

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

Grounded Theory Analysis of the Development of Support Services for Military Service-
Connected Students in Public Postsecondary Educational Institutions in Southern California

A dissertation in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

By
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Dedication

To my son, Kevin, who is now wearing the uniform as an active duty member the U.S. Navy proudly serving aboard USS America. He will never truly know how much he has inspired me to become better than who I was.

To my nephews and nieces (Khriza, Joel, Christopher, Jay, EJ, Kaitlin and Addie), may you not let anything get in your way.

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Table of Abbreviations

BCT	Basic Combat Training
CC	Public 2-year community college
CCC	California Community Colleges
CSU	Public 4-year California State University
DoD	U.S. Department of Defense
EO	Executive Order
GAO	United States Government Accountability Office
GPA	Grade Point Average
GT	Grounded Theory
GWE	Gulf War Era: August 1990 to August 1991
GWOT	Global War on Terror: September 2001 to the present
MCS	Military-connected students. For purposes of this dissertation, Military-connected students or MCS is defined as the group of students who either had served in the U.S. military and are considered Veterans and those students who are concurrently serving in the National Guards, Reserves and active duty.
NCES	The National Center for Educational Statistics
PEI	Postsecondary educational institutions
PTSD	Posttraumatic Stress Disorder
QR	Qualitative Research
SVO	Student Veteran Organization
VA	U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs
VRC	Veterans Resource Center

Abstract

Grounded Theory Analysis of the Development of Support Services for Military Service-Connected Students in Postsecondary Educational Institutions

By

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Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

Military-connected students (MCS) is a segment of the student body who bring with them unique characteristics and challenges. While the strict discipline, dedication, and mission-orientation of the military make MCS suitable to meet the demands of higher education, MCS may be predisposed to struggle academically due to age, family obligations, isolation due to loss of social support system, difficulty acculturating to the academic environment, and traumatic experiences in the military. Using semi-structured interviews, this grounded theory study sought to understand the processes that influenced the development of MCS support services including whether assessments were used and how those assessments were designed in seven public 2-year colleges and three public 4-year universities in Southern California. This research further sought participants' opinion on the support services for MCS they deemed essential. Participants suggested three initiatives to help MCS succeed academically: 1) creating a campus climate

welcoming to MCS, 2) encouraging the creation of and providing support to MCS organization, and 3) providing space for MCS. The interviews revealed challenges and opportunities.

Suggestions are given to address these challenges as well as suggestions for future research.

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Chapter One

Introduction

In his address to the American Council on Education in 2008, California State University Chancellor Charlie Reed presented a challenge to institutions of higher education:

I'm going to give you an assignment. Do an assessment of how you're doing with programs and services for service members and veterans. You won't find a pretty picture. What you will find is that you need to reorganize and reprioritize. (Cook & Kim, 2009, p. iii)

The challenge to identify the need for and availability of institutional services designed specifically to help military-connected students (MCS) was taken up by Cook and Kim (2009). In their study, Cook and Kim (2009) found that of the 723 postsecondary educational institutions (PEI) they surveyed, only 33% provided training for staff to meet the needs of veterans with brain injuries and physical disabilities. Other findings include that only 22% provided transitional services for MCS while only 20% provided veteran-specific professional development for faculty and staff. Furthermore, in 88% of the PEIs, students who were called into active military service and deployed were treated upon their return as if he or she had never been a student at the institution. These former students were required to go through the process of re-enrollment (Cook & Kim, 2009).

Twelve years have passed since Chancellor Reed's address to the American Council on Education (Cook & Kim, 2009). The population of MCS receiving military educational benefits had doubled from 461,248 in 2008 (Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.) to 903,327 in 2016 (VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017). Furthermore, the population of MCS is expected to continue growing as the number of service members who joined the military as part

of the surge to fight terrorism since September 11, 2001 leave the military (United States Government Accountability Office, 2014).

Overview of Military-Connected Students (MCS)

The group of “military-connected students” (MCS) in this study is defined as the group of students who either had served in the military and are considered Veterans and those students who are concurrently serving in the National Guards, Reserves and active duty. These individuals join the military for a number of reasons. While honor, nationalism and patriotism often are cited as primary motivation for enlisting (Ackerman et al., 2009; Bachman et al., 2000; Woodruff et al., 2006), many others are also lured by the promise of upward social mobility through educational benefits provided by the G.I. Bill (Ackerman et al., 2009; Wang et al., 2012). Indeed, higher education significantly impacts an individual’s employment and income level. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) reports that those with bachelor’s degree or higher had an 86% employment rate in 2017 compared to 57% for those without a high school diploma (Employment and unemployment rates by educational attainment, 2018). NCES further reports that educational attainment is positively correlated with personal income. In 2016, those with bachelor’s degree earned an average of \$50,000, those with high school diploma earned an average of \$31,800 while those who did not complete high school earned an average of \$25,400 (Annual Earnings of Young Adults, 2018).

The MCS population is steadily increasing. During the 2007-2008 academic year, it was estimated that MCS accounted for 4.5 percent (913,800) of the total undergraduate student population with 3.4 percent (688,000) of them being Veterans while the remainder concurrently serving in the U.S. military. By the 2011-2012 academic year, the estimated MCS population increased to 4.9 percent (1,132,860) of the total undergraduate student body with 3.4 percent

(855,900) being Veterans. The MCS accretion is also seen in the graduate level where MCS population increased from 4.2 percent (146,000) in 2007-2008 to 4.3 percent (159,700) in 2011-2012 (Radford et al., 2016). However, MCS population is primarily deduced by PEIs from the number of students receiving educational benefits administered by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) or the Department of Defense (DoD), those who identify themselves in their admission application as serving or had served in the U.S. military, and those who self-identify by other means, e.g., walk-in at the Veteran Resource Center (VRC) or while receiving mental health services (Queen & Lewis, 2014). Lost in the estimate of MCS are those who are not receiving educational benefits and do not self-identify (Molina & Morse, 2015). Thus, the population of MCS may be larger.

The majority of undergraduate MCS students attend public postsecondary institutions. During the 2007-2008 academic year, 42 percent of MCS attended public 2-year colleges while 21 percent attended public 4-year institutions. By 2011-2012, the percentage of MCS attending public institutions had slightly gone down, but still make up the majority: 37 percent attended 2-year public college while 19 percent attended 4-year universities (Radford et al., 2016).

With increased MCS population come increase in expenditures for educational benefits. In 2008, the VA disbursed \$3.070 billion in educational benefits, not including Vocational Rehabilitation (Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.). By 2018, the cost had risen to \$13.1 billion (VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017). However, these amounts reflect only those funds expended by the VA and do not include funds expended by DoD through each branch's educational programs.

Problem Statement

MCS is a segment of the student body who bring with them unique characteristics and

challenges. While the strict discipline, dedication, and mission-orientation of the military make MCS suitable to meet the demands of higher education (Callahan & Jarrat, 2014), MCS may be predisposed to struggle academically due to age (Kim & Cole, 2013), family obligations (Molina & Morse, 2015), isolation due to loss of social support system and difficulty acculturating to the academic environment (Ahern et al., 2015), and traumatic experiences in the military (see e.g., Aikins et al., 2015; Tanielian & Jaycox, 2008).

With the increase in MCS entering PEIs and further increase expected in the coming years, PEIs have implemented varying forms of student support services to help ease MCS' transition back into the civilian world and reintegrate them into college campuses (see e.g., Dillard & Yu, 2016; O'Herrin, 2011; Queen & Lewis, 2014). To attract MCS, PEIs tout themselves as "military-friendly" or "veteran-friendly." However, there is no governmental guidance or definition for the phrases "military friendly" or "veteran-friendly" (Pope, 2012). This has resulted in the variability of support services for MCS across different PEIs (see, e.g., Rumann et al., 2009; Wilson et al., 2016) and the race to provide the most number of support services if only to be labeled as "military-friendly" or "veteran-friendly." This lack of standardized definition for "military friendly" leaves MCS unsure of what to expect from each college or university and PEIs uncertain how to meet an elusive standard (Wilson et al., 2016).

Just as many PEIs are generous in their offerings to help MCS transition and reintegrate into the college environment, there are many PEIs who suffer from having limited resources that hamper their ability to provide support services in general and to MCS in particular. High among these resources is fiscal support provided by governmental entities (local, state, and federal) to public 2-year community colleges (CC) and 4-year state universities (see, e.g., Boggs, 2004; Kena et al., 2016; Miller & Holt, 2005; Webber, 2018). Subject to the economic health of

the nation, governmental financial support towards public postsecondary institutions has seen a steady decline in the last 30 years to the point that the budget allocated for the academic year 2017-2018 was 25 percent lower than it was in 1997-1998 (Webber, 2018).

Purpose and Significance

With 86,069 students receiving military educational benefits enrolled in PEIs across California in 2018, California is home to the second largest number of MCS (California is surpassed only by Texas with 87,357 students receiving military educational benefits) (VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017). The majority of postsecondary education students in California attend CCs. For example, in 2018, 2.2 million people were enrolled in 114 CC campuses compared to 514,000 students at 23 campuses of the 4-year California State Universities (CSU) and 281,000 students at 10 University of California (UC) campuses. Like many CCs in the U.S., California CCs (CCC) are affected by the economic health of the nation. While all three entities rely on the state's General Fund to subsidize part of their operations, UC and CSU have the authority to increase their tuition to fill their gap in funding (Campaign for College Opportunity, 2018). However, CCCs do not have such authority (Boerner, 2012) and must rely heavily on governmental fiscal support and local property taxes (Boggs, 2004; Miller & Holt, 2005).

The number of MCS currently enrolled is sizeable and their number is expected to grow in the coming years (United States Government Accountability Office, 2014; VA | Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.). Given their experience and background, MCS may need student support services to help them transition and reintegrate back into the community. Many PEI's have answered the needs of MCS by implementing varying forms of student support services. However, not all institutions are equal in their ability to provide services. Furthermore, because

there is no governmental standard definition for what makes an institution “military-friendly,” institutions with limited resources are hard pressed to meet MCS’ needs.

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the experiences of staff, administrators and/or counselors that influence the development of support services for MCS at CCCs and CSUs in Southern California as well as understand how decisions are made that guide the implementation MCS support services. Given the financial limitations faced by many PEIs, this dissertation further aims to gauge what student support services participants deem essential to the retention, persistence, and ultimate academic success of MCS.

Research Questions

This qualitative study was guided by two main research questions and two sub-questions:

1. What factors influence the development of support services for MCS at Southern California public two-year community colleges and four-year state colleges?
 - a. How are student-Veterans engaged in the formulation of support services for MCS?
 - b. How are assessments utilized to guide the development and/or modification of support services for MCS?
2. What support services are essential to increase MCS persistence and retention?

Theoretical Framework

This dissertation is guided by the theories set forth by social constructionism, two stages of Erikson’s eight stages of psychosocial development theory (Identity (cohesion) versus Role Confusion and Intimacy versus Isolation/Self-absorption (Erikson, 1980)) and Schlossberg’s Transition Framework (Anderson et al., 2012). While social constructionism gives insight on how participants in this study negotiate reality, Erikson’s two psychosocial stages of

development and Schlossberg's transition framework attempts to explain the experiences of MCS that necessitate providing student support services.

Social Constructionism

This dissertation is first viewed through the lens of social constructionism. Social constructionism posits that knowledge is borne out of interaction among groups of people (Walker, 2015) and that meaning making is negotiated among members of the group. Social constructionism entails "constructing an understanding of shared experience and acting according to what is understood" (Cottone, 2017, p.465) and seeks to understand "what exactly it is that is being constructed, what it is that is doing the constructing, and what the process is through which this can occur" (Elder-Vass, 2012, p. 6). Approaching this research from the social constructionism, thus, is appropriate. As administrators of support services for MCS at Southern California PEIs decide what support services to offer and provide, the sole decision may not lie in the hands of the administrators alone, but through transactions at the local level and the collective meaning stakeholders derive from their interaction.

Erikson's Psychosocial Stages of Development

Erik Erikson, a leading theorist on human psychosocial development, posited that human personality develops through eight stages throughout the lifespan. Each stage brings with it challenges that must be overcome for the person to move to the next stage (Schultz & Schultz, 2013). Of particular interest to this dissertation and instrumental in the development of the military personality are the fifth and sixth stages that Erikson called Identity (cohesion) versus Role Confusion and Intimacy versus Isolation. Specifically, Identity (cohesion) versus Role Confusion explains how the military personality forms while the stage Intimacy versus Isolation

explains how the military members' mutual dependence and shared experience result in strong bond among its members.

Identity (Cohesion) versus Role Confusion

The fifth stage of Erikson's psychosocial development occurs between the ages of 12 to 18 (Schultz & Schultz, 2013). During this stage, adolescents are actively engaged in the process of reconciling self-perception with society's perception and expectations, examining personal strengths and beginning to identify with social roles (Erikson, 1980). Successful formation of a positive identity leads to the person being able to commit to a purpose and genuine relationship with others (Schultz & Schultz, 2013). This stage coincides with the U.S. military's minimum enlistment age of seventeen (Careers & Jobs, n.d.).

Identity (Cohesion) versus Role Confusion and the Development of the Military Personality. A service member's introduction to the military begins with basic combat training (BCT). BCT is a physically and psychologically demanding process that prepares the servicemember for the rigors of military service (Rausch, 2014). BCT is a process that strips the individual of his or her civilian identity and transforms the recruit into a soldier (U.S. Army, n.d.). Thus, successful completion of BCT entails shedding prior civilian identity and forming an identity that adheres to the military's norms, culture, symbolisms, and structure (Rausch, 2014) and commitment to the goals and purpose of being in the military (Schultz & Schultz, 2013). Depending upon the length of service as well as the nature of service (e.g., active duty versus Reserve versus National Guard and whether the servicemember had been assigned to hazardous environments), the military identity can become so ingrained that service members face difficulty transitioning back into the civilian setting once the military personnel separates from the military (Naphan & Elliott, 2015; Pellegrino & Hoggan, 2015; Rausch, 2014)

Intimacy versus Isolation/Self-Absorption

The sixth stage of Erikson's psychosocial development, *Intimacy versus Isolation/Self-absorption* (Erikson, 1980) occurs between the ages of 18-35 (Schultz & Schultz, 2013). With the person's identity sufficiently developed during the fifth stage, *Identity (cohesion) versus Role Confusion*, the person is able to commit to intimate relationships. Intimate relationships created at this stage are not necessarily sexual in nature. Such relationships include "friendship, combat, leadership, [and] love" (Erikson, 1980, p. 101).

Intimacy versus Isolation/Self-Absorption and the Military. The strength of the military lies in its members' reliance on other members for safety and survival. The bond that glues members of the military begins with BCT. During this time, recruits learn to work purposefully and cohesively. Close-quarter living arrangements provide plenty of opportunity for members to discuss "what one feels like, and what the other seems like, [while sharing] ... plans, wishes and expectations" (Erikson, 1980, p. 101). In the words of the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (2019), "by getting to know other Soldiers on a professional and personal level, you learn how to improve yourself and encourage others. Working together, you and your battle buddy learn initiative, responsibility, trust, and dependability" (p. 36).

Schlossberg's Transition Framework

The strength of a Veteran's military identity and commitment to relationships built with others in the military directly affect the ease or difficulty with which the Veteran transitions into the PEI setting and reintegrates back into the community. Schlossberg's Transition Framework theory posits that disruption from what is familiar to unfamiliar triggers a crisis that requires the individual to reinvent herself/himself if she/he is to adapt and succeed in the new role and environment (Anderson et al., 2012). This is especially true for Veterans. Individuals who leave

military service to return to civilian setting leave behind them strongly held personal and cultural identities. Exacerbating the cultural shock is the absence of close-knit relationships that the Veteran had come to rely upon during her/his tenure in the military. Further compounding the difficulty associated with leaving the familiar environment of the military to the unfamiliar landscape of the civilian world are the physical and psychological impact of military service (see e.g., Aikins et al., 2015; Blosnich et al., 2015; Tanielian & Jaycox, 2008).

Overview of Methodology

This qualitative research was guided by grounded theory. Through semi-structured interviews with those responsible for shaping policies and providing support services to MCS, grounded theory allowed for the exploration of the challenges participants faced, the process by which they resolved those challenges, and how opportunities were identified and implemented to better serve MCS. Furthermore, grounded theory provided the opportunity to concurrently analyze data as data was collected (Durdella, 2019). Such concurrent analysis, in turn, led to changes in how subsequent participants were chosen. Indeed, while this study initially intended to seek the perspectives of student-Veteran leaders, administrators and VRC staff members, grounded theory's "theoretical sampling" (Bryant & Charmaz, 2012), a process in which specific individuals are sought to refine the developing theory, served to focus this dissertation's recruitment of participants to the frontline individuals who have direct contact with both MCS and PEIs' executive leadership." As interviews progressed, it emerged that VRC representatives were sufficiently knowledgeable: 1) most had been student-Veterans themselves or had close relations with those who were, 2) they are knowledgeable of student-Veterans struggles as providers of services, and 3) interact with administrators whose primary responsibilities lie in

providing leadership not only to the VRC, but other support service departments as well (CSU Careers, n.d.), and thus, may or may not be directly involved with the MCS population.

Limitations and Delimitation

Limitations

This research was conducted in Southern California and drew participants from Southern California CCs and CSUs. While California is home to the largest number of MCS, MCS in Southern California may not be representative of MCS in other parts of California and the United States. Consequently, the challenges and opportunities faced by those responsible for shaping policies and providing support services to MCS in Southern California may not reflect opportunities and challenges elsewhere.

A second limitation relates to the population of MCS enrolled at the participating institutions. The participants in this research represented institutions with an average MCS population of 486.2. Thus, generalizability of findings herein may be limited only to Southern California public institutions with large populations of MCS and may not apply to institutions with lower populations in Southern California and elsewhere in the U.S.

A third limitation involves collection of data and risk of “response effect.” “Response effect” entails a participant providing “inaccurate or incorrect information” (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009, p. 223). Where “response effect” is suspected by the researcher, Wiersma and Jurs (2009) suggests that “the interviewer must be able to recognize misunderstanding and uneasiness and make on-the-spot decisions about any additional probing that may be desirable” (p. 223). Because the majority of interviews (nine of 13) were conducted over the telephone as a matter of convenience for both participants and researcher, the researcher was not able to observe, among others, the participants’ physical reaction to the questions. If such physical reaction did occur

and the researcher was able to observe it, the researcher could have had the opportunity to explore the cause of such reaction. Thus, ultimately, it is assumed that the participants in this research have all been forthcoming.

The last limitation involves the possibility of researcher bias. The researcher herein is an Army Veteran who served on active duty and had been stationed in hazardous environment where threat to safety and life was omnipresent. The researcher has personally experienced the difficulty of transitioning and reintegrating back into the civilian community. Soon after leaving active duty and while still serving in the U.S. Army Reserve, the researcher enrolled at multiple CCs in Southern California at a time when support services specific to MCS were non-existent. Thus, the researcher had personally experienced the struggle of being in an environment drastically different from what the researcher had been accustomed to and where the researcher felt out of place. The researcher would eventually succeed in receiving a bachelor's degree and a master's degree, albeit longer than it would have taken traditional students.

The researcher's experience in the military, as a Veteran, and as MCS may have influenced the manner with which this dissertation was formulated. While the researcher attempted to approach the study from a place of curiosity, the researcher cannot completely divorce himself from his military past. Thus, parts of this dissertation, such as the interview questions, could have been written differently and could have elicited different responses had the researcher not been in the military.

Delimitations

Because the majority of MCS attend public PEIs, private PEIs were not included in this study. Additionally, the use of purposive sampling and grounded theory's theoretical sampling led to intentionally recruit participants who were staff members in charge of the VRC at their

institution. Except for one administrator, the input of other administrators were not solicited. Also not solicited were the input of student-Veteran organization members and/or leaders. While delimiting the participants to staff members in charge of VRCs served to focus the study to the opinions of the frontline personnel who faced both the administrators and MCS, it silenced the voices of the two latter constituents.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. This chapter, Chapter One, provides an overview of the problem this dissertation attempts to answer and provides the foundation for succeeding chapters. Chapter Two is the Review of the Literature section. It analyzes relevant research that had previously been conducted relating to the problem at hand. Chapter Three is the Methodology section. It provides justification for the procedure this dissertation took to gather and analyze the data. Chapter Four is the Finding chapter. It provides a brief background of the participants in this study and narrates the significant statements that they had expressed and themes that emerged. Lastly, Chapter Five discusses and examines the insights provided by the participants in relation to the research questions herein. It then discusses the implication of this study for purposes of policy and practice and makes recommendations for future research.

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Chapter Two

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The 2011-2012 academic year saw MCS account for 4.9 percent of the total undergraduate student body and 4.3 percent of graduate students. And the number is expected to grow. In 2013, the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) (2013) estimated that over 5 million Veterans will be entitled to receive educational benefits by the year 2020. Along with the growth in MCS population comes the increase in the cost of their educational benefits: from \$3.070 billion in 2008 (Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.) to \$13.1 billion in 2018 (VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.).

The large number of current and expected increase in enrollment of MCS in higher education along with the amount expended annually by the U.S. government towards MCS' postsecondary or technical/vocational education merits understanding this growing segment of the student body. Recognizing the specific experiences and needs of MCS would help PEIs design support services that would increase their persistence, retention, and, ultimately, academic success. ("Persistence" is defined by the National Center for Education Statistics as "continued enrollment at any institution" and "retention" as "continued enrollment at one institution" (Chen et al., 2019, p. 1).)

This chapter offers an overview of the enrollment trends of MCS throughout the U.S. and in California and is followed by a discussion of the types of educational benefits currently available to them. The chapter then weaves into an analysis of the personality characteristics of MCS as shaped by their military training and experience as well as possible barriers to their academic success resulting therefrom that necessitate the need to provide student support

services. Lastly, this chapter looks at efforts by other postsecondary institutions to create an academic environment where MCS can thrive and succeed.

MCS Enrollment Trends

During the 2011-2012 academic year, MCS accounted for 4.9 percent (1,132,860) of the total undergraduate student body and 4.3 percent (159,700) of graduate students. 75.6 percent (855,900) of undergraduate MCS in 2011-2012 were Veterans while 24.4 percent were composed of MCS concurrently serving in active duty (15 percent), Reserves (6.6 percent), or the National Guard (2.8 percent). Mirroring the breakdown of undergraduate MCS, 68.7 percent of military-connected graduate students were composed of Veterans, 16.5 percent were serving in active duty capacity, 11.4 percent were Reservists and 3.4 percent were in the National Guards (Radford et al., 2016) (see Table 1). And the number is expected to grow. In 2013, the GAO (2013) estimated that within a few years after 2014 more than one million of servicemembers will leave the military and walk the halls of postsecondary institutions as college students. The GAO (2013) further estimated that by the year 2020 over 5 million Veterans will be entitled to receive educational benefits.

Table 1

Military-Connected Students Enrollment 2011-2012

<u>Military status</u>	<u>Undergraduate</u>	<u>Graduate</u>
Total	1,132,900	159,700
Veterans	855,900	109,700
Active	170,800	26,300
Reserves	74,300	18,200
National Guard	31,900	5,500

Source: Radford, A. W., Bentz, A., Dekker, R., & Paslov, J. (2016). *After the Post-9/11 GI Bill: A profile of military service members and veterans enrolled in undergraduate and graduate education.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

While the number of MCS is sufficiently large to merit providing support services to this growing population of students, the number of MCS presented is not accurate and may be larger (Callahan & Jarrat, 2014). Most estimates of MCS population are deduced from the number of recipients of educational benefits administered by the VA or the DoD (see, e.g., Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.; Queen & Lewis, 2014; VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017). Lost in the estimate are the MCS who may not be aware of the educational benefits to which they may be entitled, those who save their educational benefit until they transfer to higher costing institutions (e.g., CC to four-year institution), and those whose benefits have run out (this is especially true for MCS who served prior to 9/11/01). Indeed, during the 2012-2013 academic year, 89 percent of responding PEIs on a survey stated that they relied on VA/DoD benefits to identify MCS, 74 percent used admission records, and 59 percent used self-identification, e.g., MCS who sought counseling services or visited the Veteran Resource Center (VRC) (Queen & Lewis, 2014). The problem of undercounting is illustrated by the finding that 54 percent of undergraduate MCS concurrently serving in the National Guards and 32 percent of Reservists do not use VA or DoD benefits to fund their education (Molina & Morse, 2015).

The amount expended towards educational benefits provided to MCS is also on the rise. In 2008, the VA disbursed \$3.070 billion in educational benefits (Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.). By 2018, the cost of the educational benefits had risen to \$13.1 billion (VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.). However, these amounts reflect only those funds expended by the VA and do not include funds expended by DoD through the Military Tuition Assistance Program that each branch offers its servicemembers.

The educational path of MCS varies. Of the 166,420 who began receiving educational benefits in 2016, 55 percent pursued undergraduate degrees, 23 percent pursued college/non-

degree courses, 13 percent attended technical schools, and 9 percent pursued graduate degrees (VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017). Cate et al. (2017) found the top three majors pursued by MCS fell under the categories of business management/marketing, liberal arts and sciences/humanities/general studies, and degrees related to the health professions.

An analysis of the enrollment trends of MCS during the 2011-2012 academic year found that the majority (56 percent) of undergraduate MCS attended public PEIs: 37 percent attended public two-year colleges while 19 percent were enrolled in public four-year PEIs (34 percent attended for profit PEIs while nine percent attended more than one PEI). Following the trend, more graduate MCS attended public four-year PEIs (38 percent) than private, non-profit four-year PEIs (29 percent) and for for-profit four year PEIs (27 percent) (Radford et al., 2016).

MCS Enrollment Trends in California's CCs and CSUs

California is home to a large population of MCS. In 2016, of the 1,000,089 students receiving educational benefits through the VA, 88,436 MCS were enrolled in PEIs across California. California was followed by Texas with 87,067 and Florida with 70,716 (VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017). (In 2018, Texas surpassed California with the highest (87,357) MCS enrolled across the state receiving educational benefits through the VA, followed by California with 86,069, and Florida with 63,397 (VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.)) While these numbers are sufficiently large, they do not include those MCS receiving educational benefits through the DoD and those who are self-funded (Molina & Morse, 2015). Thus, the population of MCS in California may be much larger.

In the spring semester of 2016, the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (2018) reported that 38,728 MCS were enrolled in CCCs throughout California. Of those, 30,010 were Veterans and 8,718 were students concurrently serving in active duty, Reservist or

National Guards (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2018). Accounting for 20,000 of the student body, enrollment of MCS and dependents is also significant in the four-year public California State University system (CSU) (The California State University, n.d.).

California is second only to Texas in the number of MCS attending two-year and four-year public colleges and universities (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2018; Radford et al., 2016; The California State University, n.d.; VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.; VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017). California is also home to a large pool of potential MCS. In 2018, California had the highest number of Veterans (1,629,238) residing in the state than any other state in the nation (VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.). Southern California, specifically, is also home to a number of large military bases. For example, Naval Base San Diego employs 48,000 military and civilian personnel (Naval Base San Diego, n.d.). Other large military bases in the area include Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton also in San Diego, Fort Irwin Army Base in Barstow, Edwards Air Force Base in the Mojave Desert, and Coast Guard Training Center in Petaluma.

Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (The GI Bill of Rights)

There are several factors that influence individuals to enlist in the military. While honor, nationalism and patriotism often are cited as primary motivations (Ackerman et al., 2009; Bachman et al., 2000; Woodruff et al., 2006), others join the military to take advantage of the promise of upward social mobility through educational benefits provided by the GI Bill (Ackerman et al., 2009; Wang et al., 2012).

On June 22, 1944, then President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944. Designed to help returning military personnel of World War II transition from combat zones to civilian employment, the Act, more commonly known as the GI

Bill of Rights or simply GI Bill, provided college tuition benefits to Veterans (Jolly, 2014).

Within years after the end of World War II, Veteran enrollment in colleges throughout the U.S. accounted for approximately 70 percent of the student population. Its effect on the post-World War II American economy was pronounced: it had been instrumental in making college education attainable to the masses and launched the American middle class (Bound & Turner, 2002). It would later help 44 percent of Korean War Veterans and 67 percent of Vietnam War Veterans receive their college education (White, 2004).

Driven by the economy, the needs of the nation and the presence or absence of crises, the GI Bill has been revised several times since its signing in 1944. Through its multiple incarnations, the GI Bill remains at the core of benefits provided to those who serve to secure the nation's safety (White, 2004). Today, with the goal of helping servicemembers transition back into the civilian sector, enhance the nation's global competitiveness through an educated populace, and provide incentive for others to join the military (United States Government Accountability Office, 2013), the VA administers educational benefits primarily through four programs: Chapter 30 Montgomery GI Bill, Montgomery GI Bill selected Reserve (MGIB-SR), Chapter 31 VA Vocational Rehabilitation, and Chapter 33 Post-9/11 GI Bill. (One other educational program still available to Veterans, but with diminishing participants is the Post-Vietnam Era Veterans' Educational Assistance Program (VEAP). Veterans using this program must have enlisted after December 31, 1976 and before July 1, 1985. The benefit expires ten years from discharge from active duty (VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.). Theoretically, a Veteran who enlisted in 1985, served 30 years, and discharged in 2015 would still be eligible to receive benefits through VEAP. However, in 2018, there were only 69 MCS using VEAP with no new enrollment for that year (VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs,

n.d.). Thus, it is expected that Veterans eligible for this benefit will continue to dwindle.) Additionally, each branch of the military runs its own Military Tuition Assistance Program to help its current servicemembers attain vocational training or undergraduate/graduate degrees.

From Camps to Campuses: MCS Strengths and Barriers to Success

“[Soldiers] are expected to accomplish the mission, not war’s validity or social redeeming graces” (Schlie, 2016, p. ix).

The U.S. military demands from its members strict discipline, dedication, and unwavering focus towards completion of its mission(s) (U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, 2019). These qualities along with the maturity and broad experience that MCS bring into the classroom make MCS suitable to meet the demands of higher education (Callahan & Jarrat, 2014; Katopes, 2009). Indeed, of the 853,111 MCS who received educational benefits through the Post-9/11 GI Bill between August 1, 2009 through December 31, 2013, 53.6 percent had either received at least one postsecondary education diploma or completed a vocational training program. As of September 1, 2015, an additional 18 percent were enrolled and on track to complete their postsecondary education (Cate et al., 2017).

While the military instills upon its members characteristics that make them suitable and capable of succeeding in higher education (e.g., punctuality, dedication to the completion of the mission which can translate to completion of the academic course, and ability to follow directions), many MCS are saddled with challenges that prevent them from attempting to begin their journey into postsecondary education or, for those who do start, hamper their ability to focus and persist (see e.g., Alschuler & Yarab, 2016; Ness et al., 2015; Rattray, 2019). This is illustrated by Durdella and Kim’s (2012) observation that while MCS are more likely to engage in academic activities than students without history of military experience, e.g., MCS are more

likely to interact with faculty in and out of the classroom, engage in classroom discussions, and spend more time working on projects alone and with others, MCS' grade point average (GPA) tend to be lower than their non-MCS counterpart (3.03 and 3.11 respectively). Indeed, while Cate et al. (2017) found that 71.6 percent of the 853,111 MCS who took advantage of the Post-9/11 GI Bill between August 1, 2009 through December 31, 2013 had either received a degree, vocational training or are on track to complete their postsecondary education as of September 1, 2015, 29.4 percent had left without completing their intended degrees. While having a 29.4 percent drop-out rate is significant, unknown is the number of current servicemembers and Veterans who qualify for educational benefits, but have not attempted to take advantage of the opportunity.

With so many MCS now in PEIs across the nation and with many more soon to follow, it is imperative to understand the challenges that may predispose MCS to experience difficulties in the postsecondary educational setting. This section delves into the more common challenges faced by MCS including age, family, and employment (Department of Defense, n.d.), difficulty transitioning from their strong ties with the military and reintegrating into the civilian and higher education setting (Redmond et al., 2015), and the impact of deployment and exposure to hazardous duties to their physical, mental, and psychological functioning (see, e.g., U.S. Military Casualties - Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), 2016; U.S. Military Casualties - Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR), 2016; U.S. Military Casualties - Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), 2016; U.S. Military Casualties - Operation New Dawn (OND), 2016). However, while many MCS carry with them the residues of military service and of war experiences, current and former servicemembers are resilient. This section further delves into the strengths that MCS bring with them into the classroom.

MCS are “Highly Nontraditional” Students

Traditional students are those students who enter college soon after graduating from high school, depend on their parents or guardians for financial support, and are pursuing their postsecondary education full-time (Choy et al., 2002). Bean and Metzner (1985) defined nontraditional student as those students who possess at least one of three characteristics: above the age of 24, commutes to school, and enrolled part-time. Choy et al. (2002) expanded Bean and Metzner’s (1985) definition of nontraditional students to include those students who postponed their postsecondary education for at least a year, enrolled less than full-time for at least a part of the academic year, employed full-time and are financially independent, have dependents other than a spouse, are single parents, and did not graduate from high school, but instead have certificates equivalent to high school diploma.

Being a nontraditional student is a risk factor for attrition. Citing Horn (1995), Choy et al. (2002) categorized nontraditional students as: “minimally traditional” are those students who possess one characteristic of being nontraditional students; “moderately nontraditional” are those students who possess two or three characteristics; and “highly nontraditional” are those students who possess four or more characteristics. While traditional students are not saddled with financial obligations and are not responsible to care for the well-being of another and, thus are able to focus on meeting the demands of their education as well as partake in socialization opportunities on campus, nontraditional students are torn between conflicting roles and responsibilities (Goode, 1960; Markle, 2015). The single-parent who must decide between the concurrent demands of being in the classroom while needing to find a caretaker for a child or the student who must coordinate with other students to finish a class project while needing to meet the demands of a full-time employment are but two examples of the conflicting roles and

responsibilities that nontraditional students face. Thus, the higher the number of nontraditional characteristics that a student possesses, the higher the number of conflicting roles and responsibilities. Consequently, nontraditional students have a higher probability of attrition (Capps, 2012; Horn & Premo, 1995).

The majority of MCS bear at least four characteristics that make them highly nontraditional. First, most MCS postpone their postsecondary education for at least a year and are older than traditional students. In 2014, the average age of servicemembers was 28.6 years old (Department of Defense, n.d.). Because most MCS postpone their college education until completion of military service, it can be extrapolated from these numbers that today's MCS are older. In support, Kim and Cole (2013) found that of the MCS at four-year PEIs who participated in the 2012 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), 78.9 percent were 25-years of age or older with an average age of 33.

Second, MCS tend to be enrolled less than full-time. Analyzing data from the U.S. Department of Education for the 2011-2012 academic year, Molina and Morse (2015) found that 61 percent of active duty servicemembers, 46 percent of reservist, 32 percent of Veterans, and 26 percent of National Guard members were enrolled part-time throughout the school year. Perhaps illustrating the negative influence of competing demands placed upon MCS, a small percentage of each military status (19 percent of members of the National Guard, 17 percent of Veterans, 13 percent of reservists, and nine percent of active duty) had mixed full and part-time enrollment throughout the school year (Molina & Morse, 2015).

Third, MCS are more likely to have dependents other than a spouse and be single parents. Of the 1,090,939 active enlisted personnel in 2014, 52.1 percent were married while 4.2 percent were divorced. Of those serving in the reserve component, 40.8 percent were married while 6.8

percent were divorced. Combining active and reserve components of the military, 42.8 percent of those who were serving in 2014 had at least one child (Department of Defense, n.d.).

The burden of caring for the well-being of family members extend to when the servicemembers leave the military. Molina and Morse (2015) found that during the academic year 2011-2012, 57 percent of active duty and 52 percent of Veterans in undergraduate programs had dependents. Furthermore, of the undergraduate MCS, 20 percent of Veterans, 13 percent of active duty and 11 percent of National Guard were single parents (Molina & Morse, 2015). As a result, MCS struggle to balance their academic pursuit with the need to attend to the responsibilities of caring for their families. For MCS who separated or divorced after deployment, the additional stress of having to shoulder financial obligations alone and the challenges brought on by having to deal with child custody and childcare further heighten the difficulty they face to meet the demands of their college courses (Rattray, 2019).

Lastly, MCS are more likely to be employed and be financially independent. During the academic year 2011-2012, 36 percent of National Guards, 36 percent of reserve and 42 percent of Veterans held full-time employment while 40 percent of National Guards, 33 percent of reserve and 22 percent of Veterans were employed part-time (Molina & Morse, 2015).

Because of their status as nontraditional students, MCS are at higher risk of attrition than their traditional student counterparts. Having to prioritize between obligations external to academic demands and educational responsibilities, many MCS consider starting or completing a degree as least of all priorities (Alschuler & Yarab, 2016). Additionally, MCS often sacrifice opportunities to participate in social activities on campus that are designed to enhance students' sense of belonging (Markle, 2015). Social integration (association with peers, faculty and staff)

or the lack thereof is a contributing factor in a student's decision to drop-out or persevere (Tinto, 1975).

Transition and Reintegration: Adjusting to Civilian and Academic Environments

While most Veterans return to civilian setting without exhibiting overt and debilitating behavioral impairment (Tanielian & Jaycox, 2008), many MCS find it challenging to adapt to the civilian environment. One difficulty is the need to navigate the two starkly different cultural and social structures of the military and the civilian worlds (Naphan & Elliott, 2015; Pellegrino & Hoggan, 2015; Rausch, 2014).

The way of life for the American military is distinct from the larger American society. The American military is bound by its own culture and tradition. It has its own set of values, norms, language, laws, social structure, and style of interaction that are clearly defined (Redmond et al., 2015; Summerlot et al., 2009). The military values collaboration and unit cohesion in furtherance of its objectives leading to individuals becoming "part of a team, bound to each other by integrity and trust" (U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, 2019, p. 39). In contrast, the civilian world and PEIs value individuality and independence to achieve primarily the individual's goals (Naphan & Elliott, 2015; Summerlot et al., 2009).

Servicemembers share a unique identity that is not easily shed when a servicemember leaves the military and returns to the civilian population and into PEIs (Naphan & Elliott, 2015; Pellegrino & Hoggan, 2015; Rausch, 2014). For most servicemembers, leaving the military means losing strongly held identity while concurrently losing intimate social support network (Ahern et al., 2015; Anderson et al., 2012; Erikson, 1980; Schlossberg et al., 1995). Oftentimes, leaving the military triggers a crisis that results in confusion, isolation, and sense of disconnectedness (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Further exacerbating or perhaps contributing to the

Veteran's sense of isolation is the feeling that civilians do not understand nor can imagine the military experience (Ahern et al., 2015; Garcia, 2016; Lighthall, 2012; Naphan & Elliott, 2015).

For many MCS who had served in areas of conflict or participated in hazardous missions, the transition process can prove more difficult than for those who had served in peacetime or outside of the war zone (Morin, 2011). Skill sets that were effective during deployment, such as hypervigilance or dark sense of humor, are frowned upon in the civilian setting especially on campus and in the classroom (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2012) resulting in difficulty establishing or maintaining interpersonal and social relationships (Rumann, 2011; Sayer et al., 2010). The difficulty transitioning and reintegrating back into the community is further complicated by physical, cognitive, and psychological impairments (Aikins et al., 2015; Blosnich et al., 2015; Tanielian & Jaycox, 2008) with many utilizing negative coping mechanisms such as alcohol and/or substance use (Hoggatt et al., 2017).

The Physical and Psychological Effects of Military Service

In 2016, 2,039,865 Veterans who had served from the Gulf War era (GWE) (August 2, 1990 to July 31, 1991) to the present Global War on Terror (GWOT) (September 2001 to the present) were diagnosed with “disabilities caused by diseases, events, or injuries incurred or aggravated during active military service” (VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017, p. 67). Of these, 979,457 were GWE Veterans while 1,060,408 were Veterans of GWOT. Combined, 548,682 were 34-years old or younger while 1,280,104 were between the ages of 35 to 54 – the age group that is most likely to be MCS today either in the undergraduate or graduate level. The most prevalent service-connected disabilities relate to auditory problems (tinnitus and hearing loss), psychological (Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, Major Depressive Disorder and

unspecified anxiety disorder), and musculoskeletal (lumbosacral or cervical strain) (VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017).

Many Veterans who served during GWE and GWOT had done so in hazardous environments. Some carry with them physical injuries that predispose them to face difficulties in PEIs not experienced by their nonmilitary counterparts. Specifically, GWOT resulted in 52,360 physical injuries arising from exposure to conflict (see, e.g., U.S. Military Casualties - Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), 2016; U.S. Military Casualties - Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR), 2016; U.S. Military Casualties - Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), 2016; U.S. Military Casualties - Operation New Dawn (OND), 2016). However, this number does not include those who suffer from physical injuries that is not caused by a single incident, but worsen over time as a result of continuous exposure to harmful stimuli such as loud noise that lead to hearing loss or continuous physically demanding activities that lead to musculoskeletal dysfunction. Additionally, while at least 52,360 American military servicemembers from GWOT alone present visible and identifiable physical injuries, the number of those who served during GWE and GWOT and suffer from the less obvious cognitive and psychological problems collectively known as “invisible wounds of war” is unknown (Tanielian & Jaycox, 2008).

The invisible wounds of war take many forms with many labels: PTSD, Depressive Disorder, and Anxiety are but a few examples of psychological wounds MCS may bear (VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017). While the specifics of each diagnoses may be of interest to PEIs, of greater interest is how these diagnoses manifest themselves on campuses and in the classrooms and how these manifestations impair an MCS’s ability to concentrate, communicate, and/or integrate. For example, MCS who suffer from PTSD and depression feel that they lack control of their life situations and that their lives are devoid of purpose and

meaning (Ness et al., 2015). Furthermore, these students are more likely to report dissatisfaction with the college experience, feel a heightened sense of disconnect with the campus community, and are more likely to complain of negative interaction with faculty (Elliot, 2015).

Veterans with clinical psychological impairment may exhibit symptoms of depression, anxiety, and may harbor suicidal ideations (Blosnich et al., 2015; Rudd et al., 2011). Additionally, MCS who carry the burden of the invisible wounds of war may employ negative coping mechanisms that include avoidance, substance use/abuse (Aikins et al., 2015; Grossbard et al., 2014), and self-harm (Blosnich et al., 2015). Together, these manifestations and negative coping mechanisms can further lead to heightened sense of isolation that only further serve to increase an MCS's likelihood of attrition.

MCS are Hardy and Resilient

From GWE to the GWOT, MCS witnessed and experienced challenges that their civilian counterparts only see glorified on television shows and movies. Numerous studies have shown the negative impact of military service and exposure to hazardous duties on the behavioral, psychological well-being of servicemembers (see, e.g., Blosnich et al., 2015; Hoggatt et al., 2017; Rudd et al., 2011). However, what is lost in clinicians' focus on diagnosable impairments is that military service and exposure to high stress and life-threatening environments alone do not predict cognitive and behavioral impairment (Bartone, 1999). For example, while Hoge et al. (2008) reported that 15.6 percent to 17 percent of Iraq soldiers and Marines reported depression, general anxiety or PTSD, the inverse can be argued that 83 percent to 84.4 percent did not experience psychological impairments.

Suicidal ideation or attempts among the MCS population is another concern for PEIs. However, when comparing MCS to the general student population, MCS are not any more at risk

of suicidal attempt or ideation than their non-military counterparts (Pease et al., 2015; Rudd et al., 2011). In fact, Pease et al. (2015) found that students without history of military service are more likely to commit non-suicidal self-injurious behavior than MCS.

Alarming, in the general population, Hoggatt et al. (2017) found heavier use of alcohol is more prevalent among male Veterans between the ages of 18 to 25 than civilians of the same age group without military history. For the same age group, the incidence of illicit and prescription drug use has been found to be higher among women Veterans compared to women who had never served in the military (29 percent and 18 percent respectively). The same findings also applied when comparing male Veterans' use of illicit and prescription drug to males who had never served in the military (38 percent and 18 percent respectively). However, Hoggatt et al. (2017) found that the incidence of substance use among Veterans diminish as Veterans age.

Veterans in the general population may not reflect the MCS population. For example, Aikins et al. (2015) found that non-student Veterans are twice as likely to use marijuana and four times as likely to use painkillers than MCS (however, Aikins et al. (2015) is silent on whether the use of painkillers was illicit or prescribed by a medical doctor, i.e., to control for pain resulting from physical injuries sustained in the course of military service). Additionally, in a study of sixteen PEIs comparing MCS alcohol use with the general student population found that MCS binge drink no more than their non-military cohort and further found that alcohol use was least among female MCS (Barry et al., 2012). Barry et al. (2012) did not control for age and posited that MCS in this study may be older and with more established social relationship (e.g., spouse and/or children) that controlled risky behavior among this cohort of MCS. (This finding concurs with Hoggatt et al.'s (2017) observation that substance use among Veterans tapered off

as Veterans age.) Paradoxically, while Hoggatt et al. (2017) found high rate of alcohol use among MCS, they concluded that alcohol use among MCS did not have negative consequence to GPA. Hoggatt et al. (2017) theorizes that MCS may be higher functioning than non-student Veterans and that supportive staff and faculty as well as stress management skills had greater impact on GPA than alcohol use alone.

Most servicemembers exposed to hazardous duties exhibit durability, hardiness and resilience (Morin, 2011). Bartone (1999) posits that individuals with high levels of internal locus of control, a sense of commitment and purpose, being open to change, and ability to thrive in the face of challenges serve to insulate servicemembers from stressors faced in the course of military service. This is supported by Eisen et al. (2014) who found those who exhibited resilience and hardiness exhibited better mental health 6 to 12 months after deployment.

Lastly, each military branch train their servicemembers to face and withstand adversity, instilling in them characteristics that can prove valuable in higher education. An example is the Army training doctrine:

American Soldiers are Tough. ... Resilient...mentally and physically. Tough and resilient enough to be comfortable being uncomfortable, to take a surprise or shock and bounce right back into the fight, to move as far and fast as necessary and to fight as long and as hard as necessary to win. (U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, 2019, p. 30)

While most MCS are resilient and are able to tackle the challenges that college education brings, there are MCS who do suffer from the psychological and physical effects of military service (Ackerman, 2009; Hoge et al., 2008). For these students, research has shown that PEIs can proactively provide interventions that would alleviate the symptoms of psychological impairment while promoting positive coping mechanism and self-efficacy. These interventions

include providing opportunities for MCS to increase social support from their MCS and non-military peers (Elliot, 2015; James et al., 2013; Whiteman, 2013), academic support in the form of academic counseling as well as empathetic staff and faculty (Elliot, 2015; Hoggart et al., 2017; Ness, 2015), financial counseling (Elliot, 2015), and mental health counseling (Elliot, 2015; Ness, 2015; Whiteman, 2013). Additionally, MCS would be better served if staff and faculty who provide direct services to MCS are trained, knowledgeable, and sensitive to the unique experiences and concerns of the MCS population (Burnett et al., 2009; Elliot, 2015; Rattray, 2019). Together, these proactive efforts can serve to heighten MCS' sense of belonging while decreasing their sense of isolation which, ultimately, would lead to increased retention, persistence, and academic success (see, e.g., Burnett et al., 2009; Tinto, 1975).

Creating a Military-Friendly Campus

The expected increase in MCS who had served during GWOT and the passage of the Post-9/11 GI Bill in 2008 led PEIs to institute programs to address the needs of MCS. However, in the early days of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, not all PEIs had the best interest of MCS in mind. In response to the aggressive, misleading, deceptive and at times fraudulent and predatory recruitment practices of some PEIs, then President Obama signed Executive Order (EO) 13607 on April 27, 2012. EO 13607 addressed PEIs practice of recruiting prospective MCS who suffer from physical and/or psychological difficulties without providing for academic counseling and/or mental health services, PEIs encouraging MCS to take on costly students loans without providing information about less costly federal student loan options, and PEIs failure to provide information about graduation rates and possibility of employment upon completion of degree or program (Presidential Documents, 2012).

EO 13607 provided for “Principles of Excellence” to which PEIs must agree to receive federal funding for MCS education. Specifically, PEIs must:

- a. inform prospective MCS of the total cost of the program and expected outcome prior to the start of enrollment;
- b. before offering privately funded loans, inform the prospective MCS of available federal student loan options should the MCS’s GI Bill/Tuition Assistance Program not be sufficient to meet the cost of education;
- c. provide mechanism for reenrollment should the MCS miss classes due to military service; and
- d. provide academic, financial and mental health counseling (Presidential Documents, 2012).

While EO 13607 provides guidance for institutions to follow, the directive is primarily focused on financial disclosure, reenrollment, and the need to provide counseling without specifying whether the counselor needed to be knowledgeable of issues unique to MCS. Adding further confusion is the concept of a campus as being “veteran-friendly” or “military-friendly,” a marketing buzz phrase that has caught on. While many postsecondary institutions tout themselves as “veteran-friendly” or “military friendly,” the term is vague and the meaning differs from institution-to-institution (Ackerman et al., 2009). This lack of standardized definition for “military friendly” or “veteran-friendly” leaves MCS unsure of what to expect from each college or university and leaves PEIs uncertain how to meet an elusive standard (Wilson et al., 2016).

In response to the need for a better standard to define “military-friendly” or “veteran-friendly” campus, Lokken et al. (2009) defined “veteran-friendly” as “efforts ... to identify and remove barriers to the educational goals of veterans, to create smooth transitions from military

life to college life, and to provide information about available benefits and services” (p.45). However, the definition is overbroad. Minnis (2014) suggests that “a truly veteran-friendly institution needs to go beyond the ‘friendly’ label by fostering an institutional culture that’s supportive, appreciative, respectful, embracing and inclusive of student-veterans” (p.8). To be more specific, articles have suggested for institutions to include training for staff and faculty, career service for MCS, academic outreach, mental health services, financial aid (Minnis, 2014), creating MCS organization, safe space for MCS, first year seminar for incoming MCS, seminars for staff and faculty to educate them on military-specific issues (Dillard & Yu, 2016), having a specific person knowledgeable about resources as point of contact for MCS, provide orientation to ease MCS transition to higher education, providing veteran-only courses, and peer mentorship programs (O'Herrin, 2011), are among only the many suggested services.

There are many PEIs who make their institutions as welcoming to MCS as possible (Queen & Lewis, 2014). An example is the efforts exerted by Western Kentucky University (WKU). A public four-year university, WKU approaches supporting MCS not by simply providing an office where MCS can find answers to all of their academic needs, but by creating a campus culture that takes into account the skills that MCS possess and capitalize upon those skills to prepare MCS to enter the work-force. To ease MCS into WKU, the university has a certifying official who works with the VA to ensure that Veterans’ paperwork are in order and that each MCS receive her/his educational benefits in a timely manner, a dedicated financial aid officer, discounted tuition for Veterans, free tuition for dependents of disabled or diseased Veterans, and a book loan program where MCS can borrow books for the semester at no cost. To foster a sense of belonging, WKU supports its MCS student organization and offers peer-to-peer mentoring (Wilson, 2014).

In the CCC system, Evans et al. (2015) analyzed the presence of support services provided to student Veterans and their efficacy. They found that CCCs are encouraged to have a VRC and are mandated to have a Veteran certifying official. The article highlighted targeted interventions: Veteran-specific courses, Student Veterans' Organization, orientation, mentoring, as well as faculty, counselor, and staff professional development. However, Evans et al. (2015) notes that many initiatives currently in place are untested or in need of modification.

While many institutions are actively pursuing efforts to make their campuses conducive to the success of their MCS population, not all institutions are created equal. There are those who fall short of what WKU has instituted and what CCC aspires for its constituent campuses to provide. In Indiana, Hitt et al. (2015) conducted a study of 77 postsecondary institutions. The researchers called each institutions' main telephone number to obtain answers to eleven survey questions relating to admissions, financial aid, academic affairs and student services. In many cases the researchers experienced difficulty finding knowledgeable staff and were transferred multiple times or had to call repeatedly. The difficulty in finding information or the right person with whom to connect at best illustrated the disconnect among the different departments of the campuses contacted that made obtaining information or help difficult. However, it may also reflect what Summerlot et al. (2009) considered campuses with "ambivalent climate" or "challenging climate" (p. 73).

"Ambivalent climate" campuses are found in commuter colleges with large population of nontraditional students. In these campuses, military service is considered as being another experience among the many experiences that saddle all other nontraditional students. MCS, thus are seen and treated as other students (Summerlot et al., 2009).

“Challenging climate” colleges are those colleges with a history of distrust of, and antagonism towards, the U.S. government and the military. In these institutions, military service is viewed with suspicion. Consequently, MCS, apprehensive about identifying themselves as Veterans or members of the military for fear of negative reaction from segments of the campus community, fail to organize (Summerlot et al., 2009).

While some PEIs have an “ambivalent climate” or “challenging climate” towards MCS (Summerlot et al., 2009), other PEIs fail to provide support services due to limited resources. The most common resource that hampers a PEI’s ability to provide support services to its students in general and MCS in particular is inadequacy of funding. Public two-year CC and four-year state universities in particular are subject to the economic health of the nation. For example, during the academic year 2013-2014, public institutions received 42 percent of their revenue from governmental entities (local, state, and federal). However, the academic year 2013-2014 saw a 13 percent decrease of fiscal contribution from local and state government compared to 2008-2009, albeit revenue from the federal government increased by 8 percent for the same academic years (Kena et al., 2016). And the decrease in the government’s financial support towards public postsecondary institutions has been ongoing for at least 30 years: from 1997-1998 to 2017-2018 academic years, the financial support declined by 25 percent while student population increased (Webber, 2018).

The impact of diminishing governmental fiscal support is especially felt by the 797 CCs throughout the United States who predominantly rely on the government for its viability (Boggs, 2004; Phelan, 2014; Webber, 2018) and where the majority of college students attend (in 2009, 42.6 percent of all college students attended CCs) (Desrochers & Wellman, 2011). Like many CCs in the U.S., CCC are affected by the economic health of the nation. While all three public

postsecondary institutions in the state (CC, CSU, UC) rely on the state's General Fund to subsidize part of their operations, UC and CSU have the authority to increase their tuition to fill their gap in funding (Campaign for College Opportunity, 2018). However, CCC do not have such authority (Boerner, 2012) and must rely heavily on governmental fiscal support and local property taxes (Boggs, 2004; Miller & Holt, 2005).

In a good economy, funding CCs through local property taxes raises the question of equity: CCs in areas with high property value are better funded than those in lower socioeconomic communities (Miller & Holt, 2005). Thus, even in times of economic expansion, some CCs fall short of funding compared to CCs in more affluent areas. However, during times of economic contraction when property taxes decrease, CCs are placed under even greater pressure to cut costs (Boerner, 2012). Ultimately, CCs respond by terminating faculty, limiting class offerings, and reducing student support services (Sheldon, 2003).

There are many suggested support services to help MCS traverse the PEI landscape. However, PEIs have limitations. While having a clear guideline to follow would ease decision-making, O'Herrin (2011) posits that given MCS' diverse background, individual PEIs would be able to better serve their MCS population by gauging their MCS population's specific needs while acknowledging their institution's limitations.

Conclusion

MCS is a growing segment of today's student population. While at first glance it seems that MCS have characteristics that make them a good fit to meet the demands of and succeed in higher education, e.g., maturity, self-discipline and focus under pressure, goal orientation, and leadership skills, MCS are also saddled by a number of challenges that predispose them to experience difficulty in their new environment. Specifically, MCS have to navigate a social

culture governed by ambiguity, most struggle with the process of transition and reintegration, many are encumbered by the responsibilities associated with nontraditional students such as concurrent full or part-time employment and supporting a family, and some may suffer from the psychological and physical sequelae of having been exposed to hazardous environments or combat situations during their time in military service.

Just as servicemembers face with courage and strength the adversities they encounter in the course of their military service, so, too, can MCS equally face the challenges they encounter on campus and in the classroom. Many PEIs recognize the sacrifices MCS have made and, with their cultural experience, the contribution they can provide in the classroom. Numerous services are offered by many PEIs to help MCS better navigate the landscape of higher learning. However, the support services provided to student Veterans vary by institution and the efficacy of existing support services is not well understood. In an environment where postsecondary institution funding is uncertain, knowing the support services that are essential would help PEIs with limited resources maximize their investment while helping to increase MCS' persistence, retention, and probability of academic success.

Chapter Three

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Given the challenges and lack of agreed-upon definition for what makes an institution “military-friendly” (Ackerman et al., 2009), this study sought to understand the processes that influenced the development of MCS support services at Southern California CC and CSU including whether assessments were used and how those assessments were designed. Additionally, this research sought participants’ opinion on what support services for MCS they deemed essential. By analyzing the challenges, opportunities and decision-making processes experienced by this study’s participants, the goal of this research is to offer PEIs who are in the process of making their campuses “military-friendly” insight into the processes that shaped MCS support services in Southern California.

This dissertation is influenced by three assumptions:

1. Because of their military training, MCS have personality characteristics that make them suitable and especially equipped to succeed in post-secondary education (Callahan & Jarrat, 2014). However, depending upon the nature, location, length of military service, familial responsibilities, and existence of physical and/or psychological difficulties that arose as a result of military service, MCS can also be at a disadvantage (Ahern et al., 2015; Kim & Cole, 2013; Molina & Morse, 2015);
2. Acknowledging MCS’s service to the nation and understanding the potential difficulty they may face in their new academic environment, PEIs around the nation are proactively providing disparate student support services to help MCS transition and reintegrate (Evans et al., 2015; Queen & Lewis, 2014); and

3. Not all PEIs are created equal. While some PEIs are well funded and, therefore are generous in the support services they provide, others struggle financially especially CCs (Miller & Holt, 2005; Sheldon, 2003).

This dissertation is guided by two main research questions and two sub-questions:

1. What factors influence the development of support services for MCS at Southern California public two-year community colleges and four-year state colleges?

a. How are student-Veterans engaged in the formulation of support services for MCS?

b. How are assessments utilized to guide development and/or modification of support services for MCS?

2. What support services are essential to increase MCS persistence and retention?

This chapter examines the methodology used in this dissertation. The section on Research Design discusses the justification for conducting this study using qualitative research method (QR) through the lens of grounded theory (GT). Participants of this study were recruited from CCs and CSUs in Southern California. The section on Research Setting discusses the reasoning and suitability of pooling participants from this geographic area. The section on Research Sample provides a background of the research participants, the process by which each was chosen or recruited. The section on Instruments and Procedures specifies the manner with which data was collected and how the data was analyzed. This chapter closes with the role of the researcher in determining how participants were chosen, how data is collected and analyzed, and details the researcher's background that may indicate potential researcher bias.

Research design

There is no governmental guidance or requirement for the type of support services that

PEIs must provide their MCS population aside for those enumerated by EO 13607 (Presidential Documents, 2012). Thus, the support services provided by PEIs are restricted only by the limitations imposed by their resources, the collective subjectivity of perceived institutional priorities, advocacy and activism of their MCS, and the motivation and level of passion of their administration, staff, and faculty.

This dissertation was conducted utilizing the QR method and approached through the lens of GT. QR is appropriate in that QR helps uncover “insights, explanations and theories of social behaviour (sic)” (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994, p. 174). Ritchie and Spencer (1994) further posited QR as appropriate for those researches whose goal is “examining the reasons for, or causes of, what exists” (p. 174). Unlike quantitative research method, QR does not rely on manipulating variables (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). Rather, QR allows the researcher to explore in greater depth the participants’ personal perspectives, interpretations, and meanings that they attach to the challenges they face, the process by which they resolve those challenges, and, in the present study, how opportunities are identified and changes implemented to better serve MCS (Willig, 2012).

The use of GT as lens through which this research was viewed further enhanced the process of data gathering and how the data was interpreted. GT considers the social context where events occur and how social interactions shape individual perceptions and actions (El Hussein et al., 2017). GT frees the researcher to approach the study without having *a priori* knowledge or hypothesis (Bryant & Charmaz, 2012). Through inductive inquiry, QR generally and GT researchers specifically, follow the meandering thoughts and subjective experiences of research participants (Maxwell, 2013). By following research participants’ revelations to wherever they may lead, GT does not shackle researchers to the task of proving or disproving

preconceived hypotheses through a predesigned procedure, e.g., survey. Instead, GT allows for the theory to present itself (Maxwell, 2013; Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). For example, GT can begin with a sample of participants from a broad backgrounds or positions. Through concurrent data collection and data analysis, researchers may begin to see pattern(s) or theme(s). When such pattern(s) or theme(s) arise, GT researchers may modify their questions to extract deeper meaning and, through the use of theoretical sampling, may choose to seek additional participants who would be able to provide further clarification and whose knowledge can further enhance the rising theory (Bryant & Charmaz, 2012; Charmaz, 2006).

Research Setting

This study required for participants to have familiarity with the formation, modification, and implementation of student support services for MCS. It also required for participants to be knowledgeable of the social interaction that transpires among the various stakeholders during the course of such formation, modification, and implementation of support services. The participants in this study represented public PEIs in Southern California that were geographically dispersed with 320 miles separating the two extreme institutions. The public PEIs were specifically targeted and requested to participate in this study due to their large populations of MCS and, thus had significant collective experience to provide insight to the challenges and mechanisms that influence the development of support services for MCS.

Three factors make Southern California an ideal location to conduct this study and CCCs and CSUs as ideal participants:

1. California has a large population of current MCS and an even larger pool of potential MCS (VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017; VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017). Additionally, a number of large military facilities, e.g., Fort Irwin,

Camp Pendleton, and Naval Base San Diego, call Southern California home. These military facilities further contribute to the pool of MCS in Southern California.

2. Further supporting California as a suitable location to conduct this study is the large population of MCS who attend public PEIs in the state. Fifty-six percent of MCS pursuing undergraduate degrees are enrolled in public institutions while 38 percent of MCS pursuing graduate degree are enrolled in public 4-year universities (Radford et al., 2016). In the spring semester of 2016, the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (2018) reported that 38,728 MCS were enrolled in CCCs throughout the state while 20,000 MCS and dependents were enrolled at CSUs (The California State University, n.d.).

3. Lastly, it has been 12 years since CSU Chancellor Charlie Reed issued his challenge for PEIs to look into their MCS-specific support services (Cook & Kim, 2009). California has been at the forefront of formulating best practices to increase MCS retention and persistence (Evans et al., 2015).

Research Sample

This research involved human subjects “about whom an investigator conducting research obtains (1) data through intervention or interaction with the individual” (Protection of human subjects, n.d., Activities that require human subjects review). Federal regulations require that the approval of Human Subjects Committee be obtained for any studies involving human subjects, “to ensure that ethical research is being conducted” (Protection of human subjects, n.d., para. 1). To comply with federal regulations, an Institutional Review Board (IRB) application was submitted to the California State University, Northridge's (CSUN) Human Subjects Committee requesting approval to commence data gathering involving human subjects. Among the information contained in the IRB application were purpose of the study, participant recruitment

procedure, anticipated risks to participants, and the application detailed how participants' confidentiality will be protected. Having completely satisfied the requirements of the IRB, the researcher was granted approval to collect data on October 11, 2018 with an expiration of October 10, 2019 (Appendix A). The approved IRB was subsequently renewed on October 9, 2019 (Appendix B).

The research participants herein were chosen using purposeful sampling method. Unlike sampling methods used by quantitative research studies, e.g., random sampling which seeks to find commonality or the average, purposeful sampling seeks to find participants who can provide meaning to the event or circumstances the researcher seeks to understand (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). The initial target research participants for this research had been VRC supervisors or managers, certifying officials, administrators, and student-Veteran organization (SVO) leaders of CCCs and CSUs in Southern California. Both CCCs and CSUs were targeted to understand "local processes, meanings, and contextual influences in particular settings or cases" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 99). Indeed, the location of the participants' institutions are dispersed with 320 miles separating the two extreme campuses.

Recruitment of participants occurred in two phases. To get a sense of each group's perception, phase one involved sending an e-mail to four CC VRCs, three CSU certifying officials, three CSU VRCs, two CC SVO leaders, one CSU administrator, and one CC administrator. The CSU candidate participants were chosen by referral whereas the CC candidate participants were chosen due to the size of the MCS population on their campuses and were contacted through their institutions' websites. The email introduced the researcher, provided an overview of the study's purpose, and invited the recipient to participate in the study (See Appendix C). The email attached the IRB approval form from the researcher's institution

(Appendix A) along with an Adult Consent Form (Appendix D) asking recipients to return the signed Adult Consent Form. Of the eleven emails sent, seven agreed to participate in the study and returned the signed Adult Consent Form: three CSU certifying officials, one CSU VRC, two CC VRCs, and one CSU administrator.

After completing the semi-structured interviews of the initial set of seven participants and concurrent analysis of data that arose from those interviews, certain themes and categories began to emerge. However, the themes and categories were not concrete and needed further clarification. Using theoretical sampling, a sampling method by which research participants are chosen based upon specific knowledge of the research's subject matter (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009), recruitment of additional participants was limited to VRCs. VRCs were determined to have specific knowledge of the research's subject matter due to: 1) many VRCs had been MCS themselves or had close relations with those who were and, thus are personally familiar with military culture and its influence on MCS, 2) interact with today's MCS regularly and are knowledgeable of their concerns, and 3) interact with administrators and represent the administrators to MCS.

During the theoretical sampling phase, emails were sent to 24 VRCs in 21 CCs and five VRCs in three CSUs. The email contained the same information and had the same attachment as the previous email sent to participants in the initial phase (Appendices A, B, C, and D). Of the twenty-nine emails sent, six agreed to participate in the study and returned the signed Adult Consent Form: five CC VRCs and one CSU VRCs.

In total, 43 emails were sent to potential participants in 31 PEIs. Using purposive sampling method, each PEI was chosen due to its significant number of MCS: 1) in the spring 2019 semester, the 23 CCs invited to participate in the study had an average MCS of 399.2

students who were Veterans and 87 students who were at the time serving in the military; while 2) in 2017 the sample CSUs had an average of 720.5 students who identified either as Veteran or currently serving in the military. Of the 43 candidate participants invited to take part in the study, 13 responded, agreed to be interviewed, and returned the Adult Consent Form: seven VRCs from seven CCs, two VRCs from two CSUs, three certifying officials from two CSUs, and one CSU administrator.

Participants' Right to Privacy

The participants were informed of their right to privacy both in writing (see Appendices A and C) and verbally (Appendix D) prior to the commencement of the interview. Any identifying information, e.g., name, age, gender, or school affiliation, have been redacted from any report. Hard copy documents containing participant's information, e.g., completed Adult Consent Form (Appendix C), have, at all times, been in the possession of researcher secured in a locked safe. All electronic research data are stored on a secure computer with password protection. The audio recordings and typed transcripts are kept in password-protected computer files. The recordings were transcribed by the researcher. Each participant was accorded with a code number, and no data was saved in the same location as personal identifiers. A master list of code numbers and names were kept in a locked location. All data collected will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study.

Instruments and Procedures

This study was conducted following a semi-structured interactive data collection technique (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). Because the objective of this study is to “examin[e] the reasons for, or causes of, what exists” (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994, p. 174), using semi-structured interview was appropriate in that it allowed the research to follow each participant's responses

and conduct in “an in-depth exploration of a particular topic or experience” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 25). Furthermore, using semi-structured interview allowed for the exploration of the theories held by the participants acknowledging that the participants’ personal theories “inform the participants’ actions, and any attempt to interpret or explain the participants’ actions without taking account of their actual beliefs, values and theories is probably fruitless” (Blumer, 1969; Menzel, 1978 as cited in Maxwell, 2013, p. 52).

Nine of the interviews were conducted over the telephone and four were conducted face-to-face. Conducting the interview by telephone was convenient for both researcher and participants and it eliminated the cost associated with travel given that the locations of the PEIs were dispersed with 320 miles separating two geographically extreme campuses (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). Because this study sought to understand the participants’ subjective interpretation relating to the social interaction that influences MCS support services, it was not deemed necessary for the researcher to be present and observe the participant’s environment. However, by conducting the interviews over the telephone, the researcher’s ability to recognize participants’ “response effect” was diminished. The “response effect” occurs when a participant gives “inaccurate or incorrect information” (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009, p. 223) due to a number of reasons including feeling uneasy about a question or responds based upon expectation that the response is professionally appropriate (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). Had the interviews been conducted in-person, the researcher could have made an “on-the-spot decisions about any additional probing that may be desirable” (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009, p. 223). However, the researcher has no reason to suspect that the participants interviewed by telephone were not forthcoming.

Data Collection

Data was collected by using a semi-structured interview. The interview followed a set of prewritten open-ended questionnaire (Appendix E). The length of the interviews ranged from 35 minutes to an hour. To ensure accuracy of interview transcription, the interviews were audio recorded. During the recruitment stage, the researcher sent potential participants an electronic mail detailing the purpose of the study and informed participants that the interview will be audio recorded (Appendix A). The electronic mail also attached a form entitled Consent to Act as a Human Research Participant (Appendix D) which stated, “the following procedures will occur: audio recorded interview.” If the participant agreed to participate in the study, the participants were asked to acknowledge their understanding by signing and returning the last page of Appendix D to the researcher. Participants were again informed verbally that the interview will be audio recorded prior to the commencement of the interview and had been given the opportunity to decline to participate. Furthermore, participants were informed that they may end the interview at any time during its course (Appendix E).

Data Analysis

Data for this study were collected from semi-structured interviews with 13 staff members of 11 PEIs in Southern California who are, in one form or another, involved in the development and implementation of support services for MCS. Four of the interviews were conducted face-to-face while nine were conducted over the telephone. The interviews varied in length from 35 minutes to an hour. All interviews were audio recorded and personally transcribed by the researcher soon after the end of each interview.

The researcher used line-by-line coding to find implicit meanings in explicit statements. Having done line-by-line coding immediately after each interview allowed researcher to refocus

subsequent interviews to clarify emerging ideas, categories, and themes (Charmaz, 2006). In so doing, this study ascribed to the principle of grounded theory wherein data collection and analysis occur concurrently which informed subsequent data collection (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014).

As data continued to grow, the researcher used constant comparative methods to find “similarities and differences” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 54) between different interviews. As coding progressed, certain initial codes began to appear more dominant than others. At this point, the coding process moved on to the focused coding. Focused coding involves sifting through the codes produced during the initial coding, synthesizing them to find themes and form cohesive categories upon which to organize the collected data (Charmaz, 2006).

Role of the Researcher

This research was formulated, designed, conducted, and analyzed by the researcher for purposes of fulfilling the dissertation requirements. Although the researcher has no active combat experience, the researcher is a Veteran of the United States Army and had deployed to an area of conflict and was exposed to hazardous environment. This study is motivated and shaped by the researcher’s experience transitioning from a soldier to a civilian serving in the U.S. Army Reserve and a college student, the researcher’s familiarity with the U.S. military culture, affinity with Veterans of the U.S. military, and the researcher’s only child, a son, who is currently serving in active duty with the U.S. Navy. The researcher’s experience as an active duty servicemember in the Army, as a Veteran, as an MCS, and father of actively serving servicemember who will transition to MCS in two years, may have influenced the manner with which this dissertation was formulated. While the researcher attempted to approach the study from a place of curiosity, the researcher cannot completely divorce himself from his military

past. Thus, parts of this dissertation, such as the interview questions, could have been written differently and could have elicited different responses had the researcher not been in the military.

Conclusion

This study utilized a semi-structured interview as the single source of data collection. Due to the large population of MCS in the region, participants from Southern California PEIs had knowledge and experience relating to the subject of formation and implementation of support services designed to increase MCS retention and persistence. This chapter detailed the procedures taken to ensure that harm to participants was minimized and that their confidentiality is protected. Furthermore, this chapter detailed the steps taken to collect the data, analyze the data collected, and provided authoritative justifications for the steps taken. Lastly, the researcher offered possible sources of researcher bias.

Chapter Four

FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the data collected. In total, 13 staff members from 10 different PEIs in Southern California participated in this research. Seven of the 13 represented seven different CCCs and held the position of VRC supervisors or managers. The other six represented three CSUs and had varied roles: three Certifying Officers, two VRC supervisors or managers, and one administrator.

The participants were chosen using purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling method is the process in which participants are chosen deliberately by the researcher because of the participants having specific knowledge or experience related to the matter being studied (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). Specifically, institutions with population of more than 100 documented MCS were assumed to have enough MCS that it would have an active VRC. Thus, VRC staff would be familiar with this study. Indeed, except for two participants who had less than a year in their position and in the field of providing services to MCS, all other participants in this study had at least two years of experience with one participant having almost two decades in the field of MCS support services (see Table 2). The CCC participants in this study represented institutions with an average population of 486.2 MCS while CSU participants represented institutions with an average of 720.5 MCS.

Collection of data was conducted using semi-structured interviews that followed a set of prewritten questions (Appendix E) as a guide. Four of the semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face at participants' place of business while nine were conducted by telephone. The length of the interviews varied from approximately 35 minutes to an hour. Each

were audio recorded and guided by two research questions and two sub-research questions:

1. What factors influence the development of support services for MCS at Southern California public two-year community colleges and four-year state colleges?
 - a. How are student-Veterans engaged in the formulation of support services for MCS?
 - b. How are assessments utilized to guide development and/or modification of support services for MCS?
2. What support services are essential to increase MCS persistence and retention?

The first part of this chapter offers a brief profile of each of the participants. The second part of this chapter provides an overview of how data was analyzed. Lastly, this chapters offers the findings of the interviews. Specifically, the analysis of the collected data produced four dominant themes: 1) MCS face challenges that necessitate providing support services, 2) factors that influence the design of services, 3) roadblocks preventing MCS services, and 4) advocacy/campus partnership for MCS support services.

Participant Profiles

This section provides a brief profile of the participants in this study. The profile covers personal and professional background, including military affiliation and how the participant perceives such affiliation, or the lack thereof, help or hinder the participant's ability to fulfill her or his responsibilities. The brief profile is offered herein to provide the reader a glimpse into the life experiences that participants bring into their occupation, for the reader to consider how such life experience influence the participants' perspectives, as well as provide the bases of the participants' authority to speak on the matter at hand. To protect the identities of the participants, pseudonyms are used in lieu of their true names while using pseudonyms that reflect

their gender, the names of their institutions are replaced with “CCC” to represent two-year public community college or “CSU” to represent the 4-year public California State University, and the length of time they have held their position have been obscured. Table 2 lists the participants, the institution they represent (CSU or CCC), their military affiliation, if any, estimated length of time in the field of student services, and current position.

Table 2

List of Participants

Name	Institution	Military Affiliation	Years in Student Services	Position
Michael	CSU	Navy	6	Certifying Official
Robert	CSU	Marine Corps	10	Supervisor, VRC
Lynn	CSU	Air Force National Guard	10	Veterans Coordinator
Andrew	CSU	Marine Corps	6	Veterans Coordinator
Raymond	CSU	Navy	6	Supervisor, VRC
Steve	CSU	Marine Corps	10	Administrator
Arlene	CCC	Husband is Army National Guard	17	Oversee VRC
Regina	CCC	Son’s father is a Marine Corps Veteran	>6	Counselor and coordinator, VRC
Nicole	CCC	Cousin in the military	<1	Counselor, VRC
Anne	CCC	None	2, less than one year at VRC	Oversee VRC, Certifying Official
Norma	CCC	Both parents and sister’s husband were in the military	<20	VRC Coordinator, Certifying Official
Christy	CCC	Marine Corps	>11	Supervisor, VRC
Emily	CCC	None	<2	Program Coordinator, VRC

Michael

Michael was interviewed at his CSU office where he works as a certifying official. He has been at his current position for approximately six years. His responsibilities primarily revolve around certifying students’ educational benefits in a timely manner, provide information

about their benefits, and how to maximize and how to utilize them accordingly. Michael served in the Navy as an active duty personnel where he was a career counselor. It was from this experience that he believes he was qualified and hired for the position he now holds. He is still in the Navy Reserve.

Robert

Robert's interview was conducted face-to-face at his CSU office. A retired Marine, Robert is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the Resource Center and oversees the development and implementation of a number of different programs. He is responsible for what he called "troubleshooting" when there is a situation that comes up. He sees himself as an advocate for MCS not just on the campus where he works, but MCS across the country. As part of his duties, he represents his CSU and the programs that they provide at their Resource Center at different MCS-related conferences and symposiums nationwide.

Lynn and Andrew

Lynn and Andrew were interviewed simultaneously in the conference room of the CSU where they both work as Veterans Coordinator. Their office is located in the admissions office and their focus is solely to help MCS. Both Lynn and Andrew have two primary responsibilities:

1. They both assist MCS applying to the CSU. In that role, they evaluate applications, transcripts, and process incoming MCS' "Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty" form otherwise known as Form DD 214;
2. Both serve as their campus' school certifying official with the VA. In that capacity, both are responsible for assisting students with collecting approved documentations, certificates of eligibility letters, VA Vocational Rehabilitation form 1905, and evaluate MCS' course enrollment and progress to ensure that MCSs are on degree-applicable track.

Lynn has been at her position for almost a decade. She is a Veteran of the Air Force National Guard and received her degree from the CSU where she now works. As a Veteran of the Air Force National Guard, Lynn was able to use her GI Bill benefits to fund her education. Of her experience as a member of the Air Force National Guard and how it helps her present position, Lynn proudly states:

100 percent! And I think also the dynamic of our office is, you have an active service member, male Veteran, combat air Veteran, and then you have Guard Reserve representation, but also female Veteran. That is very rare. You don't always usually have those two dynamics in an office. And we're both [CSU] alum. We both graduated here so we understand both sides of the fence, student-wise and also staff-wise, VA benefits and that type of thing and we both used different types of benefits. ... So, we have a good scope, from personal experience.

Andrew served in the Marine Corps for four years. Like Lynn, Andrew received his degree using his GI Bill at the CSU where he now works. As an undergraduate student, Andrew supplemented his GI Bill through the VA's work-study program. He has been in his position for six years. About whether his service in the Marine Corps helps him in his position, like Lynn, Andrew was proud to declare:

Yes, it does, but also the fact that we were using benefits. So now we could relate to the students not only as staff, but as Veterans and also as Veterans who used those benefits. It gives us a sense of credibility right off the bat that we know what they're going through, and we've been through there. So, quote unquote, we kind of know what we're doing.

Raymond

Raymond was interviewed by telephone. He currently manages the VRC at his CSU, a position that he has held for a little more than a year. Prior to his present occupation, he was at a private university where he was the Veteran Success Coordinator and at a CCC where was responsible for certifying and providing advisement for MCS.

Because Raymond had worked in different types of institutions, he was asked about the similarities and differences among the varied environments. He responded that each had a different focus. He found that at the private school, he was more focused on personal and professional growth. At the CC level, he was more involved with ensuring that the MCS understood “the very basics because they were just getting out [of the military] at the community college level.” At CSU, the focus revolved primary around providing programs and services rather than professional and/or personal development.

Raymond served four years in active duty with the Navy after 9/11. During his time in the service, he deployed twice to the Middle East. Raymond used his Post-9/11 GI Bill to fund his education. Asked how his military experience helps him with his position, Raymond states in a matter of factly tone:

It helps me, number one: relate to the student-Veterans. It gives me automatic credibility and a sense of trust. It also helps as far as when we want to develop programming and what to, what are the needs of the students, it really helps because having a military experience and going through the higher education process as a student-Veteran, I have firsthand experience in that transition.

Steve

Steve is an administrator at his CSU and is responsible for overseeing the support

services for MCS. Steve is also responsible for working with the legislative offices and other offices within the CSU to ensure that policies and procedures set forth by the legislative bodies are followed. He remarked that his responsibility is to “make sure that not only are we providing good service to Veterans, but also that we are meeting the requirements of both State and federal law as well.” Steve has been at his current position for a little more than two years and had been a Director at CSU for more than 8 years prior to his present position.

Steve is a Cold War Veteran who served in the Marine Corps for six years. When asked how his time in military service helps or hinders his ability to fulfill his position, he responded:

[I]t provided me with kind of that, I don't know, secret Veteran handshake if you will.

And, even though there isn't one, there are many times where you have people that have gotten out of the military that really want to interact with someone who has also served.

... Although I am not a combat Veteran, I didn't go over to Iraq in 1991 like a lot of people did, still the cultural knowledge that I have certainly provides a basis for me to speak from. And I think that makes a difference when I'm speaking with faculty and staff as well.

Arlene

Arlene had been with her CCC for almost 17 years. Aside for overseeing the VRC, she is also responsible for student services that serve other populations including LGBTQ. Her husband retired from the Army National Guard. While her husband was in the military, Arlene served as Family Readiness Group Coordinator for the battalion where she functioned as a liaison between families and the military. Asked whether her familiarity with the military culture influences how she approaches the MCS population, she states:

Yes, and they have their own unique experience and trauma and challenges. So, when

they come to us in transition from military to civilian, it's not an easy thing. If you are not connected to the military somehow, you could try to understand, I do not know if you will fully understand.

Regina

Regina has been with CCC, although not in the same institution, for more than six years. She is the Veterans counselor and coordinator. Her responsibilities include meeting with students or prospective students who are Veterans, active duty, Reserve, or dependent. She helps guide the students or potential students through the process of higher education and works with them to explore career options based upon their experience, skills, and interests.

Regina is affiliated with the military through her son's father who is a Marine Veteran. It was through "him I get the perspective from having served in the Marine Corps." Regina feels that witnessing her son's father's educational journey using both the GI Bill and Vocational Rehabilitation gives her "some knowledge, insight knowledge, of what the process is like. And, based on his experience, what students can..., I have an idea of what to expect." However, Regina feels that military affiliation is not a necessary criterion to serve MCS. Rather, she feels that it is the passion to help the MCS population that would lead to greater understanding of their struggles and strengths:

I think if the counselor has a genuine interest in helping students, that genuine interest then will lead them to do the research outside of their minimal job description, that will require them to know just the benefits. I feel like when a person is passionate about what they are doing, they are going to look to find the answers.

Nicole

Nicole serves as a counselor at her CCC. With less than a year at her position, Nicole is

responsible for organizing workshops and follow-up counseling with the students “to check how they are doing in classes.” A graduate student of Psychology, Nicole’s affiliation with the military is through her cousin. In spite of her cousin being in the military, she states, “I do not have any connection, so I am not very familiar with it [military culture].” However, it has not stopped her from fulfilling her job duties, “I have actually learned a lot because we actually have three student workers that are Veterans. So, I can rely on them, to ask them questions and learn more through them.”

Anne

Anne oversees the VRC and is the sole Certifying Official at her CCC. She has been at her position for less than six months. Prior to her present position, Anne was at another CCC working in the STEM program where she states the population was different than the population she serves now. She states that at her prior position, the average age of the population she served was “a little bit lower, more consistently lower. Maybe between the ages of 18 to 28 pretty consistently” compared to the population she now serves at the VRC. She says of her present constituents, “my student population has a much wider range and variation. So, it could be, I think right now the youngest I’ve seen is 20, 21 years old maybe. The older ones are like, I had a 75-year old yesterday.”

Asked of her military affiliation, Anne states, “I do not. I am a civilian. I have never been in the service or anything. I do have some friends who are in the military. I do not know too much about it.” She admitted, “I’m a little insecure about my ability to be in the leadership just because I’m very new and I don’t know enough, a lot about, like, the Veteran experience because I’m not a Veteran.”

Norma

Norma is the Coordinator for the VRC and also serves as a VA Certifying Official at her CCC where she has been working for almost 20 years. She is primarily responsible for running the Veteran Center and to certify MCS' and dependents' educational benefits.

Norma herself had never served in the military. However, she states that her family has many members who had served including both of her parents who had met while they were in the service, an uncle, another uncle and his wife who, like her parents, also met in the service, her brother, as well as her sister's husband. Regarding how her family background affected how she viewed the MCS who now make up the population that she serves, she states:

I have a really big heart for them. Just because of the things I've seen, of what they've gone through, what they deal with, from this job. Not so much from when I was a kid with my parents, just by doing this job.

Christy

Christy is the supervisor of the VRC at her CCC. Her responsibility is to oversee all of the day-to-day functioning of the VRC including managing the 31 members that comprise the VRC staff. Christy is a Marine Corps Veteran. Asked whether her background in the Marine Corps has helped her in her position, she states:

[L]ike any other in my position, I used my benefits for my education. So, I kind of got both sides of the story. I experienced using my benefits at institutions to get my degree and kind of the struggle. So, I have been able to firsthand offer some of my experience as well.

Given that Christy is able to draw upon her military experience as well as having been a MCS who worked her way through college using her GI Bill to connect with the MCS that now

walk in to her VRC, she was asked whether having a military affiliation, in her view, would be a requirement if only to be able to connect with the MCS. In response, she echoed Regina's sentiment:

Oh no, not at all. I think it is one of the fields that I would say, you know, we don't get paid well, it's not very glamorous, there's a lot of paperwork. So, it's something you have to be passionate about. And, I think that people who have affiliation with the military, that just comes a little bit more naturally. But there are, I mean, I also work with wonderful individuals who have no military affiliation at all. They're just very passionate about serving our Veteran community. I would say more than having a military affiliation, it's just kind of the passion for helping Veterans that will make a difference.

Emily

Emily is the Program Coordinator for the VRC at her CCC. Her responsibilities include running the VRC, managing its budget, and providing support services to MCS. She has been in her present employment for less than two years. Prior to her position at CCC, she had worked at a number of large nonprofit agencies, county governments, and in the private industry. Her background is in program development and professional business administration. However, she professes that while she has family members who served, she personally does not have any military experience. Furthermore, she stated that she had "never worked with the Veteran population" prior to her present position. Asked whether her lack of personal experience with the military helps or hinders her fulfilling her responsibilities, she states:

I don't think it does either. I think, sometimes I bow out of certain things because I don't feel that I, maybe, have the knowledge to participate. ... That said, I do continually

educate myself on military processes and so forth so that I at least learn some things about how it works and what our students are subjected to in the military. And mostly to understand what the transition period is like and also educate myself on what I need to know with respect to how to support our students towards attaining their educational goals.

Emerging Themes

The semi-structured interviews were analyzed soon after each interview. Using grounded theory's line-by-line coding method allowed researcher to closely look at the data to find subtle nuances (Charmaz, 2006). As additional data was added, constant comparative method was used to compare data with data to compare similarities and differences" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 54). The last step of the data analysis involved focused coding where "the most significant and/or frequent earlier codes [were used] to sift through large amounts of data" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 57) to identify the emerging categories or themes. Following the steps mentioned produced four dominant themes: 1) MCS face challenges that necessitate providing support services, 2) factors that influence the design of services, 3) roadblocks preventing MCS services, and 4) advocacy/campus partnership for MCS support services.

MCS Challenges that Necessitate Providing Support Services

The literature review discussed the different challenges that MCS face as they transition from servicemembers to college students. They include being nontraditional students (see, e.g., Choy et al., 2002; Molina & Morse, 2015), navigating two different social structure and culture (see, e.g., Naphan & Elliott, 2015; Pellegrino & Hoggan, 2015; Rausch, 2014), and the physical and psychological effects and their sequelae of having served in hazardous environments (see, e.g., Barry et al., 2012; Rudd et al., 2011; Tanielian & Jaycox, 2008). The participants in this

study offered their perspective on the challenges that the MCS presents in their particular institution. Coding the interviews revealed three predominant subthemes under the broader theme of MCS Challenges that Necessitate Providing Support Services. Specifically, they are: problems with transition and reintegration, financial, and mental health.

Transition and Reintegration

When asked about the challenges that MCS bring with them to campus that necessitate the need for support services, the most cited challenge is transitioning and reintegrating into the civilian setting in general, but more specifically, to their new role as students. Some cultural differences between the military and civilian that MCS find exasperating may not even rise to the consciousness of their civilian counterparts. Take for instance the adherence to timeliness.

Raymond states:

I've noticed that some Veterans have a hard time adjusting to the new culture. By the time they get here, one of the common complaints is that everybody's always late. Our Veterans always show up on time or earlier. But here in higher education, people show up either, if the meeting is at 9:00, people show up at 9:00, 9:05. They straggle in around 9:00 and our Veterans five minutes prior. And even in the classrooms, they are there early while everybody else shows up late. That is really frustrating for them.

For other MCS, the difficulty may arise with them being nontraditional: older, financially independent, and may have dependents (Kim & Cole, 2013; Molina & Morse, 2015; Rattray, 2019). Arlene sees many MCS in her VRC complaining of their civilian counterparts:

The problem they come with is not connecting with the general student population. Most of our Veterans are not younger Veterans that can connect with most of the students that come to us from high school. So, here [college-wide] most of the students we serve are

between the ages of 18 and 24. Our military Veterans or families may be in that range, but most of them are older. And, so they come back with the frustration of “I’m not connecting with the students, they’re too immature, they don’t respect the instructor.”

For other MCS, pride is a detrimental obstacle that prevents them seeking help. Regina explains, “so, I know at least with my experience with, specifically, the Marine Corps, they have a lot of pride and for them to ask for help is hard. And they may see it as looking weak.”

Christy concurs:

Some of the things that we’ve seen is definitely, it’s an adjustment not only back in the civilian life, but back into the college life. Some of the things that we’ve seen are students who are struggling specifically with math and English. I mean, that’s not unique to military-affiliated students. ... We did some focus groups, we did a few Q&As and the feedback was pretty consistent that, especially among our older Veterans, that it’s a little bit harder to, you know, go to a math or writing center and receive tutoring from somebody that is like 18, 19-years old. It’s just kind of, like, I think, more of a hit to their pride.

Another source of conflict is the means with which MCS communicates. MCS come from a military environment where the form of communication is very direct, and orders and directions are straightforward leaving very little to ambiguity. Arlene reports that:

What we have noticed over the past year is that they [MCS] do not know how to navigate the community college system. And, it is as basic as interacting with their faculty. We have received many cases where the Veteran student had a disagreement with faculty because the faculty said something very vague in terms of an assignment. The Veteran students, most, don’t handle vagueness. They need structure. And, ... instead of trying

to work things out between student and faculty, Veterans get angry and come to us for help.

Other problems with transition and reintegration can and do lead to bigger problems. Sometimes MCS' difficulty transitioning and reintegrating into the college environment can lead to conflict with other students and faculty with the MCS being forced out of the institution. One source of contention is that the military's direct form of communication is often sprinkled with profanities. While Regina states that most MCS are able to gauge their environment and filter themselves, "for some students they don't have that censor. I have had one student who had an academic discipline and ultimately was expelled from our college because he wasn't able to adapt."

For participants who had served and obtained their education either during or after their military service, the feeling of being lost in the new environment is only too familiar. This is true for Lynn who stated:

Based on what I've observed and me as a student, I think the challenge is feeling that you don't relate to the college life. ... For me, the VRC had not been established yet. ... To me that was something that I'm glad we have now. At the time, as a student, I felt like I did not have a safe space to where I can go and air out my frustrations over my GI Bill or issues I was having because I was on the [Air Force National] Guard. That was a challenge for me personally.

Financial Challenges

The second most cited challenge that MCS bring with them on campus relate to finances. Oftentimes the problems arise due to the specifics of their educational benefits, e.g., when they will receive their checks, how much funding they have left in their GI Bill, whether the VA has

received their paperwork, and other sources of educational benefits such as Vocational Rehabilitation. However, for many MCS, the financial problem can be more serious. According to Anne at CCC:

For a lot of students also, these GI Bill benefits are their only source of income. So, depending on when their payments come in or how their payments work out, depending on the classes they take, I think a lot of them do end up feeling very stressed about money because they have rent to make and food to pay and they're, a lot of them are very dependent on these GI Bill payments to supplement, you know, and help keep them afloat. They can often be so worried about funds that, you know, it can distract them from school.

The financial difficulties experienced by MCS at the CCC level is not restricted to CCC, however. At the CSU level Raymond commented that:

It is a wide range of challenges from food insecurity to housing insecurity. Most of our funds, our emergency funds that we have here for student-Veterans goes to housing insecurities. So, our Veterans have trouble finding secure housing especially when they are full-time student and they are using just the GI Bill and maybe a part-time job. It is kind of hard for them because of the pricing of housing to find, especially if they have dependents or family, they really struggle as far as that. But, obviously, that speaks to the greater issue of the cost of living here in Los Angeles. But that is the main issue.

Mental Health

A number of literature reviews have studied the impact of exposure to combat and hazardous environments during the course of military service on service personnel's mental health (see, e.g., Aikins et al., 2015; Grossbard et al., 2014; Tanielian & Jaycox, 2008) and how

the effect of such exposure manifests itself on college campuses (see e.g., Pease et al., 2015; Rudd et al., 2011). The first four participants in this study were asked in general, broad terms to identify the challenges that MCS bring with them on campus that necessitate the campus having to provide support services. While the participants readily stated problems with transition and reintegration as well as financial difficulties, mention of mental health presentations were incidental. Thus, subsequent interviews became more direct in asking about the prevalence of MCS presenting with emotional or psychological burden. The response was enlightening. Many reflected Michael's and Regina's observations. According to Michael:

We have had faculty and staff who have reported student-Veterans, Veterans specifically, with suicidal ideations. That happens maybe four or five times a year. Not too often, but considering our population it is bound to happen at one point or another.

At CCC, Regina also claimed that MCS exhibiting emotional or psychological impairment is not a prevalent issue amongst this population of students:

From the students that I have seen, maybe 10%. It is not a huge number for the most part. At least when they come to us, for the most part a lot of them have already been assimilated to civilian life and are doing fine.

However, not all participants agreed with Michael and Regina. Norma and Lynn posited that perhaps mental health issues among the MCS population reflect some MCS' inability to express themselves or unwillingness to seek help. Norma at CCC observed:

Okay, this is me and I have a problem with this, too. Just because, I mean, talking to somebody I just met, I don't know if there is a problem. You know what I mean? You just don't know the person. That could just be his, his style of how he does things. He might not have any problem. But yet, he could and a lot of them keep it inside of them.

... I mean there's times when I found out, I didn't even know about this, about this person's having horrible times and all that.

Lynn at CSU echoed Norma:

I know that a lot of them do not utilize the disability resource center. I do not know if it's due to not wanting to get labeled, or a stigma, or maybe because they do not have service-connected disability rating because they haven't taken that step yet. But they could truly use those services.

Factors that Influence the Design of Services

The second theme that arose from the interviews relate to the design of support services for MCS. The participants in this study indicated attending conferences, symposiums, and site visits to other VRCs to learn of local, state, and national trends in the field of MCS support services. Others indicated using focus groups, formal survey, informal discussion, check-in/check-out forms, and suggestion boxes to understand the needs and concerns of their MCS population. Sometimes these tools lead to offering new services while at other times it leads to reestablishing past events that have been discarded or adapting current services to the needs of their present MCS population. Not all tools are effective, however. Some are discarded for lack of feedback from the MCS while other tools, such as institutional surveys, either do not provide enough information or the results are not shared with the VRC. Thus, leading to frustration.

Formal Assessments

Of interest is that only a few of the participants reported their department using formal assessments to gauge MCS response to the services they provide. For those that do, these formal assessments can take the form of surveys conducted by the institution, as well as surveys and focus groups conducted by the VRC. According to Michael, conducting formal assessments:

[H]elps us understand how the population changes, where to focus our resources and our focus as far as student population next. Oftentimes, what we are made more aware of is what we are doing well obviously, but what we are not doing well. Those tend to change, it just depends on the student-Vets on campus.

For Christy, conducting question and answer focus groups have been most effective and where they “got a lot more feedback, a lot more valuable feedback.” Regarding conducting surveys, she states, “We have tried to do follow up survey, it is really hard to get students to respond to those.” Because of the ineffectiveness of follow up surveys, in conjunction with the focus groups, Christy stated that her VRC resorted to following the GPAs instead:

It’s not the best, right? But we’re trying to take this more holistic approach. If we’re meeting all of these other needs, then hopefully the students can focus more on doing well in school. So, we’ve been tracking GPA as a way to kind of say, “okay, what we’re doing is working because our students are either doing better or at least passing” or staying off of probation. Not the best way, we know, but kind of what we’ve had that works.

Two VRC stated that their institutions conduct regular, annual surveys. However, they feel that while these institutional surveys are designed to be used by all departments within the institution, the surveys tend to be too broad and universal that the surveys have limited value or applicability to their specific MCS population. For example, Emily states:

We do have a survey that is done annually of all students. Generally, I don’t think it’s super effective because the questions are kind of generic. For example, “when I left the Center today, I knew exactly what I needed to do.” “I disagree with that” or “I highly agree with that.” So, it’s a scale of not disagreeing all the way to agreeing. So, it’s not

super-effective. I'm not really sure how they quantify some of the questions like, ... "I felt respected when I walked into the place." I don't really know how you can quantify that. I wasn't allowed to modify the questions because the same questions are asked of all the students of all the student services. ... I am actually putting together a survey myself for my Veteran students to find out more specifically what my cohort wants. And I'm going to leave room for people to write things in if they want to.

Norma on the other hand has found no value to the institutional survey at all. When asked how the institutional surveys serve to guide the services provided to MCS who visit her VRC, Norma responded with palpable frustration:

That's a good [question], too. A lot of times they run stuff and just want the reports, but they don't do anything afterwards. They're just running the figures and finding out, you know, problems. I mean, I don't know. I just don't feel like, I don't know exactly how to help them and what they totally would need. We do try to go through, but knowing exactly what it is, sometimes we don't get that information out of the stuff we run, the data we run, just to really find out what they need.

While they do not do so now, most other VRCs, however, realize the value of gaining formal insight into the effectiveness of the services they provide. As a result, many are in the contemplation or design stage of conducting formal assessments. For example, Regina is considering having a needs assessment and intake form. She states that:

[T]hat is something that we know is needed, that we do need to engage our students because the way that we've based our services and the resources that we provide is kind of our anecdotal experiences and not necessarily based on any collective data or information that is from our students.

Informal Assessments

While few of the participants stated that they conducted formal assessments, all use informal assessments to test ideas for new events and/or services or gauge MCS satisfaction with prior events or current services. A form of informal assessments is casual discussions between staff and MCS. Raymond illustrated other participants' sentiment relating to casual discussions as a source of ideas, "we have those all the time as far as conversations with the students because that is really the best way to kind of gauge how our performance is during our events or programs, during conversations, during downtime here." As an example of the effectiveness of informal discussions, Raymond cites an event that their VRC had discarded previously:

A good example of that is we had a, one of our programs is Family Fun Day. That is basically we rent the [campus] recreation pool and then we have Veterans, they come in and bring their family to pool day during the summer. That was taken away. During our consultation with the students they always say, "how come we don't do that anymore. We should bring that back." And we brought it back and we had an RSVP of about 50, but 80 students showed up and their families altogether.

Others such as Andrew and Lynn have an open door policy, "students that have issues or they feel the need to express a concern about something, normally come and speak directly to Lynn and I (sic) primarily because we are student-facing." Norma touts the value of simply listening to the discussion around her at the VRC. The VRC becomes its own informal assessment, a source of invaluable, candid information relating to the struggles of the MCS:

[B]ecause if you give them a place to meet, that's when they start talking. And then that's when you hear, that's kind of where I hear more of what they need and what the problems are. Just from being in the room right next to them and they're talking.

Conferences and Site Visits

Attending conferences and symposiums is another tool that VRC staff as well as administrators use to learn of current trends in the field of MCS retention and persistence and where they gain fresh and new ideas. For some, these conferences can be local or statewide while for Robert:

We've got national conferences all over the place. And I like engaging with those folks because what we are doing here that is successful, while it may not work, say in Kansas, there may be something that we are doing that they could replicate to benefit their program. Likewise, if they are doing something that we have not thought of, we can replicate it. We can at least give it a shot.

For colleges whose budget may not allow for national travel, site visits are an option. For Emily, the site visits did not always lead to replicating already existing services at other VRCs, but served to fine tune the services provided to the MCS at her CCC:

At first when I got here, I really wanted to go around and see the other Veteran Centers and see how they do things. And then I realized that I really needed to shape things the way that it works here. So, that's basically what I've done. I have gone to a couple of Veteran Centers and I've seen things that I didn't want to do at my Center and I've seen things that I thought were a good idea and I would implement them in my own way.

Roadblocks Preventing MCS Services

All of the participants expressed genuine interest in increasing MCS persistence, retention, and academic success. To that end, the participants have also shown genuine desire to maintain, if not expand, support services to further the goal of helping MCS succeed. However,

certain barriers stand in the way of fulfilling this goal. Specifically, funding, MCS participation, buy-in from administrators, faculty, and staff, and space.

Funding and Infrastructure

Michael works at a large CSU with an equally large population of MCS. As a Certifying Official, Michael is saddled with having to certify more than a thousand students in a timely manner. The impact of budgetary constraint at Michael's institution leads to the institution's inability to hire another person to help Michael:

Obviously, state institutions resources. It's funny, it's kind of funny for us considering that we have such a large space. We do have a significant population so that warrants our large space to assist these students. For all of our students that are here, the biggest thing that we run into is adding another person like myself to certify student in a timely manner. I certify anywhere between 1,400 and 1,600 students every semester. It takes me roughly about a month and a half to get to all of those students.

Raymond who had previously worked at a private PEI compared the difference between his past position and his present situation:

During my time at [the private college], the biggest challenge there was getting Veterans to go to private school. Money was not a problem; change was not a problem. They would welcome change and entrepreneurship. However, at a public school, one of the biggest challenges we face obviously is budget. Our money is always tight.

Funding is a struggle at CCC as well where Norma is often met with "'oh, we can't do anything. We don't have the money.'" They say that all the time. 'oh, we can't do that. We don't have the money.'" However, the lack of funding is not the biggest problem for some. In Emily's case, "I don't have an unlimited budget. By using volunteers, utilizing space that we

already have. ... I'm able to get about 80% of things done on my own."

With everything said about lack of funding, Steve disagrees that it is the hardest thing to get on campus:

You know we always say money is the hardest thing to get on a college campus? But that is actually not true. The hardest thing to get is space. I know there have been a lot of campuses that over the years have struggled to get that Veteran Resource Center space that they need. ... In some places, you go to San Diego State and they've got the Taj Mahal of Veterans Centers and Cal State Fullerton as well. They have these amazing, huge spaces that are super functional. But you've got some other places where you've got a space kind of an office aside. So, I think space is one consideration that can be a challenge.

MCS Participation

Another barrier to providing additional support services rests with the MCS themselves. A number of participants complained of the lack of engagement by MCS. Lynn and Andrew's statements exemplify other participants' general view:

You hear from students, "I want this" or "I want that," but then when it's offered, there is no follow through. A lot of people don't show up. ... I think that's why there might be a lack of certain services because, "oh we tried, but no one showed up" or "we only had two individuals." So, they tend to not do it again because the cost is too much or "we're providing so much and taking resources elsewhere when we could be providing them to this other group." I think with that, that is always going to be a challenge.

Andrew concurred, stating:

We want to have big ideas, but if only three people showed up, is it really worth getting

\$10,000 of funds just for this three Veterans? I think the power of numbers is what constraints us. It is not because the lack of the school not trying to provide those. It is justifying those expenditures to the state. Again, everything is controlled by money.

While also suffering from lack of participation by MCS at her institution, Anne understood that the MCS at her CCC may not be as readily available to participate in campus-based extra-curricular activities:

Because the way the campus feels, it is again like very kind of go to school, go home. Or go to school, you don't stay too late. A lot of the students tend to use public transportation especially if they are living nearby because it is cheaper than having a car. There is no parking. It is just more convenient for them. So, if I wanted to throw these workshops, something to think about would be availability of the students and if they were even willing to stay for a workshop.

Buy-In from Administrators, Faculty, Staff, and the General Study Body

The next roadblock that many VRC and administrators find standing in their way is the lack of buy-in from administrators, faculty, and staff. Sometimes, the lack of buy-in results from holding on to old campus cultural norms that may no longer hold true. Raymond found that:

There is a fear of change. Things they want to be done the same way. As a supervisor, I do have to report to a manager and then the executive levels. And sometimes new ideas and entrepreneurship kind of scares those who are used to the old tradition. So, being a newcomer, bringing new ideas is kind of, it is difficult to get support or, I want to say, investment in because of what they are used to or because of political climate.

Emily concurs:

I come from a background of getting things done quickly, you know, from a business

background. Working at a college, things move a lot slower, there's a lot more bureaucracy to deal with. ... It's other administrators. Mostly they're supportive, but I work in an environment with people that have been in education for a long time and they tend to be naysayers like, "oh, we tried that before and it didn't work" or "yeah, you can set up an AA meeting, but good luck getting students to show up." There's usually kind of a negative, I don't know, there's something negative. I don't really know how to describe it.

For Regina, the problem of bureaucracy can forestall the implementation of services: Right now, we are in the process of getting there. It is just the bureaucracy, like getting in place and establishing it, is I think what is preventing it. The funds are there, it is just a matter of making it happen. Basically, [getting] everybody signs off on the process.

Emily agreed that space may be a source of difficulty. However, her experience is that it is not the lack of space that is the problem, but the inability of the campus' executive leadership to allocate available spaces to better use. She said:

And then the other thing is that I have a small Center. Every square inch is used. I don't really have a space to see students on a confidential basis. But, there is a huge suite next door that's not being used. I finally got a key to it. It's been vacant for three years and they're like, "well, don't get too comfortable there because we've got plans for that room." Well, they've been saying that for three years.

While many VRC and Certifying Officials look at the bureaucracy imposed upon by administrators as the source of their inability to design services that would better serve the MCS, Steve who is an administrator points the finger at the political institution outside of the campus:

Interestingly, I think the biggest challenge with legislation is that we have a very

polarized political world at this point. State and federal legislators, whether it be congress or state house or senate, they cannot agree on anything except Veterans. So, if a bill comes out that has Veterans in it, it's probably going to pass. Which means that the legislative environment for us is in a constantly shifting new requirements, constantly, every year, usually twice a year we have either state or federal legislation that changes something dramatically enough that we've got to push out new policies to accommodate the new laws. And the ideas are always, you know, let's help Veterans, but sometimes that works really well and other times it creates more and more challenges for the campuses that you wind up not having the person power to accomplish what is being asked, figuring out how to use resources to do things can be a challenge.

At other times, the resistance comes from the general student body. Raymond states that his VRC has to consider the views of other student organizations before they promote or conduct certain activities:

There are different student organizations on campus who see Veterans as agent of oppression because of what they represent. So, it's kind of hard to create programs when there are other groups that are not necessarily welcoming to the Veterans. But that does not mean that we do not work together. We do. But there are different students that have certain reservations when it comes to Veterans. ... Especially with the political climate nowadays.

Sometimes the barrier that stands in the way of MCS success goes beyond the lack of funds, space, legislative agenda, or even campus community being passive. At times the barrier borders on outright antagonism and hostility. This is what Arlene has experienced:

What I would say in terms of a challenge that I would trade in any time for the fiscal one

because I can tackle the fiscal one, it would be increasing the ally-ship from our faculty, staff and managers towards our Veteran-students. ... I had one faculty member where the student was in the hospital, released himself from the VA Hospital against medical advice, I think it was a blood clot in his chest, because he needed to come in to take this exam because the instructor would not provide a make-up exam. ... We even sent an email on his behalf with his documentation. And he refused to give him a make-up exam. So, he released himself from the hospital against medical advice. ... I always hear that “military is for people that don’t have brains. They have nothing better to do. So, they join the military.”

Advocacy/Campus Partnerships for MCS Support Services

While the theme “Roadblocks” discussed barriers that prevent the formation of new support services or expansion of existing ones, more successful VRCs point to active engagement by MCS and at least a person in their institution for initiating the pro-MCS environment on their campuses. While the VRC participants pointed to MCS and institutional support as key constituents, the researcher had noted in the course of data analysis, was the active role of the VRC representatives who serve as the bridge between the MCS and the campuses’ executive leadership.

MCS Advocacy

Participants have reported the role of MCS advocacy in the formation of the support services that MCS now enjoy. To illustrate, Lynn states: “they are the ones that have a greater voice. Because of them we have our VRC. Because of VRC that we have special graduation reception.” Andrew further offered:

I think that is also when it started [2009-2010], that snowball effect, where the SVO

[Student Veteran Organization] was created and then next year came another individual who was very motivated and pro-Veteran group, and then a whole group started and then they started reaching out, “well, we need a Veterans’ Resource Center.” So, they were the ones knocking on doors asking, “where’s our space? Everyone has a space. We don’t.” That is how the VRC started, actually was created.

Steve who, as an administrator at CSU pays close attention to the events in other CSU campuses. He considers MCS activism as instrumental and from which campus executive leadership takes its cue: “I think that the campuses are listening to the voices of the students. ... But the more active that student organization is, the better feedback the professional staff that work there get from them as well.”

While student organizations at CSU have a higher rate of sustainability due to the length of time students and student organizers stay at the institution, CCC have a harder time retaining students due to transfer and the nature of the institution as predominantly commuter with its MCS population likelier to be nontraditional students with responsibilities off campus. And the size of the MCS population at CCC seems to have no influence on whether MCS will organize to advocate on their behalf. Regina, who is from a CCC with more than 500 MCS in the spring of 2019, stated regarding the student-Veteran organization on campus:

On and off we have had one. Right now, we are not able to have one yet because we don’t have enough students who are interested. So, the club cannot become chartered until I think there is 4 or 5 participants. We have had it in the past. Once the president graduated, then there was nobody else who continued the organization.

Institutional Advocacy

In some institutions, MCS themselves advocate for services they feel are due them. In

other institutions, it is a collective effort among administrators and staff. Andrew and Lynn illustrate how a proactive campus environment coalesce towards a common goal. But Lynn traces the Veteran-centric culture to one person. According to Lynn, even before the MCS used their collective voice to advocate for space in the form of the VRC, there was an administrator at the Admissions and Records Office:

A previous employee here, she was an employee for thirty something years. Her husband was a Vietnam Era Veteran. So, she just had a really big passion for Vets. So, she herself, whenever there were issues, because she had that authority, she was an administrator to basically say “oh no, go ahead and waive their residency. Go ahead and do this.” I think, and she had a such a strong presence in Admissions and Records, everyone just kind of piggybacked on that and just started to also kind of do the same motions as her. Again, the way we are, it’s office-wide, it’s A&R-wide, it’s not just us that advocate for Vets. Directors, managers in other areas also are very passionate about helping servicemembers. You know, it is not something that is just internal here, I mean, we’re the contact point or the face of it per se, but it’s across the board.

Andrew added in support of the proactive stance the administrative staff are in their CSU: For example, we are limited because of our resources and where we stand. Management went to a conference and realized that the way we were set-up was not ideal set-up for Veterans and for us. So, they went ahead, and they were in a process of remodeling this whole thing. They already had the blue plans [print] and everything set, and we were not included in that. They came back, had a meeting between the big people and they decided that, “you know what? We need to rearrange this blueprint so we could accommodate the Veterans.” ...To me changes took a lot of money and it took a lot of

approvals. So, that means that they were so passionate about Veterans that they went ahead and tackled those tasks in a short amount of time.

VRC Staff Advocacy

Active advocacy by MCS students and student-Veteran clubs is instrumental in informing executive leaders of the needs of the MCS population. The executive leadership and administrative staff's receptiveness to MCS is instrumental in creating an environment where MCS can thrive. Where MCS do not actively advocate for themselves, the executive leadership and administrative staff can take proactive steps, as they have done in Lynn and Andrew's institution, to create that environment. A third player, but equally important, in creating this campus environment is the VRC staff. Not only do the VRC staff serve the needs of MCS as they walk into the Center, they are also instrumental in voicing the needs of the MCS to the executive leadership as Anne had done:

The tricky part is, I think a lot of people in the administration want to provide assistance and help, but they may not know where they can help. So, for me, I think my job might be to be very clear about the resources we need and be very direct.

Lynn and Andrew, aside for advocating on behalf of the MCS to the executive leadership, they also encourage MCS to advocate for themselves. According to Lynn:

We always tell them, "it's your right as a student. As a state employee I have certain limitations. Even though I might feel a way about something, I'm not a student anymore. You have a right to voice your opinions. Follow the right channels." I always encourage them.

Conclusion

Thirteen staff members from three CSUs and seven CCCs participated in this qualitative

research study. The participants graciously shared their personal perspectives and insights into the challenges they face in providing services to their MCS population. Likewise, and without taking personal credit, all participants discussed successes they have witnessed, participated in, or were instrumental in launching. From the interviews emerged four themes: 1) MCS face challenges that necessitate providing support services, 2) factors that influence the design of services, 3) roadblocks preventing MCS services, and 4) advocacy/campus partnership for MCS support services. This chapter delved into each of the four themes with support from the voices of the participants.

The next chapter, Discussions and Conclusions, discusses and examines the insights provided by the participants in relation to the research questions herein. It then discusses the implication of this study for purposes of policy and practice and makes recommendations for future research.

Chapter Five

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

In his address to the American Council on Education in 2008, California State University Chancellor Charlie Reed presented a challenge to PEIs:

I'm going to give you an assignment. Do an assessment of how you're doing with programs and services for service members and veterans. You won't find a pretty picture. What you will find is that you need to reorganize and reprioritize. (Cook & Kim, 2009, p. iii)

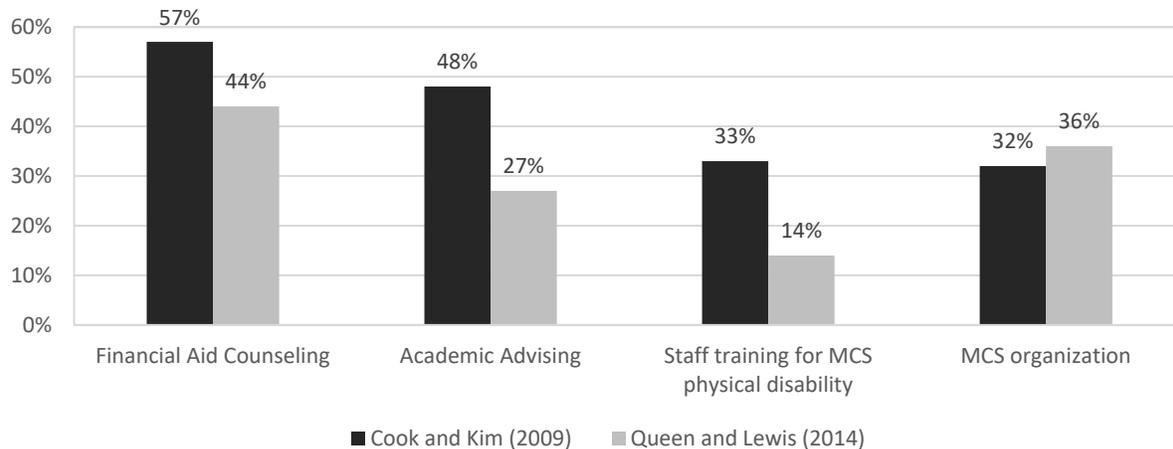
Soon after Chancellor Reed issued his challenge, Cook and Kim (2009) conducted a study to assess the state of support services for MCS. An example of Cook and Kim's findings include that of those surveyed 57 percent provided MCS financial aid counseling, 48 percent offered academic advising, 33 percent provided training for staff to meet the needs of veterans with physical disabilities, and 32 percent had an active MCS organization (Cook & Kim, 2009).

Cook and Kim's (2009) study was followed up by Queen and Lewis (2014) who analyzed support services in place during the academic year 2012-2013 in a representative sample of 1,650 PEIs. Juxtaposing Queen and Lewis' (2014) findings with those of Cook and Kim's (2009), Queen and Lewis (2014) found that 44 percent of their survey participants offered financial aid counseling, 27 percent offered academic advising, 14 percent offered training for staff to meet the needs of MCS with physical disability, and 36 percent of survey participants had an MCS organization with 19 percent having a dedicated space for MCS. Five years after Cook and Kim's (2009) study, except for the presence of MCS organization which had increased, Queen and Lewis (2014) seem to suggest that support services for MCS had lessened

(see Figure 1). (Both Kim and Cook’s (2009) and Kim and Lewis’s (2014) studies listed a number of services. The services mentioned herein is a sample of those services and used to illustrate how the services had digressed in the five years between the two studies.)

Figure 1

Comparison of Cook and Kim (2009) and Queen and Lewis (2014) sample findings



Note: Cook, B. J. & Kim, Y. (2009). *From soldier to student: Easing the transition of service members on campus*. Washington, DC: American Council on Education.

Queen, B., & Lewis, L. (2014). *Services and support programs for military service members and veterans at postsecondary institutions, 2012–13* (NCES 2014-017). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics.

In the eight years that elapsed since Chancellor Reed’s speech in 2008 to 2016, the population of MCS receiving military educational benefits had almost doubled from 461,248 in 2008 (Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.) to 903,327 in 2016 (VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017). And millions more MCS are expected to join the ranks of college students in the coming years (United States Government Accountability Office, 2014).

Twelve years have passed since Chancellor Reed issued the challenge to PEIs. This study’s aim was not to replicate Cook and Kim’s (2009) and Queen and Lewis’ (2014) studies. Indeed, the researcher’s assumption was that MCS support services today is more robust than it

was when Cook and Kim (2009) and Queen and Lewis (2014) conducted their studies. This study's purpose was to analyze the processes that transpire, as well as the opportunities and challenges that participants experience, in the creation and implementation of MCS support services.

Chapter one provided an overview of this research. Chapter two enumerated prior research and other literature relating to the experiences of servicemembers and how such experiences negatively impact former servicemembers' ability to persist in the academic setting, the initiatives some campuses have implemented to help retain and transition MCS, as well as the financial barriers that limit the services that public PEIs provide. Chapter three discussed the process by which this study was conducted and analyzed while chapter four offered the most salient responses that the participants presented relating to this study. This chapter discusses and examines the insights provided by the participants in relation to the research questions. It then discusses the implication of this study for purposes of policy and practice and makes recommendations for future research.

Discussion

The purpose of this dissertation was to explore the experiences of staff, administrators and/or counselors that influence the development of support services for MCS at CCCs and CSUs in Southern California as well as understand how assessments are designed and how these assessments guide the implementation of new and improvements of current MCS support services. Given the financial limitations faced by many PEIs (Boggs, 2004; Kena et al., 2016; Miller & Holt, 2005; Webber, 2018), this dissertation further aimed to assess what student support services participants deemed essential to the retention, persistence, and, ultimately, academic success of MCS. This qualitative study was guided by two main research questions

and two sub-questions:

1. What factors influence the development of support services for MCS at Southern California public two-year community colleges and four-year state colleges?
 - a. How are assessments utilized to guide development and/or modification of support services for MCS?
 - b. How are student-Veterans engaged in the formulation of support services for MCS?
2. What support services are essential to increase MCS persistence and retention?

This section reviews the challenges that MCS face in the academic setting. It then discusses the participants perspectives as they relate to the research questions.

MCS Face Challenges that Necessitate Student Support Services

The first theme that arose from the semi-structured interviews relate to the challenges faced by MCS on campus. Participants readily offered difficulty with transition and reintegration, of being nontraditional students, as well as financial difficulties as foremost amongst MCS concerns. The literature review supports the participants' universal observation that MCS face difficulty interacting and working with members of their new environment. The gap between the military and civilian culture exists. An example is MCS' strict observance of time and adherence to punctuality while their non-military counterparts see tardiness as acceptable. According to Raymond, "they are there early while everybody else shows up late. That is really frustrating for them."

The annoyance felt by MCS resulting from the cultural gap is further exacerbated by MCS' status as nontraditional students. Most are older, financially independent, and may have dependents. Arlene sees many MCS who complain, "I'm not connecting with the students,

they're too immature, they don't respect the instructor." Christy added that "among our older Veterans, that it's a little bit harder to, you know, go to a math or writing center and receive tutoring from somebody that is like 18, 19-years old."

The second most cited challenge that MCS bring with them on campus relate to finances. Anne explains that "for a lot of students also, these GI Bill benefits are their only source of income." Raymond stated that paying for tuition is only one of many problems relating to finances. The main concern that he encounters is "food insecurity to housing insecurity." Raymond attests that his VRC's emergency funds is predominantly spent to help MCS with housing insecurities. But rather than place the fault solely on the inadequacy of the GI Bill to supplement MCS' living expenses in addition to tuition and books, Raymond looks at the local area's cost of living, "obviously, that [housing insecurity] speaks to the greater issue of the cost of living here in Los Angeles."

While the literature points to mental health among Veterans and current servicemembers as a top concern, the first four participants in this study made little mention of mental health concern among their MCS population. Subsequent interviews were more direct in asking about the prevalence of MCS presenting with emotional or psychological burden. The response had been enlightening. According to Michael at State, faculty and staff had brought concerns about MCS being suspected of harboring suicidal ideations. However, he states, "that happens maybe four or five times a year. Not too often. But considering our population, it is bound to happen at one point or another."

At Community, Regina likewise observed a small population of MCS who exhibit emotional or psychological impairment. She states, "maybe 10%. It is not a huge number for the most part." She further stated that the ones she sees at her VRC, "a lot of them have already

been assimilated to civilian life and are doing fine.”

The lack of priority given by participants to MCS’ mental health problems contradicted the researcher’s expectation that mental health would be among the top concerns for this population of students. However, compared to Veterans who never had gone to college, this lack of negative emotional and/or psychological presentation among MCS as reported by some participants may be in concurrence to the argument that MCS are higher functioning (Hoggatt et al., 2017) and/or have higher levels of internal locus of control that allow them to readily adapt to different environments (Bartone, 1999). Alternatively, the lack of presentation may also reflect some MCS’ inability to express themselves or unwillingness to seek help. Norma at Community observed that at her VRC, “a lot of them keep it inside of them. I mean there’s times when I found out, I didn’t even know about this, about this person’s having horrible times and all that.” Lynn made the same observation at State:

I know that a lot of them do not utilize the disability resource center. I do not know if it’s due to not wanting to get labeled, or a stigma, or maybe because they do not have service-connected disability rating because they haven’t taken that step yet. But they could truly use those services.

Norma and Lynn are not alone in their observations. While Hoggatt et al. (2017), Bartone (1999), and Rudd et al. (2011), among many researchers, have found evidence for MCS’ hardiness and resilience, Rattray (2019) supports Norma and Lynn. In Rattray’s (2019) study of MCS, a Marine did not want to disclose his disability for fear of being perceived as weak because, “it hits my pride button” (p. 289). Others in Rattray’s (2019) study refused to disclose their mental health difficulties lest they be perceived as “broken” (p. 289).

Factors that Influence the Design of Services

The second theme that arose from the interviews relate to the first research question and its two sub-questions:

1. What factors influence the development of support services for MCS at Southern California public two-year community colleges and four-year state colleges?
 - a. How are assessments utilized to guide development and/or modification of support services for MCS?
 - b. How are student-Veterans engaged in the formulation of support services for MCS?

A few participants stated that they attend conferences, symposiums, and visit other VRC sites in their area to learn what is occurring locally, statewide, and nationally and take what they learn back to their institutions. At their campuses, they tailor these models of support services to the specific needs of their MCS population. Many participants utilize informal assessments such as casual discussions and check-in/check-out questionnaire to evaluate their MCS' interest and needs. Of particular interest to policy makers is the importance of three campus entities in the development of support services for MCS: 1) MCS and the level of their engagement, 2) the institution with its staff, faculty and executive leadership, and 3) the VRC staff among whom many are former MCS and now serve as intermediary between the MCS and executive leadership.

MCS and the Level of their Engagement on Campus

First among the three influencers of support services for MCS is the MCS themselves. Participants felt that MCS' voice is necessary to understand MCS' experiences as well as their needs. Lynn stated that, "they are the ones that have a greater voice. Because of them we have

our VRC.” Steve concurs that MCS activism is necessary, “the more active that student organization is, the better feedback the professional staff that work there get from them as well.”

However, MCS activism is not consistent. One complaint is their lack of commitment. According to Lynn: “you hear from students, ‘I want this’ or ‘I want that,’ but then when it’s offered, there is no follow through. A lot of people don’t show up.” Andrew concurred, stating:

We want to have big ideas, but if only three people showed up, is it really worth getting \$10,000 of funds just for this three Veterans? I think the power of numbers is what constraints us. It is not because the lack of the school not trying to provide those. It is justifying those expenditures to the state.

CCs have a harder time getting MCS involved on campus. CCs are predominantly commuter institutions with MCS population likelier to be nontraditional students with responsibilities off campus. Unlike CSUs where students remain for at least two to three years if they transferred from a CC, MCS at CCs tend to stay for two years or, for those who had acquired units while they were in the military, less than two years. With more than 500 MCS at her campus, Regina acknowledges the difficulty she faces in trying to get the MCS to organize an MCS club. She stated that:

On and off we have had one. Right now, we are not able to have one yet because we don’t have enough students who are interested. ... We have had it in the past. Once the president graduated, then there was nobody else who continued the organization.

While also suffering from lack of participation by MCS at her institution, Anne understands that the MCS at her campus may not be as readily available to participate in campus-based extra-curricular activities, “because the way the campus feels, it is again like very kind of go to school, go home. Or go to school, you don’t stay too late.” She added that while she

would like to have more transition and reintegration activities such as job training, she is hesitant. “If I wanted to throw these workshops, something to think about would be availability of the students and if they were even willing to stay for a workshop.”

A way that two participants engage MCS is through formal assessments. Michael was not specific about the tools they use, but he stated that formal assessments, “helps us understand how the population changes, where to focus our resources and our focus as far as student population next.” Christy had tried to engage the MCS population by conducting formal assessments as well. Representing an institution with more than 750 MCS, she found that question and answer focus groups produced “a lot more valuable feedback.” To get additional and broader input from MCS on her campus, Christy has tried surveys. However, she has had difficulty getting MCS involved, stating that “it is really hard to get students to respond to those.” As a result, she has resorted to tracking MCS’ GPA to gauge the efficacy of their services. She justifies the procedure stating that it is:

“A way to kind of say, ‘okay, what we’re doing is working because our students are either doing better or at least passing’ or staying off of probation. Not the best way, we know, but kind of what we’ve had that works.”

Christy acknowledges that while tracking MCS’ GPA lets Christy know that their interventions are keeping MCS off of probation, it does not equate to having MCS engage in the formulation of support services.

In conjunction with MCS’ active advocacy where it exists and attempts at formal assessments, almost all participants stated that they use informal means to solicit feedback from MCS. These informal tools take the form of casual discussions, check-in/check-out forms, and suggestion boxes. Casual conversations between staff and MCS had been helpful to Raymond,

who states, “that is really the best way to kind of gauge how our performance is during our events or programs, during conversations, during downtime here.” He states that the conversations had led to new offerings and services as well as reinstatement of events that had previously been discarded. Norma finds that just by listening to the MCS conversations at her VRC provides her with invaluable insight:

[B]ecause if you give them a place to meet, that’s when they start talking. And then that’s when you hear, that’s kind of where I hear more of what they need and what the problems are. Just from being in the room right next to them and they’re talking.

Institutional Support

In some institutions, MCS enthusiastically advocate for MCS recognition and actively negotiate with their campus leadership for support services. In other institutions, it is the collective and proactive effort among staff and executive leadership that launched their campus’ efforts to help MCS. For Andrew’s and Lynn’s CSU campus, their institutional advocacy for MCS began some 30 years ago with a Veteran-centric administrator. According to Lynn, “she just had a really big passion for Vets. ... everyone just kind of piggybacked on that and just started to also kind of do the same motions as her.” Because of that one person some 30 years ago, today, “directors, managers in other areas also are very passionate about helping servicemembers.”

Andrew points to another example illustrating their institution’s executive leadership’s commitment to helping MCS. According to Andrew, the executive leadership unilaterally provided them with additional space that had been renovated specifically with MCS in mind:

They already had the blue plans [print] and everything set, and we were not included in that. They came back, had a meeting between the big people and they decided that, ‘you

know what? We need to rearrange this blueprint so we could accommodate the Veterans.’ ...To me changes took a lot of money and it took a lot of approvals. So, that means that they were so passionate about Veterans that they went ahead and tackled those tasks in a short amount of time.

Robert, also from a CSU, had a similar experience. Like Andrew and Lynn, Robert’s institutional culture of advocacy for MCS began with a staff member. As years progressed, that staff was allowed to hire work-study employees, provided a larger space, then, “in 2015, we were approached by our leadership, ‘do you need more space?’ ... And we got the center that we are occupying today.”

A campus’ executive leadership can provide the initiative to help its MCS population. However, at times, the executive leadership becomes the barrier to the implementation of new ideas. Sometimes, the lack of progress results from holding on to old campus cultural norms that may no longer hold true. Raymond found that “there is a fear of change. Things they want to be done the same way. ... sometimes new ideas and entrepreneurship kind of scares those who are used to the old tradition.” Emily who comes from the private and nonprofit sector agrees. She states that in her institution, “things move a lot slower, there’s a lot more bureaucracy to deal with.”

At other times, the sentiment of the general student body creates an environment that Summerlot (2009) called “challenging climate.” Prior to any activity, Raymond states that his VRC has to consider the views of other student organizations because:

There are different student organizations on campus who see Veterans as agent of oppression because of what they represent. So, it’s kind of hard to create program when there are other groups that are not necessarily welcoming to the Veterans.

The difficulty of having a “challenging climate” (Summerlot, 2009) is not unique to Raymond’s institution. Arlene gave an example of a faculty member who refused to give a make-up exam to an MCS who was hospitalized due to a blood clot in his chest. The MCS left the hospital against doctor’s advice lest he failed the class. Arlene, seemingly frustrated and saddened, stated, “I always hear that ‘military is for people that don’t have brains. They have nothing better to do. So, they join the military.’”

VRC Staff

Many of the participants in this study who serve as VRC staff, supervisors, and managers had been servicemembers and MCS themselves or are related to someone who had been in the military and became MCS. Because of their familiarity with the military and experiences of being MCS as well as the challenges of transition and reintegration, they are in a unique position to both represent the MCS to executive leadership and the executive leadership to MCS. Anne sees her role as helping the executive leadership understand the needs of her MCS population. She states, “I think a lot of people in the administration want to provide assistance and help, but they may not know where they can help.”

While Lynn and Andrew advocates on behalf of the MCS to the executive leadership, they also motivate and encourage MCS to advocate for themselves. According to Lynn, “We always tell them, ““You have a right to voice your opinions. Follow the right channels.””

Towards MCS Retention and Persistence: Essential Support Services

There are many PEIs who are generous in their student support services and make their institutions as welcoming and conducive to MCS’ success as possible (Queen & Lewis, 2014). Robert equally represents an institution that is well supported by the executive leadership and the community. As a result, the institution can provide services and support to MCS beyond the

basics:

Financially we have great donors stewardship, so we have a number of community partners that have provided philanthropic support in the way of scholarships to be able to offset the need for GI Bill or who have made a significant contribution that we have been able to do something, because they want to give back to the community as well, the military community as well.

Robert credits the community's generosity to the location of the institution:

If we were in an area that does not have the same population density of military and Veterans like we do, it is going to be harder to justify, ... you do not have the visibility in the same light or familiarity.

However, many institutions face difficulty in providing services. An example is space for the VRC. Steve observed, "I know there have been a lot of campuses that over the years have struggled to get that Veteran Resource Center space that they need. ... In some places, you go to San Diego State and they've got the Taj Mahal of Veterans Centers and Cal State Fullerton as well."

Financial support is a larger challenge at CCCs (Boggs, 2004; Phelan, 2014; Webber, 2018). CCCs, unable to raise tuition without legislative approval (Boerner, 2012) must rely on governmental fiscal support and local property taxes (Boggs, 2004; Miller & Holt, 2005). Thus, CCCs in areas with high property value are better funded than those in lower socioeconomic communities (Miller & Holt, 2005). Even in times of economic expansion, some CCs fall short of funding compared to CCs in more affluent areas. According to Norma, she is often met with "oh, we can't do anything. We don't have the money.' They say that all the time." While she states that she would like to provide more services, "but getting funding and to do anything,

that's really hard. I mean, they say it, but if they don't have any money, then we can't do anything." During times of economic contraction when property taxes decrease, CCCs are placed under even greater pressure to cut costs (Boerner, 2012).

Given the limitations and challenges that many PEIs face, the third research question this study aimed to answer is, "what support services are essential to increase MCS persistence and retention?" The suggestions fell under three categories: 1) a Center or a space where MCS can feel at ease, 2) having a full-time person to manage the Center, 3) learn the needs of the MCS on campus and invite them to be part of the process.

MCS Center or VRC

All participants agreed that space for MCS is necessary. Those who had been servicemembers and later MCS or relative of servicemembers were more inclined to draw upon their own knowledge of military service and the resultant struggles with reintegration and transition as a source of their suggestions. For example, Lynn, who is a Veteran of the Air Force National Guard, remarked about the importance of a VRC:

The lack of not having an area where military-friendly or allies of Veterans were there, I did not have that. ... To me that was something that I'm glad we have now. At the time, as a student, I felt like I did not have a safe space to where I can go and air out my frustrations. That was a challenge for me personally.

Robert, A retired Marine, concurred:

One thing that is pretty common in the military is that sense of unity. There is no solo operators in the services. Everybody's working whether it is a 4-person fire team or 400-person company or 4,000-person brigade, whatever it is. You have a group that has to work together, that knows they have to work together. When they do not, it is a

dysfunctional unit and bad things happen. When you have the servicemember who comes to a college campus, we start getting told different things. You have to think independently, think outside the box, or critical thought, or you have to do this on your own. ... How do you succeed at that? You find people who have done it before or who are going through it at the same time and you form those bonds. Then you have that community.

For Norma, the VRC does not only serve as a centralized location where MCS walk in to ask for information or help with their educational benefits and then walk out. More importantly, it is a place where MCS find ways to connect and help each other. She narrated how her VRC's MCS helped a struggling MCS and what she gains from it:

I would say that the most important thing is to have an area for them to be able to all get together, like a Vet Center. ... Because they really help one another so much here. I mean, we had a homeless Vet here for a while and Vets were taking turn letting that person stay at their house so that that Vet had a place to stay. I mean, the Vets consider other Vets as part of their family. ... And then that's when you hear, that's kind of where I hear more of what they need and what the problems are. Just from being in the room right next to them and they're talking. Hearing the things and they go, "oh, you know what? I haven't been sleeping very good. I keep having these nightmares" or "I went here, and I found out something about," you know, they talk a lot among themselves. I get a lot from that, a lot from that. Because they'll talk to me, too. I think just the communication with them is where I get the best.

Christy who minimized MCS mental health issues stating that the mental health problem on her campus is "not one that's necessarily unique just for our military affiliated students" as

opposed to:

Maybe ten years ago, when we were first starting to see the increase in people using Post-9/11 benefits, but we didn't really have the resources in place. In a lot of places to deal, you know, with the rise in increase of PTSD, I think then it was probably much more of an "issue" on campus than it is today.

Christy attributed the decrease in mental health symptoms to having a VRC on campus: I'm sure you're aware, as soon as an individual seeks isolation, that's just going to start compounding. Just having a place where somebody can go and have the camaraderie kind of opens that door, lets the lid off the pot a little bit.

Indeed, Elliot (2015) found that MCS who received support from other Veterans and non-veterans showed decreased symptoms of PTSD, depression, as well as negative view of their college experience. Likewise, James (2013) found that social support minimized mental health symptoms while increasing MCS functionality.

While all agreed that having a Center is important, Robert warns about the Center becoming a place where MCS shelter themselves from the campus community and fail to reintegrate:

The biggest thing that we watch out for, this is something that I advocate all the time, for Veterans Resource Center or military resource center, whatever you want to call it, it cannot be a bubble. What we do not want to have is we do not want a Veteran to come onto campus, to come to the Resource Center and this is where they stay for the next three years because they do not want to interact with 18-year old college students. We want them to interact, we want them to be exposed to different thoughts. ... Start getting

exposed to that on the campus so that you do not become encapsulated just to that one identity. Because Veteran is just that, a single identity of many.

Full-time Person to Manage the Center

The second suggestion most frequently mentioned is having a full-time person manage the Center. According to Emily, “you need a full time professional hired to run the place ... because if you don’t have a person accountable for running the programs, how do you know that anyone’s ever going to get what they need?” For Regina, the person should be someone who can certify MCS’ educational benefits. “Because ... anytime that they certify a student that’s using the GI Bill, the school receives reporting fees for that student.”

Just as the suggestion about having a Center was influenced by the participants’ affiliation with the military, suggestions about the qualification of the person who should manage the Center is also influenced by the participants’ experience. Raymond, a Navy Veteran with multiple combat tours, stated that the person hired, “has to have firsthand experience of being a Veteran who knows their needs. Preferably Post-9/11.” Christy, a Marine Corp Veteran, feels having served in the military is not as important as having the passion to help the MCS population:

I think that people who have affiliation with the military, that just comes a little bit more naturally. But there are, I mean, I also work with wonderful individuals who have no military affiliation at all. They’re just very passionate about serving our Veteran community.

Involving the MCS Population in Starting Support Services

The third suggestion is for institutions to involve their MCS population. Getting to know the military experience and the struggles that MCS face is an important first step for Steve, “you

cannot just say, ‘oh, we have great classes and we have a great academic reputation. We want Veterans here.’” He argues that as much as efforts have been made to understand other underserved student populations, PEIs would have greater impact if they “learn about this [MCS] one, too.” While others advocate for engaging the current MCS population on campus. For Arlene, the voice of MCS is a vital part of “establish[ing] a structure within their campus.”

Robert declined to offer a more definitive response to the support services that PEIs must have. He argued that:

No one model is going to fit every mold. It just is not going to happen. There is no one size fits all mechanism that is going to work across the board. Everybody’s going to look at what do your Vets want, not what your Vets need, what do they want? ... What can you provide? All of these different factors come into play. So, you really have to analyze it from the perspective of the individual institution instead of trying to figure out what is going to work across the country or around the world.

Robert’s sentiment echoes that of O’Herrin (2011). While having a clear guideline to follow would ease decision-making, O’Herrin (2011) posits that given MCS’ diverse background, individual PEIs would be able to better serve their MCS population by gauging their MCS population’s specific needs while acknowledging their institution’s limitations.

Implication for Policy and Practice

While many PEIs are proactively engaged in adopting policies to help MCS transition from the military to the academic setting, many PEIs are hindered by limited resources both in space and financially. Twelve years have passed since Chancellor Reed’s challenge. While some PEIs, especially the CSUs, are providing services that are generous, the picture still is not “pretty” for some PEIs in this study. For example, two of the participants were hired to manage

their VRC in the last two years on a full-time basis. One of whom was hired within a few months prior to the interview. Both VRCs did not have a full-time person to manage the office and help MCS before the two participants took on their role.

As each institution attempts to support their growing population of MCS, the interviews revealed successes and challenges as well as aspirations and frustrations. Different institutions have different resources. Some institutions have active MCS along with receptive VRC and administrative staff while others are left confused with the lack of participation from the MCS population and feeling unsupported by the executive leadership.

On the surface, the semi-structured interviews revealed three suggestions: 1) creating a campus climate welcoming to MCS, 2) encouraging the creation of and providing support to MCS organization, and 3) providing space for MCS. Numerous studies concur that these initiatives would contribute to the retention, persistence, and academic success of MCS without further burdening an already constrained system. Specifically:

1. The first suggestion is for the creation of a campus climate welcoming to MCS by providing orientation or training to faculty, staff, and administrative personnel relating to the military history and culture, servicemembers, and the military experience. Because less than one percent of the American population at any given point in time serve in the U.S. military (Parker et al., 2017) and about eight percent of the population had served in the military (Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, 2020), there is a disconnect between civilians and the military. Familiarizing faculty, staff, and administrative staff by providing training or orientation about the military culture would minimize what Summerlot (2019) called “ambivalent climate” or “challenging climate.”

2. The second suggestion is for PEIs to encourage the formation of and providing

support to MCS student organization. There are two main benefits for having an active MCS organization:

a. By encouraging the formation of and supporting MCS organization on campus, PEIs would provide the means for MCS to help each other overcome their challenges.

b. Having an MCS organization would open the lines of communication between the MCS population and the PEI.

3. The third suggestion is for PEIs to provide a space for MCS staffed by individuals knowledgeable not only of MCS educational benefits, but other resources that include community resources as well as VA resources regarding disability, medical, and mental health services.

A deeper analysis of the interviews, however, revealed discrepancies in the challenges and opportunities institutions faced. As was expected based upon the literature review, CCCs face greater difficulty relating to funding compared to the CSUs. Moreover, both CCCs and CSUs that are closer to military installations and have higher population of Veterans in the community tend to have greater community support. At a CSU near a military installation, Robert states, “financially we have great donors stewardship, so we have a number of community partners that have provided philanthropic support in the way of scholarships” while at a CCC that is 125 miles away from the nearest major military installation, Norma states, ““oh, we can’t do anything. We don’t have the money.’ They say that all the time.”

The three CSUs revealed having campus partnerships or committees that brings to the table members of the faculty, staff, administrators, MCS, and MCS alumni. Each member of the committee advocates for MCS in their sector of the campus. Together, they are able to raise awareness of MCS-related issues through programs similar to the VET NET Ally developed at

CSU Long Beach, Military Ally developed at San Diego State, and Joining Forces developed at CSU Northridge. These educational trainings inform faculty and staff of the challenges that MCS face and how to support them. Beyond the campus, these committee members take their voice to the outside community and seek support on behalf of their MCS. Moreover, as a result of the CSU participants' campuses' ability to create a welcoming environment to MCS along with a multitude of support services that address numerous MCS's concerns including dedicated admissions and records and community-funded scholarships, MCS are more active on these campuses.

The needs of MCS differ from one geographical location to another and different branches of the military have different training and experience. For example, areas outside of Army bases would have communities predominantly composed of Army Veterans and retirees many of whom would have deployed to areas considered hazardous. Likewise, an area close to an Air Force installation would have a community predominated by Air Force personnel many of whom would not have been at the frontlines of conflict. To truly understand their MCS constituents, PEIs should institute formal assessments. These formal assessments can be made in the beginning of the Fall semester to gauge their MCS' needs and expectations. Another formal assessment should be conducted prior to the end of the school year to gauge whether the MCS felt that their needs or expectations were met. The result of the assessment should help guide the formation of additional services. Consideration of additional services or changes to existing services should be made with input from the campus community by forming an MCS-focused committee.

More than one of the CC participants reported disconnect and resistance from administrators and other faculty. Using the CSU as a model, CCs who are not doing so now

should strive to develop partnerships with the different segment of the campus by forming committees that invite representatives from different departments who can serve as advocates. The committee members should represent different areas of the campus, e.g., staff from admissions and records, finance, faculty members from such department as sociology or psychology, public relations, a representative from the MCS organization, VRC, and perhaps giving a seat at the table for community-based partners as well.

At times committees tend to fill positions for the sake of having bodies. This approach may not be sustainable in the long term given that the dedication and commitment of members may be questionable. Thus, not only should committee members come from different segments of the campus, but the committee should also be comprised of individuals who have genuine interest in MCS' academic success. These individuals may be Veterans themselves, family or close friend of someone who had served/currently serving, individuals on campus who had conducted research on the military, or those who are passionate about MCS. However, to engage and elicit greater participation by MCS, the MCS should be represented at the table as well.

Once the committee is formed, it can begin to work on increasing awareness of military culture, the obstacles faced by MCS, and how faculty and staff can support this vulnerable student population. If it is not now available, training such as VET NET Ally should be offered to all faculty and staff as part of career development. The training should be given by a person who is a staff or faculty member who is a Veteran and can answer questions based upon personal experience. While many campuses already provide VET NET Ally training, many offer them as an option. In an academic setting that is heavily reliant on adjuncts, the training should be mandated as part of incoming orientation for all faculty and staff regardless of classification. Doing so would plant the seeds for the next generation of faculty and staff.

While some CCC participants stated they engage the community to find volunteers including mental health professionals to help their MCS population, a concerted outreach should be made by CCs to build relationships with institutions in their community. Such relationships can be a source of sponsorship for MCS-related activities including scholarships. Additionally, because one of the oft cited challenges faced by MCS as they attend school relate to financial difficulties, relationships with the outside institutions can also be used as a means to connect MCS with employment opportunities in the surrounding community.

Lastly, the VRC is the face of the PEI to the MCS. It is the place where MCS run to for information and support not only from the staff, but from their fellow MCS. Some participants to this study suggested that the supervising staff of the VRC would have to be someone who is a Veteran. By being a Veteran, the supervising staff would have personal knowledge of the military culture, language, and form of communication that would engage and direct MCS in a way that MCS would respond. However, a Veteran candidate for the position may not always be available. Where a Veteran is not available, the person who supervises the VRC should be someone who is passionate about the population. Assuming that the new VRC supervisor with no military experience had attended a formal training such as VET NET Ally, the MCS would be the first line of individuals with whom the supervisor can engage to learn more about the specific MCS population on their campus along with the strengths and weaknesses that they bring. Additionally, the new supervisor should consult with other VRCs in the surrounding PEIs as well as resources from the VA.

Recommendations for Future Research

The scope of this study was limited to the processes involved in the formulation of support services to MCS. Because of its nature, this study raised additional questions for future

research. Among them are:

1. This research was conducted in Southern California and drew participants from Southern California CCs and CSUs with large populations of MCS. Its aim was to compare and contrast the processes between the PEIs relating to the formation of support services for MCS. However, even with the geographic location narrowed to Southern California, different PEIs (CCC versus CSU) have different challenges and opportunities. Additionally, the same type of PEI in two different locations have MCS population with differing needs as well as differing resources available in the community. Thus, future research should narrow the focus on one or small number of similar PEIs to understand in greater detail the challenges and opportunities faced by these institutions.

2. Some of the participants in this study raised as barrier the inadequacy of funding sufficient to provide basic support services for MCS. To help PEIs who are financially limited, future research should study how PEIs who are successful at engaging their external community partners initiated and maintain community support. Additionally, given different and conflicting priorities, such study should analyze the process that guide how external funding is allocated.

3. Campuses now offer faculty and staff training to familiarize them with MCS' military experience, how the military experience affects their academic performance, and how faculty and staff can support their academic success. Future research should study how faculty and staff react to such training and the level of the trainings' efficacy.

4. This study predominantly focused on the experiences of VRC staff regarding the formation and implementation of support services for MCS. However, research such as Evans et al. (2015) posits that many of the support services are untested or in need of modification. Future research should engage student-Veterans to determine the efficacy of each available

support services and how each support services affect their ability to reintegrate into the campus community, transition into the civilian setting, and persevere in their academic goals.

5. Lastly, this study focused on the experiences of public PEIs. Purposive sampling and grounded theory's theoretical sampling further limited the participants to staff members in charge of the VRC. Future research should study the processes that occur in private institutions as well as the challenges and opportunities faced by those in the position of executive leadership.

Concluding Statement

Sir Alfred J. Tennyson summed up the military personality when he wrote in his poem *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (The charge of the light brigade, n.d.), "theirs not to make reply, theirs not to reason why, theirs but to do and die." The American military is a cohesive unit whose effectiveness and efficiency is based on the individual member's willingness to forego his/her individual fear, needs, wants, and desires for the sake of the whole and the mission. However, the characteristics that serve to make a good soldier, sailor, Marine, Coast Guardsman, or airman at best do not apply in the civilian setting or in academic environments (Naphan & Elliot, 2015; Summerlot et al., 2009).

Transitioning from the military to the civilian sector is a difficult process that most will never complete. Veterans will never be the civilians they were before they entered the military, but Veterans can learn to adjust and adapt. The military gave Veterans an identity and a sense of purpose. Once Veterans shed their uniform, they enter the civilian environment needing to redefine themselves, to create new identities, and seeking new purpose. Because of Community Colleges' open access, Community Colleges serve as the gateway for most Veterans reintegrating back into their communities. To that end, Community Colleges are in a special position to help Veterans reintegrate back into the community, overcome the barriers they face in

higher education, while harnessing their skills and talent to transform them into successful students and community leaders.

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Appendix A

October 11, 2018

The Committee for Protection of Human Subjects has approved the research referenced below. Please retain and use the IRB number on any correspondence related to the project.

Approval Date: 10/11/18
Expiration Date: 10/10/19
IRB Number: 1718-217
Project Title: Grounded Theory Analysis of the Development of Support Services for Military Service-Connected Students in Postsecondary Education Institutions
Principal Investigator: Franco Santos; Mark Stevens
Department: Education

Please retain this letter and information for your records. Please be aware that you must immediately report any change in research activity or amendments to any protocol associated with this study. You must also report any adverse events or unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others. Please submit these reports to the Research and Sponsored Programs office at mail code 8222 or irb@csun.edu.

Enclosed you will find your Protocol Approval Form and approved Informed Consent Form. Consent forms given to subjects participating in the research must bear the approval stamp of the IRB. If you require changes to the consent form, please contact the Research and Sponsored Programs office. Please note that even though subject enrollment or involvement may be complete, if you are analyzing data with identifiable information, or the link to identifiable information still exists, *you must renew your protocol*. In order to receive approval by the expiration date, please submit your renewal request at least 30 days prior to the expiration.

Important note: Please be aware that this approval means that you have met the requirements of federal regulations and CSUN policies governing human subjects research. Approval from other entities may also be needed. For example, access to data from private records (e.g. student, medical, or employment records, etc.) that are protected by FERPA, HIPAA, or other confidentiality policies requires permission from the holders of those records.

If Applicable: Some listservs and websites have policies regulating the types of advertisements or solicitations that can be posted, including from whom prior approval must be obtained before posting a recruitment notice for research. Similarly, most agencies, organizations, institutions, and even classroom instructors, have policies regarding who can solicit potential research participants from their students, employees, etc., what information must be included in solicitations, and how recruitment notices are distributed or posted. You should familiarize yourself with the external policies and approval procedures required of you to conduct your study. CSUN IRB approval or exemption does *not* substitute for these approvals or release you from the responsibility to insure that you have gained appropriate approvals *before* advertising your study or conducting your research. If you have any questions, please call the Research and Sponsored Programs office at (818) 677-2901 or email irb@csun.edu.

Sincerely,



Sheree M. Schrager, PhD, MS
Managing Director, Research & Sponsored Programs/Institutional Official
On behalf of the Committee for Protection of Human Subjects

Review Type:	Expedited	IRB Registration:	IRB00001788
Funding:	N/A	Assurance Number:	FWA00001335

Appendix C
Form Participant Recruitment E-mail

Dear _____,

My name is Franco E. Santos. I am a US Army Veteran and a doctoral student at California State University, Northridge. I write to you to request your participation in a research relating to services provided to military-connected students. The research is for my doctoral dissertation. The research will involve an interview at a time convenient to you and will take approximately 30-60 minutes. The interview will be conducted telephonically and will be audio recorded, but your participation will remain entirely confidential (neither your name nor the name of your institution will be identified).

Purpose of research: because there is no general definition for what makes an institution “military friendly,” I am interested in learning about how [institution name] decides what support services to provide military-connected students. I am also interested in learning about the interaction and perspectives of VRC/administrators, the lead faculty/staff advocate, and military-connected student leader in creating/implementing such support services. With your participation, it is hoped that the result of the dissertation will help guide other colleges/universities with less established services for military-connected students.

The IRB approval along with the Adult Consent Form are attached for your record and perusal.

Would you please let me know if you would be amenable to participating in this research?

In advance, thank you for considering this request. I would truly appreciate your participation in this research,

Franco E. Santos, MA
Doctoral Candidate, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
California State University, Northridge

Appendix D

California State University, Northridge CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

Grounded Theory Analysis of the Development of Support Services for Military Service- Connected Students in Postsecondary Educational Institutions

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Grounded Theory Analysis of the Development of Support Services for Military Service-Connected Students in Postsecondary Educational Institutions, a study conducted by Franco E. Santos as part of the requirements for the Ed.D degree in Educational Leadership Policy Studies. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything that you do not understand before deciding if you want to participate. A researcher listed below will be available to answer your questions.

RESEARCH TEAM

Researcher:

Franco E. Santos
Department of Education
18111 Nordhoff St.
Northridge, CA 91330-8265



Faculty Advisor:

Mark A. Stevens, Ph.D
Department of Educational Psychology & Counseling
18111 Nordhoff St.
Northridge, CA 91330-8265



PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this research study is to explore the experiences of administrators of support services for military service-connected students (hereinafter MSCS), staff/faculty advocates, and MSCS leader that influence the development of support services for MSCS. Additionally, this study aims to understand how assessments are designed and how these assessments guide the improvements of MSCS support services.

SUBJECTS

Inclusion Requirements

You are eligible to participate in this study if you are at least 18 years of age or older and serve as administrator of support services for military service-connected students (MSCS), a staff/faculty advocate, or military service-connected student leader.

CSU, Northridge
Human Subjects Committee
Approved: 10/11/18
Void After: 10/10/19 SMS

Time Commitment

This study will involve approximately 60 minutes.

PROCEDURES

The following procedures will occur: audio recorded interview.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

The possible risks and/or discomforts associated with the procedures described in this study include: mild emotional discomfort and boredom. This study involves no more than minimal risk. There are no known harms or discomforts associated with this study beyond those encountered in normal daily life.

BENEFITS**Subject Benefits**

You may not directly benefit from participation in this study.

Benefits to Others or Society

This dissertation explores how support services for military service-connected students in a sample of Southern California 2-year community colleges and 4-year state colleges are developed. This study will help other postsecondary institutions develop procedures in formulating their own support services for military service-connected students.

ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION

The only alternative to participation in this study is not to participate.

COMPENSATION, COSTS AND REIMBURSEMENT**Compensation for Participation**

You will not be paid for your participation in this research study.

CONFIDENTIALITY**Subject Identifiable Data**

Aside for position or role held and audio recordings, no identifiable information will be collected about you.

Data Storage

All research data will be stored electronically on a secure computer with password protection. The audio recordings and typed transcripts will be kept in password-protected computer files. Any paper versions of the interview data will be kept in a locked safe. The recordings will be typed by a professional typist. Each participant will be accorded a code number, and no data will be saved in the same location as personal identifiers. A master list of code numbers and names will be kept in a locked location. All data collected will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study.

Data Access

The researcher and faculty advisor named on the first page of this form will have access to your study records. Any information derived from this research project that personally identifies you will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without your separate consent, except as specifically required by law. Publications and/or presentations that result from this study will not include identifiable information about you.

Data Retention

All data collected will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study.

Mandated Reporting

Under California law, the researcher is required to report known or reasonably suspected incidents of abuse or neglect of a child, dependent adult or elder, including, but not limited to, physical, sexual, emotional, and financial abuse or neglect. If the researcher has or is given such information, he may be required to report it to the authorities.

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS

If you have any comments, concerns, or questions regarding the conduct of this research please contact the research team listed on the first page of this form.

If you have concerns or complaints about the research study, research team, or questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research and Sponsored Programs office, 18111 Nordhoff Street, California State University, Northridge, Northridge, CA 91330-8232, by phone at (818) 677-2901 or email at irb@csun.edu.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION STATEMENT

You should not sign this form unless you have read it and been given a copy of it to keep.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to answer any question or discontinue your involvement at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. Your decision will not affect your relationship with California State University, Northridge. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this consent form and have had a chance to ask any questions that you have about the study.

I agree to participate in the study.

I agree to be audio recorded

I do not wish to be audio recorded

Participant Signature

Date

Printed Name of Participant

Researcher Signature

Date

Printed Name of Researcher

California State University, Northridge
CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

Grounded Theory Analysis of the Development of Support Services for Military Service-
Connected Students in Postsecondary Educational Institutions

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Grounded Theory Analysis of the Development of Support Services for Military Service-Connected Students in Postsecondary Educational Institutions, a study conducted by Franco E. Santos as part of the requirements for the Ed.D degree in Educational Leadership Policy Studies. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything that you do not understand before deciding if you want to participate. A researcher listed below will be available to answer your questions.

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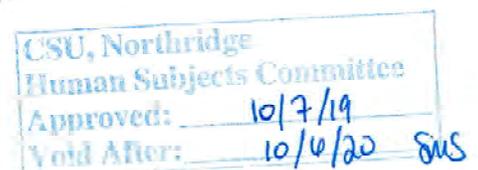
PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this research study is to explore the experiences of administrators of support services for military service-connected students (hereinafter MSCS), staff/faculty advocates, and MSCS leader that influence the development of support services for MSCS. Additionally, this study aims to understand how assessments are designed and how these assessments guide the improvements of MSCS support services.

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BENEFITS**Subject Benefits**

You may not directly benefit from participation in this study.

Benefits to Others or Society

This dissertation explores how support services for military service-connected students in a sample of Southern California 2-year community colleges and 4-year state colleges are developed. This study will help other postsecondary institutions develop procedures in formulating their own support services for military service-connected students.

ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION

The only alternative to participation in this study is not to participate.

COMPENSATION, COSTS AND REIMBURSEMENT**Compensation for Participation**

You will not be paid for your participation in this research study.

CONFIDENTIALITY**Subject Identifiable Data**

Aside for position or role held and audio recordings, no identifiable information will be collected about you.

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All research data will be stored electronically on a secure computer with password protection. The audio recordings and typed transcripts will be kept in password-protected computer files. Any paper versions of the interview data will be kept in a locked safe. The recordings will be typed by a professional typist. Each participant will be accorded a code number, and no data will be saved in the same location as personal identifiers. A master list of code numbers and names will be kept in a locked location. All data collected will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study.

Data Access

The researcher and faculty advisor named on the first page of this form will have access to your study records. Any information derived from this research project that personally identifies you will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without your separate consent, except as specifically required by law. Publications and/or presentations that result from this study will not include identifiable information about you.

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Under California law, the researchers are required to report known or reasonably suspected incidents of abuse or neglect of a child, dependent adult or elder, including, but not limited to, physical, sexual, emotional, and financial abuse or neglect. If any researcher has or is given such information in the course of conducting this study, they may be required to report it to the authorities.

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS

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VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION STATEMENT

You should not sign this form unless you have read it and been given a copy of it to keep. **Participation in this study is voluntary.** You may refuse to answer any question or discontinue your involvement at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. Your decision will not affect your relationship with California State University, Northridge. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this consent form and have had a chance to ask any questions that you have about the study.

I agree to participate in the study.

- I agree to be audio recorded
- I do not wish to be audio recorded

Participant Signature

Date

Printed Name of Participant



Researcher Signature

October 15, 2019

Date

Franco E. Santos

Printed Name of Researcher

Appendix E
Prewritten Open-ended Questionnaire

College students with U.S. military background bring with them skills, discipline, focus and a different level of maturity. However, transitioning from military camps to college campuses requires adjustment. This survey is being conducted as part of a doctoral dissertation. Its purpose is to help understand the process that guide the formation and implementation of MCS support services. This study also delves into the process of how assessments are created or conducted and how such assessments are used to guide the adjustments to MCS support services.

Your participation in this study is requested. This survey is being recorded for purposes of accuracy. However, except for general, generic information, your participation in this study is completely anonymous.

Line of inquiry of topics and prompts:

Introductory questions

Would you please tell me the responsibilities of your position?

How long have you been at this position?

Personal affiliation with the military?

If affiliated, how does your affiliation help/hinder you in fulfilling your responsibilities?

Research Question 1: factors that influence development of support services

What is the population of MCS at your institution?

From your perspective, what are the challenges that MCS bring that necessitate providing student services?

How does the institution address those challenges?

What services do you feel the Student-Veterans need, but the institution does not have enough of or currently does not provide?

What are the challenges you face in providing those services? (Financial, buy-in from the student-Veterans, stakeholder?)

Student-Veteran engagement in the formulation of support services for MCS

How do you engage the Student-Veterans in shaping support services? (How are the student-Veterans involved in shaping services?)

Use of assessments to improve student services

Does the institution conduct assessments to gauge the effectiveness of services provided?

What factors influence the design of assessments?

How are assessments used to provide MCS support services?

Research Question 2: Closing Question

Based upon your experience, what would you suggest to small colleges contemplating providing or expanding their student-Veteran services?