Difficulties Encountered by Enlisted Army and Marine Corps Veterans When Entering Community College After Separation From the Military: A Q-methodological Study

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Statement of Problem

- Lack of research concerning the transition of military veterans into higher education
- No published work seeking to understand viewpoints of veterans while transitioning into higher education
- No published work considering transitional process into community college
Purpose of the Study

Understanding the perceptions and the viewpoints of military veterans toward the transitional process and the difficulties they faced when entering community college through the use of Q methodology
Theoretical Framework

Schlossberg’s Transition Theory

- Moving in
- Moving through
- Moving out
- 4S coping factors – situation, self, supports, strategies

Self-Determination Theory

- Environment
- Intrinsic motivation
- Extrinsic motivation
Disparate Andragogy

**Military**
- Analysis, Design, Development, Implement, Evaluate Model (ADDIE)
- Behaviorist and cognitive theory

**Higher Education**
- Different methods of informational delivery
- Academic freedom
- Humanist, social cognitive, self-directed theory (SDT)
Conceptual Framework

Perceptions during the transitional process into community college

- Branch of service
- MOS
- Demographics
- Scale of difficulty

Q-sort

Factor Analysis

Group
Group 2
Group 3
Group 4

Practice, Policy, and Research Implications
Research Questions

Question 1: What are the viewpoints of enlisted Army and Marine Corps veterans toward the transition process after transitioning out of the military and into higher education at the community college?

Question 2: What are items that distinguish the groups, and what are the items that are similar between groups?

Question 3: Do the viewpoints of military veterans toward the transition process vary according to MOS or branch of service?
Significance of the Study

Use this understanding to develop better support services for transitioning military veterans at the community college level.

Ultimately aid in retention and graduation, influencing labor market outcomes and social demographics.
Limitations & Delimitations

Limitations

- Narrow geographic area
- Unequal number of Army and Marine Corps veterans
- Limited generalizability

Delimitations

- Only enlisted Army and Marine Corps veterans participated
- Concourse items developed using all information available to the researcher
- Concourse items developed to fit within theory
- Post sorting interviews to identify other items not present in concourse
Review of Literature

Demographics/Special Needs

Civilian Support Services

Completion

Social Indicators

Community College
Additional Methods Used to Gather Information

- TAP (ACAP)
- Personal Interviews
- Survey
Methods

Q Methodology: Mixed method, non-experimental design

Known for ability to study qualitative data quantitatively

Concourse development: Literature, TAP course, survey, personal interviews

Q set: 47 statements

P-set: 24 participants

Q sort: Rank on a -5 to +5 scale
Post-survey questionnaire
Q-Sorting

*Conceptual Q-Sort Grid*

-4  -3  -2  -1  0  +1  +2  +3  +4

[Diagram of a grid with empty boxes]
P-set Demographics

Branch of Service:
Army = 64%
Marine Corps = 24%

Gender:
88% Male
8% Female

Children:
64% No children
44% Children

Marital Status:
54% Unmarried
44% Married
# P-set Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>%</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
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<td>4.5</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age at time of Entry into Community College</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20-30 years old</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40 years old</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>32</td>
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<tr>
<td>41-50 years old</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
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## P-set Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank at Discharge</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>%</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>E6</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
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# P-set Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Between Discharge and Entry into Community College (years)</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>%</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Ranking of Difficulty of Transition into Community College

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranking (scale of 1-10)</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>%</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Factor Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average Reliability Coefficient</th>
<th>Number of Loading Q-sorts</th>
<th>Eigen Values</th>
<th>Variance Explained</th>
<th>Reliability</th>
<th>Standard Error of Factor Scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Factor 1</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>16.35</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>0.17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Factor 2</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>13.83</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 3</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>9.79</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 4</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>8.70</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Variance Explained = 48.67
Q44:
I had difficulty with how information was delivered in the classroom.

Factors 1, 2 and 4 ranked this statement a +1, while Factor 3 ranked it at 0.

Narrative comments suggested a greater impact than Factor rankings suggested.
### Distinguishing Statements Common to all Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q Item</th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
<th>Factor 2</th>
<th>Factor 3</th>
<th>Factor 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q03 I could not maintain motivation to study</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q22 Balancing school, work, family was difficult</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q33 I had to take developmental courses (ex. Developmental math),</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q38 My GI bill did not cover all course materials (out of pocket expenses too high),</td>
<td>-5</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q42 The behavior of non-military veteran students in the classroom was difficult for me.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Four Factors

- Mission-missing Infantry
- Difficulty Finding Balance
- Motivation Impacted by Disability
- Needs and Administrative Advisor
Factor One: Mission-Missing Infantry

- 8 members
- 16.35% of variance
- MOS: 7 Infantry
- 5 Marine Corps veterans, 3 Army veterans
- Mean ranking for difficulty of transition = 6
- Individual rankings for difficulty of transition: 6, 7, 7, 7, 8, 10

- Most “stereotypical” military veteran student group
- Uncomfortable in the classroom (non-military environment)
- Uncomfortable with lack of discipline in the classroom
- Do not feel that the mission of college is as important as their past military missions
- Failure is not an option
Factor One: Narrative Comments

- Connections with other veterans
- Mentorship
- Classroom atmosphere difficult due to lack of discipline, lack of feeling of safety
- Motivation to be successful
- Military personality “doesn’t mix well with young civilians”
- “Most students have been in school the entirety of their lives. Once in the military, it’s almost (like) everything you have ever learned is erased, and replaced with what they (the military) want. Then, when you are discharged, you are expected to know how to be a civilian immediately”
- “I think once you come home from a war where your job was to protect your friends, motivation to get a degree for a job is not as vital...”
Factor One:
Narrative Comments

“The Marine Corps instills in us failure is not an option. The problem with civilian life is there are going to be failures, regardless of preparations made. Veterans need to understand and exercise self-control once failure has occurred.”
Factor Two: Difficulty Finding Balance

- 5 members
- 13.83% of variance
- MOS: 2 firefighters, 2 combat medics
- 1 Marine Corps veteran, 4 Army veterans
- Mean ranking of difficulty of transition = 7
- Individual rankings for difficulty of transition: 3, 6, 8, 9, 9

- More typical of non-traditional community college students who have to balance school, work and family
- Military veteran status did not seem to impact transition greatly
- Related well to non-veteran students
- Transitioned into civilian/college culture well
Factor Two: Narrative Comments

- Balancing school, work, family was most difficult
- Difficulty with time management
- Difficulty with GI bill
- Issues with TAP course
- Self-motivated
- Difficulty with mental health
- “I have terrible study habits, I always have from high school. Finding the motivation and struggling with depression can be incredibly difficult…”
- “I struggle with anxiety and depression. Sometimes it’s hard to even get up in the morning and (get to) class on time. Only missing a couple of days a semester can be really challenging, it’s not the schools fault but (it is) a real challenge maintaining my mental health through it all.”
Factor Three: Motivation Impacted by Disability

- 4 members
- 9.79% of the variance
- MOS: 1 combat medic, 1 military police officer, 1 geospatial engineer, 1 artillery specialist
- All Army veterans
- Mean ranking of difficulty of transition= 6.25
- Individual rankings for difficulty of transition: 2, 5, 8, 10

- Disability impacted transition into community college
- Difficulty with study habits
- Difficulty maintaining motivation
- Did not have difficulty balancing school with work and family
Factor Three: Narrative Comments

- Disabilities impacted transitional process
- MOS didn’t translate into civilian career
- Difficulty finding career direction
- Difficulty with securing advising
- Lack of motivation
- Actual course work was easiest part of transition

  “I have disabilities such as anxiety and depression which have affected me in every aspect of my life. I barely know how to function anymore, and I’m trying to be serious about college but I have no idea what I am doing”

  “I have PTSD, but wasn’t diagnosed at the time (of transitioning into community college).”

  “There is no direction (in the military, for civilian life). I am good and believe I could excel in multiple areas/careers but I have no idea what I want to do. I think that if the military actually gave us time to experience things and possible careers it would help.”
Factor Four: Needs an Administrative Advisor

• 5 members
• 1 Marine Corps veteran, 4 Army veterans
• MOS: 2 infantry, 2 specialists, 1 bulk fuel specialist
• Mean ranking of difficulty of transition = 4.2
• Individual rankings for difficulty of transition: 1, 1, 3, 8, 8

Frustration with GI Bill, financial aid
Difficulty with money management
Similar to Factor 2 as related to school, work, life balance
Similar to Factor 1 as related to change from military to civilian culture
Factor Four: Narrative Comments

- GI Bill was difficult to use and to understand
- Difficulty with the transition from military to civilian/college
- Two respondents reported ACAP prepared them fully
- Managing finances was difficult
- Self discipline was helpful
- Motivated to attend class and do well
- “The change in environment (was most difficult). Those of us who have not taken the time to develop independency from the former unit will encounter huge problems maintaining our status in school. We do not fit in or belong here, so individuals who have not adapted to being alone will have a lot of trouble. You are taking someone who had a huge family, incurring significant loss, enduring a lot of violence, and once having a purpose, to stripping them of everything and having them start over in a place where nothing they did matters.”
Common Themes Among All Factors

- Difficulty with the transition from military to civilian/college culture
- Need for mentorship
- Difficulty connecting with other veterans on campus
- Balancing school with work and family
Conclusions

Four viewpoints distinguished

Branch of Service

MOS

Combat

Military classroom training
Conclusions and Implications

Theory

Self-Determination Theory
- Develop intrinsic and extrinsic motivation
- Develop feelings of confidence (academic and non-academic)

Schlossberg’s Transition Theory
- Develop 4 S assets to aid in moving through transitional process
Conclusions and Implications

Andragogy

Q44: I had difficulty with how information was delivered in the classroom

Individual rankings

Vocational programs versus Academic programs

Adjustment to new style leads to stress

Affects learning and memory

Affects feelings of ease and safety

Address change in andragogy

Identify “traditional” instructors
Conclusions and Implications

Program Development

Programs that create connections between veteran students

Veteran student union

Mentorship

Disability and mental health services

GI Bill and financial aid workshops
Conclusions and Implications

Labor Market Outcomes
- Increased retention and graduation should increase employment and higher wage earning opportunities

Practice
- Veteran-friendly campuses and classrooms

Veteran Students
- Sense of commonality and community with other veteran students
Recommendations for Future Research

Future Research

- Studies at other community colleges
- Survey created from distinguishing statements
- Participants from other branches of the military
- Study focused on infantry
- Vocational versus academic programs
Thank you!

Any Questions?

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