

## Staff Members' Perceptions of Student-Veterans' Transition at a Public Two-Year and Four-Year Institution

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**Abstract:** *The purpose of this descriptive study was to explore staff members' perceptions of student-veterans college experiences at a 2-year and a 4-year institution. This study was guided by Schlossberg's Theory of Adult Transitions. Purposive sampling was used to identify 640 participants for the study. Respondents indicated that their campus should add more support services for student- veterans. Staff members rank the following as major problems that the Department of Veterans should be responsible for when helping student-veterans with selected problems: military- related physical injuries, PTSD, and talking about their military experiences. A majority of the respondents reported that they would be willing to participate in a seminar about student-veterans and military culture.*

**Keywords:** *student-veterans, staff members, two-year institution, four-year institution, transition*

Due to the authorization of the Montgomery GI Bill in 2008, it is estimated that more than two million veterans serving the wars of Iraq and Afghanistan will be eligible to pursue post-secondary education (Barry, Whiteman, & MacDermid Wadsworth, 2014; Vance & Miller, 2009). According to Persky and Oliver (2011) "the legislation requires development of policies and institutional practices that are informed by research" (p.112). Several researchers have argued that with the influx of returning student-veterans to U.S. colleges and universities, there is a gap in the understanding of their needs by higher education professionals (Barnard-Brak, Bagby, Jones, & Sulak, 2011; Elliott, Gonzalez, & Larsen, 2011; Livingston, Havice, Cawthon, & Fleming, 2011).

In our study, a student-veteran was defined as "any student who is a current or former member of the active duty military, the National Guard, or Reserves regardless of deployment status, combat experience, legal veteran status, or GI Bill use" (Vaccaro, 2015, p.347). Vaccaro (2015) emphasized that it is central that higher education professionals are thoroughly prepared to handle the transitions of student-veterans.

Schlossberg's Theory of Adult Transitions (1984) provided the theoretical basis for this study. Schlossberg outlined the transition process in following three phases: (1) moving in, (2) moving through, and (3) moving out. In moving in, people should familiarize themselves with the rules, norms, and expectations of the new environment or system. During the stage of moving through, individuals must learn how to balance the demands of their daily activities as they progress through the transition of the new environment or system. Moving out occurs when the transition cycle has ended and the individual is thinking about what comes next (i.e., academic

preparation). A transition is defined as “any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions and roles” (Schlossberg, Waters & Goodman, 1995, p.27). Schlossberg’s (1984) theory consists of four types of transitions: (1) anticipated, (2) unanticipated, (3) chronic, and (4) non-event. Chronic transitions “can erode self-confidence and lead to an inability to initiate necessary changes” (Schlossberg, 1984, p.46).

Griffin and Gilbert (2015) built upon earlier work of Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg (2012) by denoting four categories of resources known as “the 4S’s” of coping resources: (1) situation, (2) self, (3) support, and (4) strategies. Situation coping resources are an individual’s ability to assess what has happened. A person’s coping resources will vary based on what triggered the transition. Factors important to self, are the personal and demographic characteristics of a person, as well as psychological resources. Support includes those who are there to help (i.e., family, friends, and institutions). Strategies coping resources are useful in providing methods of coping with selected transitions. Goodman et al. (2012) emphasized that individuals cope best when they remain flexible and use multiple strategies. No published studies were found which specifically explored staff members’ perceptions of student-veterans’ transition. In our study, we defined staff members as professional personnel who provided administrative support to student-veterans in the following areas: academic (i.e., tutoring in all subjects), student services (i.e., financial aid and scholarship), and veterans’ resources (i.e., employment assistance). The purpose of this study was to explore staff members’ perceptions of student-veterans college experiences. Five research questions guided the study:

1. What are staff members’ perceptions of student-veterans’ campus environment?
2. What proportion of staff members is aware of selected veteran services available for student-veterans?
3. What are staff members’ perceptions of who should be responsible for helping student - veterans with various problems they may have?
4. What are staff members’ attitudes toward the U.S. military, recent wars, and the U.S. troops?
5. To what degree are staff members willing to attend selected training courses designed to assist them in understanding the military culture and student-veterans?

### **Review of Related Literature**

Factors that led to the relationship between post-secondary education and the military

The evolution of the relationship between higher education and the military started with the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 (Rumann & Hamick, 2010). Abrams (1989) reported that the Morrill Act mandated military training as a component of the curriculum at Act-financed institutions. A part of this education included the creation of the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) in 1916, which has produced a large share of military officers (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010).

In June 1944, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed into law the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944 (Public Law 78-346), known as the GI Bill of Rights. The purpose of this act was to assist World War II veterans in readjustment to civilian life. Few requirements were placed on veterans; they simply were to select the kind of training and/or education they wanted, apply for admission to a recognized training program, and maintain the academic standards necessary to continue in the program. In addition to the direct participants in vocational education, a large number of veterans in college majored in vocational teacher education and taught in vocational programs. Veterans were allowed time for participation in

accordance with the time they had been in service. Subsequent legislation guaranteed these benefits to veterans of the Korean and Vietnam wars (Gordon, 2014).

Congress established the Post-9/11 GI Bill on June 30, 2008, as part of the 2008 Supplemental Appropriation Act (Public Law 110-252). The Post 9/11 GI Bill took effect on August 1, 2009. Veterans who pursued college-level training at the associate degree level, or higher, received tuition and fees paid directly to the institution (not to exceed the cost of the most expensive in-state public institution of higher education). A monthly living/housing allowance was included, equal to the local rate of the basic allowance for housing a married, military E-5 (junior noncommissioned officer). Other provisions included a yearly \$1,000 stipend for books and supplies and a one-time payment of \$500 if the veteran relocated from a rural area. The legislation allowed the veterans fifteen years to use thirty-six months (four academic years) of entitlement. Reduction in basic pay was not required for participation in the Post-9/11 program. Currently, service members serving after August 1, 2009, and who agreed to serve for specified additional periods, may be able to transfer benefits to a spouse or dependent child (Gordon, 2014).

### **Psychological stressors**

Alder and Dolan (2006) discuss the stressors of isolation, ambiguity, powerlessness, boredom, and danger in the deployment environment. These stressors have been shown to effect individuals as they return to civilian life. In a qualitative study performed by Rumann and Hamrick (2010), student-veterans discussed being uncomfortable in large, loud football crowds; and uneasy with people walking closely behind them. Ackerman, DiRamin and Garza Mitchell (2009) reported similar themes of anger, stress, and carryover from combat; being on constant alert; being afraid; and the dislike of large crowds.

The realities of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) are not new to veterans. This disorder was previously referred to as 'shell shock' or 'combat fatigue' (DiRamino & Spires, 2009). Findings from a quantitative study by Elliott, et al. (2011) revealed that U.S. institutions of higher education are experiencing an influx of student-veterans who have been under chronic stress, have suffered injuries, and currently exhibit symptoms of PTSD.

### **Support services**

The need for support services for student-veterans is required as the two million service men and women return to civilian and campus life. Sixty-five percent of colleges and universities that provide veteran and military service have increased their emphasis with these services since September 11, 2001 (American Council on Education, 2009).

Returning student-veterans have the need for services regarding academic reentry, contractual or financial matters, advising and counseling, reinstatement of insurance coverage, and adjustments to financial aid packages (Bauman, 2009). Ackerman et al. (2009) recommended that colleges should develop student-centered activation and deployment policies that manage campus bureaucracy. In addition, the campus should maintain connection with their deployed students.

According to Herrmann, Raybeck, Wilson, Allen, and Hopkins (2008), military training and experience should be awarded the appropriate equivalent college credits. Herrmann et al. (2008) indicated that orientation programs generally deal with concerns of traditional students and recommended that a separate orientation program be presented for student-veterans to assist in their transition.

Vance and Miller (2009) reported a list of top priorities as related to support for student-veterans. These priorities focused on the need for effective referrals, connections to other student-veterans, ensuring smooth transitions and coordination services. The appointment of a Veteran

Services Officer, or department, trained in the specific needs of veterans to coordinate services (Burnett & Segoria, 2009) has also been found to be helpful. Additionally, the need to reduce red tape (Vance & Miller, 2009), and provide faculty and staff awareness training (Burnett & Segoria, 2009; Vance & Miller, 2009) were also mentioned.

The social stigma of mental disorders continues to be problematic for all veterans including student-veterans. Nash, Siva, and Litz (2009) stated that:

Military service members avoid seeking care for mental health problems because they are afraid they will be branded as weak or lose the respect and trust of their peers and leaders. Additionally, mental health stigma causes individuals suffering from mental health disorders to lose respect for themselves, whether or not they receive treatment. Shame arising from stigma worsens depressive symptoms and social alienation and increases rates of treatment non-compliance... (p. 789)

While 88% of military members agree that mental illness can be treated, and 90% agree that treatment can help people gain control of their lives, the Veteran Affairs health system found that the stigma-related barriers are a major contributing factor to the lack of service utilization (Dickstein, Vogt, Handa, & Litz, 2010).

### **Physical disabilities**

With the assumption that many student-veterans will be returning with disabilities, Branker (2009) suggests the following to assist in reintegration to campus: engagement efforts; mentoring; peer support; leadership experiences; network opportunities; academic advising; and disability services/accommodations. Since students with disabilities must self-report disabilities to the appropriate campus service, Nash et al. (2009) and Madaus, Miller, and Vance, (2009), discuss changing from a medical model of disability, to a normalization or social model respectively. The normalization model encourages the concept that PTSD is a normal reaction to an abnormal event (Nash et al., 2009). The social model seeks to reasonably serve Americans with disabilities based on what would be most effective for their purposes (Madaus, et al., 2009). Because student-veterans are not the only students with disabilities, such changes are more likely to benefit all students with disabilities. Also, moving from the medical model approach may reduce the stigma associated with needing accommodations (Nash et al., 2009; Madus, Miller, & Vance, 2009).

### **Cultural differences and the sensitivity of the campus community**

According to Burnett and Segoria (2009), military culture is steeped in the traditions and practices of aggressive masculinity. Military culture also promotes the reliance on one another for safety. This causes student-veterans to feel more comfortable with each other on campus and to seek each other out for assistance (Burnett & Segoria, 2009).

Attitudes of other students and faculty are one of the greatest barriers to student-veterans becoming a part of the campus community (Burnett & Segoria, 2009). One of the more common complaints from student- veterans is the stereotyping of veterans through questions such as whether they had killed anyone (Ackerman et al., 2009). Student-veterans also noted a perceived hostile classroom environment created by instructors. Examples included a professor calling American soldiers terrorists (Ackerman et al., 2009), inappropriate disclosure requests of student-veterans in class and regarding student- veterans as spoke persons for all veterans (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009); and open criticism of military service and the government (Hermann et al., 2008; Summerlot, Green, & Parker, 2009).

Student-veterans may feel marginalized and inadequate (Bauman, 2009) in the culture of a university campus. As students are often much older than their new peer group, they find that

their perspectives and priorities are different from their classmates. Student-veterans are more likely to be more mature and have an increased commitment to their academic goals as compared to other students (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010).

### Method

The study was conducted using descriptive survey research procedures. This type of research is grounded in the need to “describe and interpret what is.” (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006). Descriptive survey’s advantages are that it can provide a plethora of information from a wide variety of individuals. These data can then be utilized to produce information about various aspects of education (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007), which in turn, leads to the improvement of education and educational delivery systems.

The target population for this study consisted of professional staff members employed at a large (20,000+ students), public, four-year institution and a large (19,000+) public, two-year institution located in the Western United States in the same community. A sampling frame consisting of all professional staff members employed during the fiscal year of 2014 was obtained from the division of human resources at both institutions. Purposive sampling was used to identify a combined total of 640 participants for this study. In purposive sampling, the researcher generally specifies the characteristics of the population of interest (Vogt & Johnson, 2016). Vogt and Johnson (2016) suggested that “identifying certain kinds of subjects of interest is an improvement over convenience sampling” (p.350).

The survey instrument utilized for this descriptive study was adapted from a previous study conducted by Gonzalez and Elliott (2012). Modifications were made to specific sections of the survey in order to accommodate the research focus of this particular study. Additional input was provided by professional staff and academic faculty members from both institutions. This input along with concepts and information taken from the review of literature was used to design the final draft. The validity of the instrument was established through a panel of experts in academics, student services, and veteran resources. The survey instrument was field tested with nine professional staff members and academic faculty who were not part of the survey population. Based on their recommendations, some questions were re-written and or re-designed for clarity.

The instrument was tested for reliability using Cronbach’s alpha procedures. Cronbach’s alpha value was  $\alpha = 0.84$  for the 31 Likert-type scale items, thus the instrument was deemed reliable (Gatignon, 2014). Kuder-Richardson 20 (KR-20) was used to measure the internal consistency of the 10 dichotomous (“yes/no”) items of the instrument. The KR-20 reliability coefficient was calculated to be 0.75. This was considered acceptable according to Tuckman (1985).

The data collection phase of this research was conducted during summer and fall of 2014. After having all procedures approved by the appropriate Institutional Review Board (IRB), data were collected using the web-based survey assessment platform, Qualtrics. Subjects from each institution received an initial post card invitation to participate in the study. By replying to the initial invitation, respondents were indicating their interest in participating. These individuals were subsequently sent a secure link to the web-based survey. After entering the web-based survey, participants first completed the informed consent procedures and then responded to a battery of questions lasting approximately 10 to 15 minutes. Elements of the Tailored Design Method (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2009) were utilized to achieve an optimal return rate with four follow-ups. Although 309 surveys were started by the participants, only 198 surveys were

completed, resulting in a response rate of 30.93% (198/640). The researchers recognize the need to have a higher response rate to be able to generalize the findings to the study's population. Thus, early and late respondents were compared to determine if they differed significantly on selected variables under study, and no differences were observed (Linder, Murphy, & Briers, 2001). According to the literature, the average response rates for web-based surveys are approximately 30% (Sue & Ritter, 2012).

Data were processed through preprogrammed range and logic checks, and exported into IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows (Version 22.0) database for further cleaning and analyses. Statistical analysis procedures for this study consisted of descriptive measures such as frequencies, means, and standard deviations.

## Results

### Sample Population

The average age of staff members at the two-year institution was 49, ages ranged from 25 to 64. The majority of the staff members at the two-year institution were female (75%), White, non-Hispanic (46%), completed a graduate degree (31%), and reported having over 10 years of post-secondary education working experience (48%). At the four-year institution, the average age was 38.5. White, non-Hispanic (57%) females (81%) comprised the majority of the sample at the four-year institution. Most of the staff members completed a graduate degree (43%), and reported having over 10 years of post-secondary education working experience (41%). A majority of the respondents at both institutions indicated that they never served in the U.S. military (see Table 1).

*Research Question One:* What are staff members' perceptions of student-veterans' campus environment?

Staff members were asked about their perceptions of the campus climate at their respective institutions. Of the six items which measured campus climate, "adding more services on campus for student-veterans" was rated the highest by staff members of both institutions ( $M = 1.48$ ) ( $M = 1.51$ ) respectively (see Table 2).

*Research Question Two:* What proportion of staff members is aware of selected veteran services available for student-veterans?

A majority (60-65% respectively) of the respondents indicated that they were not aware that, "Veteran's Administration counselors for disabled veterans come to their campus to provide services to veterans" (see Table 3).

*Research Question Three:* What are staff members' perceptions of who should be responsible for helping student -veterans with various problems they may have?

Respondents were asked to assign ranks (1= highest and 4= the lowest) to individuals who they perceived as responsible for helping student- veterans with selected problems. Most staff members reported that the Department of Veterans Affairs should be responsible for assisting student-veterans with various problems they may have (Table 4). Two- year institution staff members perceived the following as their top three problems that the Department of Veterans Affairs should be responsible for when helping student-veterans: (1) Military-related physical

Table 1. Characteristics of Sample Population

Characteristic	Two-year Institution	Four-year Institution
Average Age	49 (SD = 1.13)	38.5 (SD =1.33)
Gender (Female)	75%	81%
<b>Race/ Ethnicity</b>		
White, non-Hispanic	46%	57%
Black, non-Hispanic	18%	16%
Hispanic/Latino	13%	12%
Asian American/Pacific Islander	10%	8%
Multi-Ethnic/Other	13%	7%
<b>Education</b>		
Associate's degree	24%	15%
Bachelor's degree	21%	27%
Master's degree	29%	34%
Doctoral degree	2%	9%
Other	24%	15%
<b>Postsecondary Experience</b>		
Less than one year	7%	4%
1-5 years	21%	27%
6-10 years	24%	28%
Over 10 years	48%	41%
<b>Served in the U.S. Military</b>		
Never Served	90%	96%
Veteran	10%	3%
Reserves	0%	1%

injuries, (M = 1.49); (2) Helping student-veterans who have difficulty talking about their military experiences, (M = 1.54); and (3) Post-traumatic stress disorder, (M = 1.60). Staff members at the four-year institution perceived the following as their top three problems that the Department of Veterans Affairs should be responsible for: (1) Military-related physical injuries, (M =1.58); (2) Post-traumatic stress disorder, (M = 1.69); and (3) Helping student-veterans who have difficulty talking about their military experiences, (M = 1.80). Staff members at both institutions indicated that student-veterans should be responsible for helping themselves pertaining to problems with a spouse or significant other (M = 2.03), (M = 1.83).

*Research Question Four:* What are staff members' attitudes toward the U.S. military, recent Wars and the U.S. troops?

Of the six items (Table 5) which measured staff members attitudes toward service members and the U.S. military, only two items were perceived as somewhat negative by respondents at both institutions respectively: (1) The U.S. war in Iraq that began in 2003, (M = 2.64) (M = 2.73); and (2) The U.S war in Afghanistan that began in 2001 (M = 2.61) (M =2.63).

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations of Professional Staff Members' Perceptions of Campus Environment

Item Statement Institution	Two-year Institution		Four-year	
	M <sup>a</sup>	SD	M <sup>a</sup>	SD
Transfer credits should be given for knowledge acquired in the military.	1.55	(0.69)	1.78	(0.85)
Faculty should not have to adjust their teaching style in consideration of student-veterans.	2.38	(0.97)	2.28	(0.88)
The institution should add more services on campus for student-veterans.	1.48	(0.67)	1.51	(0.67)
Staff and faculty should be required to participate in training to better understand issues facing our student-veterans.	1.78	(0.89)	1.83	(0.80)
The institution should offer a separate student orientation program to better inform incoming veterans of on-campus support services, academic resources, and community veteran services.	1.78	(0.85)	1.89	(0.85)
The institution should recognize student-veterans in the graduation program or during the ceremony.	1.97	(0.94)	1.77	(0.86)

Note. <sup>a</sup>Scale: 1= Strongly agree; 2= Somewhat agree; 3 = Somewhat disagree; 4= Strongly disagree.

*Research Questions Five:* To what degree are staff members willing to attend selected training courses designed to assist them in understanding the military culture and student-veterans?

In order to ascertain how many staff members would be willing to participate in staff awareness training on selected issues related to student-veterans, participants were asked directly about a hypothetical voluntary training seminar. Most of the two-year staff members (70%) indicated that it was "very or somewhat likely" that they would participate in a voluntary seminar pertaining to the needs of student-veterans. Also, 55% indicated that they would prefer

an in-person seminar, 15% indicated that they would prefer an online seminar, and 29% reported that they would prefer both options. Over three-fifths (67%) of the four-year

Table 3. Distribution of Respondents' Awareness of Veteran Services

Item Statement	Two-year Institution		Four-year Institution <sup>a</sup>	
	Yes (%)	No (%)	Yes (%)	No (%)
State residence status granted to all "honorably" discharged veterans within two years of separation from military service.	43 (59)	30 (41)	87 (54)	85 (46)
Your institution has a Veterans Educational Center/ sponsors a nationally recognized student-veteran organization.	59 (81)	14 (19)	99 (58)	72 (42)
Veteran's Administration counselors for disabled veterans come to your campus to provide services to veterans.	29 (40)	44 (60)	59 (35)	112 (65)
Your community has a new VA Regional Hospital with state-of-the-art medical services.	57 (78)	16 (22)	132 (78)	38 (22)

*Note.* <sup>a</sup>Four-year Institution: Over 50% of the staff indicated that they were not aware of the following veteran services at their institution: (1). Priority registration for all veterans to improve the time-line for payment of their housing allowance. (2). Their university is ranked as a top 15% "Veteran-Friendly" university. (3). Their university is a Yellow Ribbon Fund participant-a VA matching funds program to provide financial assistance to veterans.

institution staff members reported that it was "very or somewhat likely" that they would participate in a voluntary seminar addressing the needs of student-veterans. Almost half (46%) of the four-year institution respondents indicated that that would prefer an in-person seminar, 16% reported that they would prefer an online seminar, and nearly two-fifths (39%) had a preference for both options.

Nearly two-fifths (39%) of staff members at the two-year institution revealed that they knew student-veterans "very well to moderately" on an individual basis, when compared to almost one-third (30%) of the staff members at the four-year institution. One-fifth (20%) of the staff members at the two-year institution reported that they typically assist more than 20 student-veterans per semester in comparison to only 14% of their counterparts at the four-year institution.

### Limitations

Several limitations emerged as part of conducting this study. The principal limitation of this study is the low response rate. It is possible that unknown number e-mail messages may have been purposefully deleted or was sent to junk or spam e-mail folders. Another limitation is that we did not obtain a nationally-representative sample. A third limitation is that participants may have provided answers that were considered desirable.

Table 4. Means and Standard Deviations by Rank Regarding Who Should be Responsible for Helping Student-Veterans with Selected Problems

Problem	Two-year Institution			Four-year Institution		
	M <sup>a</sup>	SD	Rank <sup>c</sup>	M <sup>a</sup>	SD	Rank <sup>c</sup>
<b>Spouse or Significant Other</b>						
Veterans themselves	2.03	(1.12)	1	1.83	(0.99)	1
Department of Veteran Affairs	2.12	(0.88)	2	2.07	(0.83)	2
Staff	2.55	(1.06)	3	2.45	(0.91)	3
Other	2.86	(1.15)	4	3.20	(1.15)	4
<b>Family and Friends</b>						
Department of Veteran Affairs	1.85	(0.90)	1	1.96	(0.95)	1
Veterans themselves	2.07	(1.05)	2	2.06	(0.94)	2
Staff	2.60	(1.00)	3	2.38	(0.90)	3
Other	2.67	(1.11)	4	3.16	(1.18)	4
<b>Military Experiences</b>						
Department of Veterans Affairs	1.54	(0.87)	1	1.80	(0.92)	1
Veterans themselves	2.56	(0.90)	3	2.26	(0.92)	2
Staff	2.43	(1.00)	2	2.35	(0.93)	3
Other	2.80	(1.15)	4	3.04	(1.19)	4
<b>Military-Related Injuries</b>						
Department of Veteran Affairs	1.49	(0.90)	1	1.58	(0.92)	1
Veterans themselves	2.46	(0.79)	3	2.35	(0.91)	2
Staff	2.45	(0.92)	2	2.51	(0.78)	3
Other	3.10	(1.18)	4	3.14	(1.14)	4
<b>Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder</b>						
Department of Veteran Affairs	1.60	(0.98)	1	1.69	(0.95)	1
Veterans themselves	2.59	(0.85)	3	2.31	(0.93)	2
Staff	2.49	(0.97)	2	2.50	(0.85)	3
Other	2.79	(1.18)	4	3.00	(1.21)	4
<b>Finding a Job<sup>b</sup></b>						
Department of Veteran Affairs	2.00	(1.22)	1	2.13	(1.34)	1
Veterans themselves	2.29	(1.69)	2	2.24	(1.47)	2
Staff	2.74	(1.02)	3	4.07	(1.16)	5
Faculty	4.43	(1.15)	5	4.15	(1.15)	6
Faculty and Staff	4.67	(1.24)	6	3.65	(1.36)	3
Other	4.04	(1.78)	4	3.94	(2.10)	4

Note. <sup>a</sup>Based on Scale: 1= highest to 4= lowest. <sup>b</sup>1= highest to 6 = lowest. <sup>c</sup>Mean values

### Discussion

This descriptive exploratory study attempted to contribute to the very limited evidence of staff members' perceptions of the transition of student-veterans at a two-year and four-year institution. This study provided a unique exploration of patterns of perceptions from respondents of institutions that were located in the same city. The results cannot be generalized,

however the overall aim of the study was to gain detail insights of staff members’ perceptions of student-veterans and share this information with staff members at other

Table 5. Attitudes Toward Service Members and the U.S. Military

Item Statement	Two- year Institution		Four-year Institution	
	M <sup>a</sup>	SD	M <sup>a</sup>	SD
The U.S. response to the 9-11 terror attacks.	2.00	(1.02)	2.08	(1.00)
U.S. troops who are currently serving in support of the global Wars on Terrorism.	1.54	(0.71)	1.71	(0.91)
The United States all volunteer military.	1.70	(0.89)	1.61	(0.84)
The institution of the U.S military in general.	1.60	(0.73)	1.73	(0.87)
The U.S. war in Iraq that began in 2003.	2.64	(1.06)	2.73	(0.99)
The U.S. war in Afghanistan that began in 2001.	2.61	(1.08)	2.63	(1.00)

Note. <sup>a</sup>Scale: 1= Strongly positive; 2= Somewhat positive; 3= Somewhat negative; 4= Strongly negative.

post-secondary institutions that have a growing number of student-veterans in their student bodies.

With reference to staff members’ perceptions of campus environment; respondents from both institutions were more likely to agree that more services should be added on campus for student-veterans. This finding is supported by Schlossberg’s Theory Adult Transition (1984). Helping students approach transitions requires knowledge of the transition framework. Vaccaro (2015) reported that “higher education institutions that provide student veteran spaces should be prepared to offer support to students if, and when, they navigate potentially tense interactions in those environments” (p.357). Also, it is worthwhile mentioning that respondents from both institutions agreed that credits should be given for knowledge acquired in the military. This finding is consistent with Persky and Oliver’s (2010) views of the ease of processing military experience and previous coursework toward program completion.

In examining staff members’ perceived level of awareness in classroom modifications in consideration of student-veterans, our results indicate that respondents from both institutions

had favorable views for veteran support services on campus and policies regarding deployment and re-deployment that interfere with classroom attendance.

Staff members at the four-year institution were more likely to lack awareness of the following veteran services: priority registration for all veterans, the ranking of their institution as a top 15% “Veteran –Friendly” university, and that their university is a Yellow Ribbon Fund participant (a VA matching funds program to provide financial assistance to veterans). Staff members at both institutions were less aware that, “Veteran’s Administration counselors visited their campus to provide services to veterans.” Overall, these findings suggest the need for the availability of awareness programs for staff members who are assisting student-veterans during their transition.

Staff members perceived the Department of Veterans Affairs as the leading personnel responsible for helping student-veterans with the following selected problems: military-related physical injuries, PTSD, talking about their military experiences, family and friends, and finding a job.

Responses of two-year and four-year staff members’ attitudes toward service members and the U.S. military were viewed as “somewhat positive.” However, respondents were less supportive of U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. These findings mirror a previous study by Gonzalez and Elliott (2012) that examined academic faculty members’ perceptions of student-veterans.

A majority of the staff members at both institutions indicated their willingness to participate in a training seminar that would help them to understand military culture and student-veterans. This finding suggests that selected staff members at both institutions may have a greater level of cultural sensitivity toward student-veterans, in comparison to their counterparts who were less willing to participate in a training seminar (Gonzalez, 2012).

The results of this study provide several important implications for practice. It appears that respondents would benefit from selected awareness programs concerning the availability of veteran services on campus for student-veterans. Student affairs administrators at community colleges and four-year institutions should give thoughtful consideration to this research and to their policies and procedures related to the training of staff members involve with the transition of student-veterans. The current impact of the reauthorization of the GI Bill on the influx of the amount of student-veterans pursuing post-secondary education is an indication that staff members’ ability to serve this population of students becomes a central issue (Barnard-Brak et al., 2011). It is important for staff members to engage student-veterans in meaningful conversations about transitions throughout their college experience. Thus, using Schlossberg’s Adult Transition Theory allows student affairs practitioners to take student-veterans’ uniqueness into account.

Directions for future research include: (a) Replication of this study that consist of a nationally-representative sample of staff members. Also, it would be beneficial to use a comparative analysis design so as to determine if there are any statistical significant differences between faculty and staff members’ perceptions of student-veterans at two and four-year institutions, (b) Because community colleges are more likely to receive less resources when compared to four-year institutions, a study should be conducted to compare and assess the impact of the quality of their student-veterans’ programs, and (c) Mixed methods research of staff members’ attitudes toward cultural sensitivity of student-veterans. Vogt and Johnson (2016) suggested that, “mixed methods research is often considered important for avoiding method variance” (p.261).

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