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Negotiating cultural transitions: contemporary student veterans and Louisiana institutions of higher education

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NEGOTIATING CULTURAL TRANSITIONS: CONTEMPORARY STUDENT VETERANS AND LOUISIANA INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Educational Theory, Policy, & Practice

by

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M.Ed., Southeastern Louisiana University, 2003
May 2012
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This dissertation is dedicated to the military service men and women of Louisiana. Words cannot express my sincere appreciation for your sacrifice and service for our freedom and quality of life. It is my hope that this body of work will enhance the quality of your higher education experience.

I also dedicate this dissertation to Buck, Darby, and Harrison who are the greatest joys of my life. I love you dearly.

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ABSTRACT

Student veterans are flooding colleges and universities in numbers not seen since the end of World War II. Little is known about how these contemporary student veterans navigate the transition from military life to campus life. Few studies have documented the transition experiences of these student veterans by institution type or cultural region of the country. In Louisiana, nearly 7,000 students receive military benefits for higher education with this number steadily increasing (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2009, June). This study explores the transition experience of student veterans from military life to university life at four institutions of higher education in Louisiana. Transition experiences are compared by institution type. The notion of the southern military tradition and its impact on the transition experiences of Louisiana student veterans is considered.

The researcher uses case study methodology to address the research questions. Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman’s (1995) theory of adult transition aids in developing an understanding of how male combat veterans of the Global War on Terror transition from military life to college life. Findings and implications from this research will deepen the awareness of how institution type and regional culture influence transition resulting in a richer understanding of contemporary student veterans’ transition experiences and needs that influence student veteran persistence.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

I began my day on September 11, 2001, with a detailed task list. I was a new professional in student affairs working at a regional institution in the South and I was anxious and excited about the start of my first sorority formal recruitment. My mind was not on global events and I couldn’t remember the last time I’d checked the news or picked up a newspaper. I was focused on my new job and absorbed with pressing matters such as decorations, skits, and party refreshments. Not long after arriving at work that morning, I learned of the events in New York, Pennsylvania, and Washington, D.C. I had no idea the impact that day would have on my professional practice and the experiences of my current and future students.

Over the next several years, I watched students enlist in the military and deploy to serve in the Global War on Terror. I experienced a mixture of emotions as they left the safety of the university environment and entered the military and waited anxiously to hear news of them from fraternity brothers, sorority sisters, friends, and family members. I lost touch with many of them and soon accepted another position on campus as a disability service provider. I naïvely assumed that I wouldn’t hear from these students again and began to think of them simply as graduates or as students who decided college wasn’t right for them. They were literally out of sight and out of mind.

In 2009, however, I began to notice the presence of student veterans on campus, some were former students from my time as a Greek advisor. Some requested classroom assistance through my new department, disability services, while others I randomly encountered on campus and in the community. I was startled to see returning student veterans struggle to acclimate to the college environment and puzzled that some student veterans seemed to experience no problems with transition while others were overwhelmed by the demands of the university environment. I was even more troubled to learn that many student veterans would not identify themselves on
campus and would not access useful campus resources. I had no personal experience with the military nor had I ever had more than a passing conversation with a veteran. I was very uneducated and unprepared to respond to this student population’s needs. As a result, student veterans’ transition experiences and personal stories are the motivating factors for this research. I hope to develop a better understanding of their experiences and identify their needs so that colleges and universities can better aid current and future student veterans in realizing their academic goals upon returning from military service.

Problem Statement

Hundreds of thousands of veterans return home from Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan each year. With the passage of the Post 9/11 Veterans Assistance Act of 2008, also known as the New G.I. Bill or the Post 9/11 G.I. Bill, it is anticipated that as many as two million veterans will enroll in postsecondary education in the coming years (Radford, 2009). These contemporary student veterans will have specific needs that will require colleges and universities to rethink the manner in which services and programs are delivered in order to address these needs.

The state of Louisiana and the military share a history that dates back more than three centuries. Louisiana is known to be one of the most supportive states in the nation regarding the war in Iraq (Louisiana Public Square, 2007). The state’s 319,000 veterans serve as evidence of the tradition of military support; 6,966 of these veterans currently receive military education benefits (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2009a). This number is expected to increase with the return of more than 9,000 Louisiana military personnel who have been deployed for service in Iraq and Afghanistan (Louisiana Public Square, 2007). Student veterans entering colleges and universities after conflict does not represent a new trend; however, the rising number of student
veterans from the conflict in the Middle East have different needs from those of traditional college students (Holloway, 2009).

Under the New G.I. Bill, benefits are provided at a level not known since the end of World War II. Individuals who have served on active duty in the U.S. military since September 11, 2001 will receive educational benefits based on the length of their service, with maximum benefits reached after 36 months of active duty service. These benefits may be applied to undergraduate and graduate school, vocational education, and technical training (The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2009b). With this assistance, veterans have the opportunity to become more educated and employable (Coll, Oh, Joyce, & Coll, 2009).

Veterans funded by the New GI Bill receive full coverage of their tuition and fees charged by a college or university and may attend the most expensive public institution in the state. Funding lasts for 15 years and also includes a monthly housing allowance, yearly book fee stipend, relocation expenses, stipends for tutoring, and reimbursement for licensing and certification tests. Benefits may be transferred to spouses and dependent children (The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2009b). According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (2009b), only 6% of veterans exhaust their military education benefits, though 71% use some portion of them. No doubt the downturn of the U.S. economy and the increase in tuition and fees at Louisiana colleges and universities will increase the likelihood that these benefits will be used by OIF/OEF veterans.

An increasing number of colleges and universities, as well as organizations serving the interests of higher education, developed and implemented initiatives to recruit, welcome, and assist student veterans (Shackleford, 2009). For instance, some institutions offer assistance to student veterans through the Yellow Ribbon GI Education Enhancement Program, known informally as The Yellow Ribbon Program. This program allows institutions of higher learning
in the United States to voluntarily enter into an agreement with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to fund tuition expenses that exceed the highest public in-state undergraduate tuition rate. The institution contributes up to 50% of those expenses and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs matches the same amount as the institution (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2009b). This program provides financial access for veterans to institutions that are private or out-of-state and to graduate education. For example, in Louisiana the maximum per credit hour benefit is approximately $400 for the 2008-2009 academic year. The Yellow Ribbon Program allows a Louisiana institution that charges $500 per credit hour to waive $50 and have the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs match $50, allowing the student to utilize the New G.I. Bill to attend that institution (Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.). Eleven institutions in Louisiana are part of the Yellow Ribbon Program including Central Michigan University, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Herzing University, ITT Technical Institute Baton Rouge and St. Rose, Loyola University, Northwood University, Our Lady of Holy Cross College, Remington College Baton Rouge, Lafayette, and Shreveport, Tulane University, University of Phoenix in Baton Rouge, Lafayette, Metairie, and Shreveport, and Upper Iowa University Alexandria Center and Fort Polk Center (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2009a).

While the New G.I. Bill allows for access to higher education, a student veteran’s transition to campus life still presents difficult and often unanticipated challenges. When working with OIF and OEF student veterans, higher education professionals confront issues that have not been present on college campuses since veterans returned from the Vietnam War. These veteran transition issues include psychological and physical stressors, academic advising and counseling challenges, and changes in classroom dynamics. Higher education professionals can only appropriately meet student veterans’ needs when they understand what to expect from the
transition process and how to support student veterans during the process of transition from military culture to campus life.

Currently, just 22% of colleges provide veteran specific assistance with the transition to higher education, nearly 50% of colleges do not have an individual trained to assist veterans with transitional issues. Less than 60% of colleges and universities offer veteran assistance training to faculty and staff members and less than 37% have trained staff to work with veterans with disabilities (Cook, Kim, & Associates, 2009). Largely, higher education is unprepared to meet the demands of this student population.

The campus transition issues that student veterans encounter vary. Some student veterans may experience a delay in the delivery of their New GI Bill funds, with delays lasting as long as three months (Herrman, Raybeck, & Wilson, 2008). According to the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (2009b), 277,403 claims have been filed for benefits. While student veterans are not required to pay for their tuition and fees until their funds arrive, there is still the question of covering living expenses which can cause stress for a student veteran and his or her family members.

In addition to the financial challenges, many student veterans become frustrated when they learn that academic credit is not always given for military training and experience (Herrman et al., 2008). Following World War II, the American Council on Education established a system for transferring military credit to college records but left the decisions about what and how many credits to the discretion of institutions (Radford, 2009). Because campus officials lack understanding on how to equate military training and experience to academic credit most requests for academic credit are denied (Herrman et al., 2008).

Many institutions fail to address student veterans’ personal needs. For those student veterans who served in combat situations, their military experiences set them apart from other
students. Student veterans have different academic, developmental, physical, and mental health needs from those of traditional-age students. Additionally, they have very different needs from those of other nontraditional students without military experience (Hermann et al., 2008; Waybrant, 2008). Of the increased population of veterans returning to or beginning college, a large number sustained injuries during their deployment. These injuries are both physical and psychological in nature. It is anticipated that at least 30% of all returning veterans will meet DSM: IV-R criteria for mental health disorders including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, substance addiction, and other anxiety-related disabilities (Coll et al., 2009). These challenges make addressing student veterans’ needs with existing programs and services difficult.

A student veteran’s transition from military life to campus life is fraught with many obstacles that can impede academic progress. Student veterans’ academic success, like that of other student subpopulations and subgroups, is impacted by the campus environment, climate, attitudes, faculty and staff, and services and support offered (Gohn & Albin, 2006). Their experiences must be documented before interventions can be identified that will assist them in their academic progression.

Purpose of the Study

The increase in presence of OIF and OEF student veterans on campuses across the nation and the unique challenges they encounter warrants more research in understanding their transition processes. While an increasing body of literature continues to emerge for this growing student population, few researchers have explored the construct of student veteran transition by region of the country considering cultural influences or made comparison of experiences by institution type. This study seeks to develop an understanding of how OIF and OEF student veterans navigate the transition from military culture to campus culture at colleges and universities in south Louisiana. The results of this study will aid universities and colleges to
better address the needs of student veterans of this region. Student veterans’ higher education experiences will be examined using qualitative methodology. The literature on military culture, the southern military tradition, student veterans, and nontraditional students will be reviewed. Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman’s (1995) theory of adult transition serves as the theoretical framework.

For the purpose of this research, several terms warrant clarification. The term “veteran” refers to a former member of the United States armed forces. The term “military service member” includes military personnel on active duty, in the reserves, or in the National Guard. “Student Veterans” refer to veterans who are pursuing an undergraduate education. The term “contemporary student veterans” refers to veterans from OEF and OIF.

Research Questions

The initial questions guiding this inquiry are: (1) How do student veterans navigate the transition from military culture to campus culture? (2) How does institution type influence transition for student veterans? (3) How does the regional culture impact college transition for student veterans in the South? (4) Why are some student veterans able to transition to campus life more effectively than others? These questions provide the focus for the review of literature.

Conclusion

This study contributes to an understanding of how student veterans navigate the transition from military life and culture to campus culture. Specifically, this study examines this phenomenon in Louisiana, a southern state with a strong military tradition. These transition experiences will also be described by institutional type. The bulk of research on student veterans does not document student veteran transition by institution type nor does it consider the transition process with regard to regional or cultural influence. This study, therefore, seeks to understand and expand the existing knowledge base to describe relationships among these
elements and how they contribute to, or act as barriers to, the transition experiences of contemporary student veterans.

This research proposal begins with a review of literature investigating military culture, the southern military tradition, student veterans, and nontraditional students. Next, Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman’s (1995) theory of adult transition and Schlossberg’s (1989) work on mattering versus marginality are reviewed as the theoretical frameworks and their relevance to this study are explained. Finally, the methodology for this study, including procedures for data collection and analysis is outlined.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

With the return of soldiers from Afghanistan and Iraq, there has been a surge in the amount of research produced regarding contemporary student veterans and considerable variety of applicable literature (Coll, Oh, Joyce, & Coll, 2009; Cook, Kim, & Associates, 2009; Church, 2009; DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008; Holloway, 2009; Rumann & Hamrick, 2009; Summerlot, Green, & Parker, 2009; Vance & Miller, 2009). For this study, I am particularly interested in how culture influences the transition experience for contemporary student veterans. The notion of culture’s influence on transition, that is, military culture, Southern culture, and campus culture, serves as the centerpiece of this investigation.

Five categories are used to organize this literature review: military culture, Louisiana military history and the Southern military tradition, institutional culture, student veterans, and nontraditional students. After an examination of the current literature on student veterans’ transitions in higher education, the gaps in the literature about student veterans and the areas for future research are highlighted. Finally, Schlossberg, Goodman, and Water’s (1995) Theory of Adult Transition and Schlossberg’s (1989) idea of mattering versus marginality are provided. How these theories and the existing literature form the foundation and framework for this study is explained. As this study documents how an individual leaves one culture (military) and enters another (higher education), it is logical to begin with an examination of culture and the culture socialization process.

Culture is “a system of shared beliefs, values, practices, perspectives, folk knowledge, language, norms, rituals, and artifacts that members of a group use in understanding their world and in relating to others” (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 241). Shared beliefs are convictions that people from the same cultural group trust to be true or false. Shared values are the culturally
defined standards about what is good or bad, right or wrong. Norms are culturally defined rules that guide appropriate, acceptable behavior (Johnson & Christensen, 2004).

Individuals become members of a culture through a socialization process where they are taught the features of a culture so that they may function in the culture. Cultures are maintained over time through socialization and through a social sanctioning that stigmatizes people who break group norms and rewards those members who follow the appropriate cultural norms. The socialization process and social sanctioning result in people identifying so strongly with their own culture that the ways of doing things in other cultures may seem strange (Johnson & Christensen, 2004).

A Louisiana student veteran claims membership in numerous cultural groups: Louisiana culture, military culture, and the culture of his college or university. These cultures are unique and may cause the student veteran difficulty as he attempts to negotiate his membership among them. The socialization and social sanctioning process of military culture and college or university culture are strong and established. Each includes stringent guidelines for appropriate behavior that at times contradicts one another. Student veterans must make sense of the norms they already know and those they are experiencing on campus. The dissonance between the two will likely vary depending on the student’s background and military experience. An in depth overview of each of these cultures and their relevance to the Louisiana student veteran will aid in understanding the challenges a student veteran may encounter as he negotiates the cultural differences.

Military Culture

Knowledge of military culture provides useful insight into the perspectives of student veterans. The United States military is composed of a diverse group of individuals; however, upon entering the military, all individuals are indoctrinated into a unifying military culture
composed of values, traditions, norms, and perceptions that govern how military personnel communicate and interact with each other and with the rest of the world (Coll et al., 2009). When re-entering civilian life, veterans continue to operate according to this military culture, which in many instances is incongruent with civilian norms. The following is an exploration of the core values that shape the military culture and how this culture continues to affect student veterans as they adjust to living as a civilian in a university environment.

Military values originate from the underlying belief that the armed forces exists to protect the Constitution of the United States of American and serve the Commander in Chief. Patriotism and civic responsibility, therefore, are prominent motifs that shape the soldiers’ worldviews (Ritchie, 2008). Though individuals subscribe to these principles by varying degrees, these values are embraced by all branches of the military in forming the identity of a soldier (Janowitz & Wesbrook, 1983). While these values are not exclusive to the military, soldiers learn to abide by these standards with particular fervor, because of the intense socialization process that strips them of individual identity and bestows upon them a collective identity (Coll et al., 2009). This socialization process is commonly known as boot camp which varies slightly in content and length by military service branch. Consistently during boot camp, soldiers learn how to make quick decisions and to respond under adversarial conditions (Branker, 2009).

Honor and integrity are two fundamental values upon which the military culture is established (Ritchie, 2008). Military personnel strive to be honest and truthful while taking responsibility for their actions. They have very little tolerance for improper behavior and strive to conduct themselves according to uncompromising ethics (U.S. Navy, 2004, as cited in Exum & Coll, 2008; U.S. Coast Guard, 2004, as cited in Exum & Coll, 2008). In addition to these values, the military culture is deeply committed to excellence (U.S. Navy, 2004, as cited in Exum & Coll, 2008). Soldiers are devoted to their duties and typically are not satisfied with
mediocrity, sloppiness, or complacency. Furthermore, military personnel are fiercely loyal, which is exemplified in the motto of the Marine Corps, “Semper Fidelis,” which means “Always Faithful.” Members of the military are devoted to one another because they share a common identity and experience; moreover, they pledge a considerable amount of unwavering allegiance to the United States, (Coll et al., 2009; Ritchie, 2008).

Members of the military value respect, particularly as it relates to authority. A stringent chain of command governs the military. This system provides for the ranking of officers and the vesting of authority over subordinates. Subordinates may exercise authority over their own subordinates, and so on. By following this formal hierarchy of authority, the military preempts resistance and avoids conflicts of personality, since every person must obey legitimate directives from superiors without question or doubt (Waller, 1944). The military has “high power distance” in its organization, which means subordinates are less likely to challenge direct orders (Hofstede, 2001). The military deliberately fosters this behavior, because successful completion of missions relies on immediate and complete compliance (Wesbrook, 1998). Although subordinates have the right to refuse direct orders, it is not a common practice. It is critical to note that military personnel and civilians view respect differently. From a military perspective, respect is conferred through obedience and unquestioned compliance, whereas in civilian life, respect may be communicated in less rigid terms (Coll et al., 2009).

In summation, the military culture continues to affect student veterans even in the university setting. The values that shaped veterans create dissonance when applied to civilian life as student veterans may find that they have incongruent expectations and political views than those of civilian students, faculty, and staff members. When considering the impact of military culture, it is important to note that while on active duty, soldiers follow this code of conduct twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, on and off base, from the moment they enter the
military until the moment they leave. The military believes that the pervasive application of these standards is necessary, because soldiers must be prepared at all times for deployment into combat. Culture that is so heavily and consistently enforced does not diminish easily.

Louisiana Military History and Southern Military Tradition

Student veteran transition experiences have not been explored by cultural region of the country. This research seeks to document the transition experiences of student veterans in a subcultural region of the American South, southern Louisiana. The uniqueness of the South has long been debated. Various explanations have been offered about what makes the South different from the rest of the country: slavery and segregation; the emphasis on agriculture; the defeat in the Civil War, the ethnic origins of Southern residents, and even the weather (Beck, Frandsen, & Randall, 2007). Some differences between people are inconsequential; however, the differences between the South and the rest of the United States have mattered; the nation’s politics have largely been shaped by regional differences with the Civil War representing the most significant example of this fact. The South, then, is a subculture of the broader national culture, and, complicated though it may seem, additional subcultures are to be found within the South. To further understand the subcultural differences of southern Louisiana people, an overview of Louisiana’s military history and the impact on higher education follows.

Louisiana’s military history dates back more than three centuries. This history combined with the current level of military service of its citizens makes Louisiana one of the most supportive military states in the nation. The following provides a brief summary of the most significant Louisiana military highlights, landmarks, and service members and their relevancy to this study.

The battle that launched America onto the world stage as a military power was fought on January 8, 1815, near New Orleans, Louisiana (Louisiana Public Square, 2007). The fighting in
Louisiana was really a series of battles for the Louisiana territory lasting from December 1814 through January 1815. On the Chalmette battleground, a diverse force of soldiers, sailors, and militia, including Indians and African Americans, defeated Britain's troops drawn from Europe and the West Indies. This victory forced the British to recognize United States claims to Louisiana and West Florida and to ratify the Treaty of Ghent, which ended the war. The Battle of New Orleans also marked the state's political incorporation into the Union (Byrne et al., 2006).

In the Mexican War of 1848, military posts in Louisiana provided key supply points while Louisiana natives like Pierre G. T. Beauregard provided leadership and assisted with military strategy (Meed, 2003). In the 20th century, future World War II Army generals, Dwight D. Eisenhower and George Patton, trained in the Louisiana Maneuvers held at Fort Polk (Louisiana Public Square, 2007).

Many Louisiana natives have made significant contributions to national military causes. Andrew Higgins, a Louisiana citizen, designed and built the amphibious landing craft that made possible the invasions of the Pacific islands and the coast of France in the D-Day Invasion, June 6, 1944 (Gault, 2009). Marine Corps commandants General John Archer Lejeune, a Louisiana State University graduate, and General Robert Barrow hail from southeast Louisiana. Sherian Grace Cadoria, the nation’s first black woman to earn the rank of U.S. Army general is a graduate of Southern University in Baton Rouge and is originally from Marksville, Louisiana (Byrne et al., 2006).

There are three primary military installations in Louisiana: Barksdale Airforce Base in Bossier City, the Army’s Fort Polk training center near Leesville, Louisiana, and the Belle Chase Naval Facility near New Orleans, which was temporarily moved following Hurricane Katrina. These facilities employ thousands of military and civilian personnel. Overall, the Department of
Defense expenditures and economic impact on the state is $11.5 billion annually (Louisiana Public Square, 2007).

The Louisiana National Guard has roots that date back to the 18th century French and Spanish militias of colonial Louisiana. In the first Gulf War, Louisiana had the highest number of Guardsmen serving, per capita of any state. In the Global War Against Terror, approximately 9,000 Guardsmen have been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan; this number does not include other Louisiana-based personnel from the Marines, Navy, Air Force and Army who have been deployed (Louisiana Public Square, 2007). Of the 4,479 U.S. servicemen casualties in Operation Iraqi Freedom, 604 were from Louisiana. U.S. servicemen casualties for Operation Enduring Freedom total nearly 2,000 with 133 from Louisiana (Iraq Coalition Casualty Count, 2011).

Louisiana’s involvement in the war is not only through the service and sacrifices of service members overseas. Armored vehicles destined for Iraq are produced in Louisiana (Louisiana Public Square, 2007). Thousands of armed forces personnel from across the country have trained at the Army Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk. This training involves interaction with local civilians, insurgents, militia members, coalition military personnel and government and non-government representatives. Fort Polk provides realistic exposure to the type of urban warfare that U.S. service members can expect to experience including training exercises with foreign-language speakers. (Fort Polk, 2010).

Since the Civil War, the South has maintained a fascination with military traditions. Geography, frontier conditions, slavery, and cultural notions of honor caused the South to develop into a remarkably militaristic society, fond of military display, preoccupied with war and the concept of martial glory, and holding up military service and military training as honorable activities for males (Andrew, 2001). Beginning with the American Revolution, southerners have been among the first to volunteer for military service for their country (Wilson, 1990). This
southern military tradition is personified on many public and private campuses throughout the
South, including several of the institution sites selected for this study. These institutions have
rich military histories of officer training, military curriculum, visible monuments dedicated to
war and soldiers, and place particular emphasis on student involvement in patriotic activities.
These cultural elements are explored with an emphasis on how they influence higher education
in Louisiana.

The development of the southern military tradition and its influence on the culture of
Louisiana colleges and universities is rooted in the tradition of military instruction (Andrew,
2001). The tradition of military instruction on American civilian college campuses began in 1818
when Captain Alden Patridge, a former superintendent at West Point, established the American
Literary, Scientific, and Military Academy, which later became Norwich University (Allardice,
1997; Andrew, 2001). The idea of military instruction on civilian college campuses quickly
spread to other institutions, including the Virginia Military Academy, the Citadel, and the
University of Tennessee (Andrew, 2001). The Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 further reinforced
this tradition by specifying the inclusion of instruction in military tactics in the curriculum of
land grant schools; Louisiana State University (LSU) was such an institution (Thelin, 2004).

Louisiana State University’s military education history is grounded in the antebellum
traditions of the Virginia Military Institute and the Citadel and the powerful cultural icon of the
Confederate soldier. In 1860, William Sherman, under the auspices of the Louisiana General
Assembly, opened a military academy near Pineville, Louisiana (Andrew, 2001). Less than two
years later, the academy was forced to close after most of the students enlisted for service in the
Civil War. When the war ended in 1865, David Boyd was commissioned to reopen and rebuild
the military academy. The school was moved to Baton Rouge, Louisiana in 1869 after the
original site was destroyed by fire. The name of the institution was officially changed to
Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College. Although Sherman served only one year as the primary administrator of the original Louisiana military academy, he is credited with establishing LSU’s military discipline and traditions, which were influenced by his West Point education (Andrew, 2001). Regardless of name and location changes, LSU students and alumni embraced the military tradition as part of the campus culture. Drills took place at dawn while students lived in barracks and wore uniforms (Andrew, 2001). While current students no longer wear uniforms or engage in drill practices, LSU continues to produce a group of students who support and participate in the military tradition (Davis, 2001).

The military tradition at historically Black colleges and universities evolved differently than that of predominately White institutions; this is particularly evident when comparing the military experiences of LSU and Southern University (Andrew, 2001). Southern University and Agricultural and Mechanical College (Southern) had its beginning in New Orleans, Louisiana in 1880 when a group of Black politicians petitioned the Louisiana State Constitutional Convention to establish a college for African Americans. The petition resulted in the creation of Southern University by the passage of the ACT 87 of the Louisiana General Assembly (Southern University, 2006). The passage of the Morrill Act of 1890, known also as the second Morrill Act, provided for the establishment of an agricultural and mechanical institution for people of color and led to the reorganization of Southern as a land grant institution. The Morrill Act of 1890 did not explicitly provide funding for resources needed for military training at Black land grant colleges and universities. For those few institutions that chose to incorporate military education, funding for uniforms and weapons for military training were scarce (Thelin, 2004; Andrew, 2003). Further, White politicians feared Black military training and denied funding whenever possible (Andrew, 2001). As a result, Southern did not incorporate military features until after World War I and the creation of the Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC).
The National Defense Act of 1916 merged the National Guard and the Army Reserve under the umbrella of the Regular Army. The legislation provided for mandatory military instruction at colleges and universities under the Reserve Officers’ Training Corp. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, many military training programs across the country were declining in popularity. This is largely attributed to the antiwar movement (Cox, 2006). Southern colleges and universities, however, experienced less resistance to military training than northern institutions (Cox, 2006). In May 1969, LSU’s Board of Supervisors voted to make ROTC participation voluntary for students. Other Louisiana institutions soon followed suit with Southern’s chancellor announcing that ROTC participation would move from compulsory to voluntary four months later. This is the form common on campuses today.

Southern’s ROTC program quickly established itself as a major producer of African American Army officers. Between 1948 and 1960, the Jaguar Battalian produced over two hundred Army lieutenants (Vincent, 1980). By the end of the 1990s, Southern produced nine graduates who ultimately earned the rank of General making Southern the most successful African American military training program in the country (Dabbs, 1997). Southern’s commitment to military training is explained by the relationship between its institutional mission of social uplift and first class citizenship and how military training and discipline was perceived by Black leaders and college administrators to promote organizational and leadership skills among African American youth (Cox, 2006).

While the idea and practice of a traditional military education has changed significantly at LSU and Southern over the years, the military tradition continues to thrive. War monuments, alumni activities, and the ROTC programs aid in keeping the spirit of the military tradition alive. The campus physical attributes, established practices, and celebratory events influence the
current institutional culture and may have implications for student veterans’ transition experiences.

Institutional Culture

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (2005) reports that there are 4,391 institutions of higher education in the United States including public and private schools, two year and four year colleges, research universities, military academies, historically Black colleges, Hispanic serving institutions, women’s colleges, religious institutions, and professional schools. This offers great variety for students choosing to pursue higher education. Two-year colleges, for instance, provide access alternatives to four-year colleges for students who may face multiple challenges, including limited financial resources, limited academic preparation, skill deficiencies, and geographic restrictions. Degree completion results in a student earning an associate’s degree or a certificate for a particular field (Henry, Wills, & Nixon, 2005).

The expectations that students have regarding their college experience vary by institution type (Henry, Wills, & Nixon, 2005). Each institution has its own culture with institutional culture defined as the collective, mutually shaping pattern of institution history, mission, physical settings, norms, traditions, values, practices, beliefs, and assumptions that guide the behavior of individuals and groups in college or university settings (Kuh & Whitt, 1988). The culture of the institution can be strong or weak, consistent or inconsistent, and it can inhibit, as well as facilitate, institutional development and effectiveness. Myths, legends, stories, and symbols develop over time and inspire a sense of loyalty and community (Birnbaum, 1988).

Students learn the culture of institution through their interactions with others. Students enter college with an idea of the norms and must make sense of those norms in the context of their new experiences. Weidman’s (1989) model of undergraduate socialization emphasizes student background characteristics as critical factors in understanding undergraduate
socialization. Weidman (1989) focuses on student background characteristics representing students’ academic abilities, goals, values, and socioeconomic statuses. Weidman’s (1989) model suggests that college socialization affects an individual’s post-college outcomes including career choices, aspirations, values, and lifestyle preferences.

Institutional culture impacts student engagement, student development, student behavior, and student learning. For instance, students enrolled in private colleges are more likely to expect to have a more engaging college experience and participate in activities such as student organizations and study abroad. At a larger, public institution it is easier for a student to not engage and go unnoticed (Henry, Wills, & Nixon, 2005).

Student engagement is the most important factor in student learning and personal development and is defined as the quality of effort students devote to educationally purposeful activities that contribute to desired outcomes (Astin, 1993; Pascarelllo & Terenzini, 1991). The interaction between a student and a faculty member and the student’s peers related to substantive topics and the use of institutional resources are important elements of student engagement (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Kuh, Hu, and Vesper (2000) suggest that certain student background characteristics, level of parental education, academic preparation, years in college, major field, and the perceptions of the college environment interact in complex way to shape student engagement. Student veterans have unique background characteristics and different experiences than traditional students. Like traditional students, it is critical that student veterans become engaged with the institution. Little, however, is known about how student veterans engage with an institution or the factors that contribute to student veteran engagement. Recent studies have highlighted what student veterans can expect from specific institutions but there is no known instrument that measures student veteran engagement or research that addresses this idea.
New college students enter their institutions, regardless of type or institution culture, with expectations for every aspect of college life (Howard, 2005). These expectations are based on their understanding of past experiences. Most entering students generally have a good idea of what many aspects of the college experience will be like (Moneta & Kuh, 2005). Student veterans entering college for the first time, as well as student veterans returning after experiencing military service, have specific expectations about college life. Summerlot, Green, and Parker (2009) identify three types of campus cultures to explain what student veterans can expect to experience from college campuses: supportive, ambivalent, and challenging. A supportive campus is typically one that has strong military ties, either located near a military base or offers an active ROTC program, and is a land grant institution. On this type of campus, veterans generally are very open and do not feel the need to hide their military affiliation. Veterans feel supported as a result of an adequately staffed Veterans Affairs office, policies that address the needs of student veterans, programs for veterans, and readily identifiable faculty and staff members who are also veterans. Mississippi State University serves as a strong example of supportive campus. This land grant institution has a formalized transition assistance program for student veterans and an active ROTC program.

The ambivalent campus is mostly found at regional institutions or commuter campuses (Summerlot, Green, & Parker, 2009). The ambivalent campus allows student veterans to blend in easily, remaining hidden if necessary. Student veterans often feel disconnected from their peers and typically seek involvement with off-campus veteran organizations (Summerlot, Green, & Parker, 2009). These student veterans receive little recognition and minimal campus support. The majority of regional public institutions in Louisiana can be classified as ambivalent because they lack formalized programs and services beyond that of financial aid for veterans. It is not uncommon, however, for these same schools to be classified as veteran or military friendly. The
standards by which these designations are given examine admission processes and the ease for accessing financial aid. They do not necessarily consider the institution’s assistance with transition, medical or mental health care, or assistance beyond the first year.

The challenging campus describes the institution with a history of political upheaval and strong anti-military movements (Summerlot, Green, & Parker, 2009). Student veterans at these institutions often do not identify as veterans because they fear how others may react. They keep their veteran identity hidden as a means of protecting themselves from criticism (Summerlot, Green, & Parker, 2009). In the 1970s during the Vietnam War, Kent State and Jackson State would have been classified as challenging campuses for student veterans as a result of the student shootings that occurred during May 1970. Today, Kent State is recognized as a military friendly school and operates a Center for Adult and Veteran Services that addresses such issues as veteran suicide, offers a veteran living learning community, and supports a student veterans’ club for male and female veterans.

There is a need to discover student veterans’ beliefs and expectations about higher education. This should be foremost in a higher education professional’s mind as the educational environment is designed and activities and services are created to engage student veterans and produce the desired educational outcome.

In terms of student veteran transition at colleges and universities in Louisiana, the southern military tradition and its cultural implications must be considered. On the surface, it appears that the cultural underpinnings of Louisiana military history and the southern military tradition would create veteran supportive or ambivalent campus environments. The state’s shared belief that military service is an honorable career choice or pre-college activity for males combined with the state’s culture and pro-military history would lead one to assume that state institutions would not be classified as challenging. However, because the experiences of
Louisiana student veterans are undocumented, it is unknown whether their expectations about
campus life are consistent with their actual experiences as students on Louisiana campuses. This
phenomenon warrants further exploration.

Contemporary Student Veterans

Since September 11, 2001, 1.6 million veterans have served in a combat environment and
will become eligible for New G.I. Bill assistance (Radford, 2009). The New G.I. Bill will make
higher education an option for many of the veterans who choose to pursue an education upon
their return to civilian life. Unfortunately, only a handful of published studies address the
transition experiences of contemporary student veterans in higher education (Cook & Kim, 2009,
Radford, 2009; DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008). This lack of data prohibits higher
education professionals from further defining the current cohort of student veterans and
addressing their needs on college campuses. While the research may be limited, what is available
provides a sketch of contemporary student veterans and serves as a beginning to identify their
needs in higher education. The following serves as a summary and review of the existing body of
research on contemporary student veterans.

Under the New G.I. Bill, veterans have the option of attending the most expensive public
institution in the state which means that student veterans are present on almost every campus,
regardless of the type of institution (i.e., public or private, four year or two year,). For the 2007-
2008 academic year, 43% of student veterans attended two-year public colleges, while 21%
attended four year public institutions. Private for profit and nonprofit colleges each had
approximately 13% of the total population (Field, 2009). Additionally, the largest veteran
populations are centered in the South and the Midwest regions of the United States (U.S. Census,
2000). The veteran population is most concentrated in rural and non-metropolitan communities
Institutions in the South and the Midwest, then, can anticipate larger student veteran populations as can community colleges and regional institutions.

Student veterans share many of the same demographic characteristics as nontraditional undergraduates, though they are not as likely to be female, and are often considered a subpopulation of nontraditional undergraduates (Radford, 2009). Cook and Kim (2009) report that during the 2007-2008 academic year, 85% of student veterans were aged 24 or older and were more likely to be non-white than veterans in general and traditional undergraduates.

Women represented 27% of these student veterans (Cook & Kim, 2009). There is an unprecedented number of women with experience in combat situations (Vance & Miller, 2009). Because of the new phenomenon of women in combat situations, little available research exists to better understand their specific needs upon their return to college campuses. The experiences for female contemporary student veterans are unique but beyond the scope of this study.

Wars are traumatic and life changing for the soldiers who participate in them (Lifton, 1992). Student veterans who experience wartime conflict come to college expecting to be supported and honored for their service (Summerlot, Green, & Parker, 2009). Because of the unique experience of service in the military during wartime and the high expectations about life on campus upon return, OIF and OEF student veterans face many challenges during their campus transition. Many find it difficult to manage the financing of their education, handle time constraints, transition from military life to civilian life, and overcome bureaucratic obstacles (Radford, 2009). However, student veterans are not just adjusting to the transition from military life to civilian life; they are also adjusting to life as a college student. This transition can be problematic for all students who have been out of the classroom for a significant period of time (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008).
Student veterans encounter numerous cultural barriers on college campuses. Generally the most evident cultural barriers are the lack of structure in daily campus life and the easily identifiable chain of command that the student veteran is accustomed to from the military setting. Often, it is difficult for them to relate to other students, faculty, and staff because of their military experience (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008). Contemporary faculty and staff members are less likely than earlier generations to have personally experienced military or wartime service. It is more likely that faculty and staff members are well intentioned but have little or no experience with military culture (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). Some student veterans report feeling that colleges and universities do not understand their challenges or the military mindset (Radford, 2009). Students without military experiences or backgrounds often have different perspectives from student veterans and often ask inappropriate questions of their student veteran classmates (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008).

In an effort to avoid awkward questions and conversations with other students about their wartime experiences, student veterans may hide or remain neutral, not drawing attention to their military experience. This is referred to as “blending.” (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008). According to DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell (2008), student veterans prefer to remain hidden or anonymous about their military experience. These students try to stay hidden from faculty members as well. Student veterans will try to avoid being looked upon as a spokesperson for their subgroup. When faculty members criticize the military and military personnel during the course of a lecture, for instance, it creates an unwelcoming environment for student veterans which causes them to become more deeply hidden and disconnected from important campus support systems (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008; Hermann, Raybeck, & Wilson, 2008).

Student veterans frequently seek connection with other student veterans or faculty and staff members who are also veterans (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008; Rumann &
A student organization or involvement with ROTC provides this campus connection. Off campus involvement occurs through involvement with veterans’ organizations typically identified through the state or local veterans’ affairs office. Student veteran organizations typically organize as all inclusive without regard to rank, branch of service, or time in service (Summerlot, Green, & Parker, 2009). Such organizations generally provide support services and campus programs designed to assist the student veteran in reorienting to campus life. ROTC programs also provide support for many student veterans. However, the level of commitment required by ROTC membership deters student veterans who do not choose the military as a career (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). When a campus does not have a student organization for student veterans or an ROTC program, the student veteran must go off campus for connection which leads to a lack of engagement on campus. This lack of connection negatively impacts a student’s persistence (Schlossberg, 1989).

Many student veterans from OIF and OEF return with war related injuries, some hidden and some not, further complicating the transition process. More than 18% of service men and women returning from Afghanistan and Iraq are suffering from psychological problems such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and social adjustment. Student veterans may also suffer from physical problems, such as amputations, burns, blindness, multi organ system damage, and traumatic brain injuries. Female veterans are most often treated for PTSD, hypertension, depression, and sexual trauma (Vance & Miller, 2009; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2007). All of these challenges can hinder daily functioning in and out of the classroom environment.

Student veterans are unlikely to seek assistance for disability related concerns. Many of these student veterans with disabilities do not self-identify or seek accommodations for their disabilities on campus (Church, 2009; Shackelford, 2009). This is largely the result of their
experiences with military culture. Military service members learn either formally or informally during military training that acknowledging, discussing, or reporting a personal problem will result in a negative reaction from superiors and peers (Shackelford, 2009). As such, a student veteran with a disability may choose not to self-identify when the disability is hidden from others. This is often true in cases involving traumatic brain injury and PTSD, which may be a source of significant embarrassment for the student veteran (Shackelford, 2009). It is also possible for student veterans to have other psychological or physiological problems, the effects of which they may not recognize or understand (Bleiberg, Leskin, Sachs, Pollack, Haddad, Reinhard, et al.; 2008).

It is critical for higher education professionals to understand student veterans’ experiences and contexts. While existing research provides a sketch of contemporary student veterans, more research is needed to fully define the current population. The literature on nontraditional student populations can be used to make generalizations about student veterans who are often considered a nontraditional student subpopulation.

Nontraditional Students

Defining and making generalizations about nontraditional students is difficult. Many incorrectly assume that age is the primary determinant of nontraditional classification (Dickerson & Stiefer, 2006). Nontraditional students, however, are generally identified by their identification with one or more of seven traits: delayed enrollment in college; part-time attendance; works full time (35 hours or more per week); financially independent (eligibility for financial aid purposes); dependents other than spouse; single parent; or GED, high school completion certificate, or no high school diploma (Choy, 2002). Evelyn (2002) identifies the three most common nontraditional traits as financial independence, part-time attendance, and delayed enrollment. While it may be true that traditional students represent a majority of enrolled
students, many of these students become nontraditional during the course of their college careers after a life transition that leads the student to absorb a nontraditional factor into his or her life. Likely, traditional students who become nontraditional are experiencing events that necessitate studying part-time or leaving and then returning; however, data on this point are sorely lacking (Dickerson & Stiefer, 2006).

Dickerson and Stiefer (2006) explain that the nontraditional student must often contend with feelings of isolation. It is likely that they will experience feelings of incompetence and inadequacy in the academic setting. Nontraditional students often do not have the self-confidence needed to study and learn successfully (Steltenpohol & Shipton, 1986).

Nontraditional students have different experiences and expectations than traditional students. Nontraditional students are experiencing life transitions that can be confusing and stressful (Horn, 1997). The anxiety caused by these transitions can significantly impact their performance in the academic environment (Dickerson & Stiefer, 2006). According to Ross-Gordon (2003), nontraditional students experience an initial lack of confidence grounded in the fear that they are not as prepared as students who did not part from the formal learning environment. This fear can be so overwhelming that some nontraditional students decide to forego any academic challenges (Fisher, 1997).

Nontraditional students have responsibilities and expectations off campus that can limit their involvement on campus (Dickerson & Stiefer, 2006). Many times, the expectations imposed by the nontraditional student are unrealistic. According to Murray et al. (1990), the expectations, scheduling demands, and lack of campus involvement contribute to high attrition among nontraditional students.

The literature on adult learner development and transitions helps understand the motivations and barriers associated with nontraditional students. Adult development theory
provides insight on the various psychological experiences and sociocultural perspectives of this population of students. Knowledge of adult life events and related transitions provide context and deepens awareness and understanding of nontraditional student populations and the student veteran subpopulation. Because the focus of this research is on how student veterans transition, reviewing the theory associated with adult life events and transitions is appropriate.

Theoretical Framework

Deployment to a combat zone represents a major life transition; returning and entering a collegiate environment is a major transition as well. Because of the notion of major life transition, the work of Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) serves as the theoretical framework for this study. Schlossberg (1984) developed the theory in 1981 and updated it again in 1984. Schlossberg et al. (1995) define transition as “any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (p. 27). Schlossberg et al. (1995) suggest that the significance and insignificance of events that occur relate to the extent of the transition the adult is facing. The meaning that individuals assign to an event or non-event is based on the type (anticipated, unanticipated, non-event), context (relationship to transition and the setting), and impact (alterations in daily life) to the event/non-event (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998; Schlossberg et al., 1995).

Anticipated events are those that can be predicted such as being deployed to a combat zone. Unanticipated events are ones that occur unexpectedly, such as a death or illness. A non-event is an expected transition that does not materialize. Military personnel experience non-events, for instance, when their orders to return home are cancelled or postponed.

The second component of the transition model addresses the transition process. According to Schlossberg et al. (1995), the readiness for change or transition depends on four factors that help adults cope with transition: self, situation, support, and strategies. It is important
that the individual not only has the tools to cope with the transition but also has the ability to use those coping skills appropriately (Weisenberg, 2001). Schlossberg et al. (1995) views this process as a series of “moving in,” “moving through,” and “moving out” phases. A student’s ability to deal with transition depends on his or her individual characteristics such as gender, age, health, ethnicity, and psychological resources. The situation includes trigger, timing, control, role change, duration, previous experience with a similar transition, concurrent stress, and assessment factors. The support factor refers to four types of social support: intimate relationships, family units, networks of friends, and institutions and communities. The self factor includes personal and demographic characteristics such as socioeconomic status, gender, and age. Psychological factors such as ego development and the degree of self-efficacy also affect the transition process. The final factor for coping with transitions is known as strategies. This part of the transition model consists of three categories (modify situation, control meaning, and manage stress in aftermath) and four coping modes (information seeking, direct action, inhibition of action, and intrapsychic behavior) (Evans et al., 1998).

The need for support from higher education professional during this transition is imperative. Schlossberg (1989) discusses the concepts of marginality and mattering to explain how institutional support impacts a student’s commitment to persist in college. Schlossberg (1989) defines marginality as “a sense of not fitting in” (p. 5). Feelings of marginality can heighten students’ feelings of irritability or depression when placed in a new environment or taking on new roles and their accompanying expectations.

Schlossberg (1989) defines mattering “our belief, right or wrong, that we matter to someone else” (p. 5). There are four dimensions to mattering: attention (a student feels noticed), importance (a student feels cared about), ego extension (a student feels that others will be proud of his or her accomplishments and understanding of his or her failures), and dependence (a
student feels needed) (Schlossberg, 1989). Schlossberg (1989) states that a student must feel as though they actually matter to the institution before they can feel capable of becoming involved in academic and social activities that ultimately lead to higher levels of persistence. The more support veterans receive the greater the likelihood that they will have a smooth transition to higher education and successfully matriculate (Ryan, 2010).

Being admitted to college or university does not guarantee graduation for students and this is particularly true for veterans. According to the U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs, only 6% of veterans deplete all the benefits of the GI Bill, even though 71% of veterans used at least a portion of their benefits (McBain, 2008). These statistics are a strong indicator that although many veterans pursue a higher education, most are not successful and do not earn a degree. Lack of support for student veterans may contribute significantly to the low degree completion rates (Ryan, 2010).

The concepts of marginality and mattering are particularly relevant to the student veteran who is transitioning from military to campus culture. As a military service member, the individual is socialized through rigorous training to fit in and become part of a team. Through this training, the military reinforces the four dimensions of mattering. On a college campus, in contrast to military culture, the socialization process is less in-depth and rigid. University attempts to support student veterans have a tendency to be less straight forward and this may lead student veterans to believe they are marginalized on campus.

However on campuses in the South with a strong military culture and tradition, student veterans may feel a stronger sense of mattering. This sense of mattering could be grounded in an institution’s military history. This has not been explored. More intense investigation of student veterans’ beliefs about marginality versus mattering is warranted.
Conclusion

In this chapter, five areas of literature related to the transition experiences of Louisiana’s student veterans were examined: military culture, Louisiana military history and the Southern military tradition, institutional culture, contemporary student veterans, and nontraditional students. The existing literature on contemporary student veterans combined with the literature on nontraditional students identified patterns of other student veterans’ experiences. These patterns suggest what a Louisiana student veteran may experience and expect from his college as well as existing challenges associated with transition. The literature on military culture, Louisiana military history and the Southern military tradition, and institutional culture paint a picture of the environment that Louisiana student veterans may experience, both on and off campus. These key pieces of literature provide direction for qualitative methodological decision making, specifically in focusing the research questions and in developing the interview protocol.

Further, Upcraft and Gardner (1989) argue that if institutions are to enhance student success, they must understand them and the environments into which they enter. The focus of this research is to document the transition process of student veterans from military life to campus life considering how the influences of regional culture and institutional type impact their environments. The work of Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) on adult transition and Schlossberg’s (1989) work on mattering versus marginality provide the theoretical framework.

To enhance student veteran success, institutions must develop a clear understanding of how student veterans’ transition processes operate and also discover what student veterans expect from the collegiate experience. For student veterans to have a successful transition experience, institutions must commit to providing programs and services that create maximum opportunities for them. This can be accomplished only with a knowledge and understanding of how student veterans experience transition.

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Finally, how regional culture and institutional culture impact student veteran success will be documented. Additionally, it will be essential for institutions to verify whether student veterans’ cultural expectations are congruent with their campus transition expectations as these expectations and experiences impact persistence. Given the information covered in the review of literature along with the theoretical framework, the research questions are further refined and emerge as the following:

1. How do contemporary student veterans navigate the transition from military life to campus life?

2. How does institutional type influence transition for student veterans?

3. Does regional culture, specifically the southern military tradition, influence student veteran transition?

These questions are the key research questions for this study.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This research focuses on the transition experiences of contemporary student veterans considering the cultural implications of Louisiana and military culture as well as the influence of military culture, training, and combat experience. The key research questions guiding this inquiry are:

(1) How do contemporary student veterans navigate the transition from military life to campus life?

(2) How does institution type influence transition for contemporary student veterans?

(3) Are the transition experiences of contemporary student veterans in Louisiana consistent with the cultural expectations of the southern military tradition?

These questions provide the focus for the research. Qualitative methods for data collection, including personal interviews and group observations, aid in understanding contemporary student veterans’ transition experiences.

Case study research involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system (Creswell, 2007). The case study method, and in particular the collective (multiple) case study design, offers researchers the ability to achieve a deep understanding of a specific phenomenon (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994). Case study research provides a richer, more vivid picture of the phenomenon under study than other analytic research methods (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). This research methodology is appropriate when a researcher wishes to obtain an in-depth understanding of a relatively small number of individuals, problems, or situations (Patton, 1990). According to Creswell (2007), case study is a good research approach when the cases are easily identifiable with boundaries and the researcher seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the cases or a comparison of several cases. Given the research questions guiding this study and the clear characteristics of the population under study, case study methodology is appropriate. For the purpose of this study, a “case” is defined as a
single, in-depth interview with a student veteran. This study is further defined as a collective case study as four institution sites are used.

In a collective case study design, the researcher examines multiple cases in one overall study. According to Johnson and Christensen (2007), studying multiple cases has several advantages. First, the cases can be compared for similarities and differences. Second, using multiple cases allows for theory development and aids in testing of existing theory. Third, multiple cases allow for generalizations about the results. There are several critical disadvantages to using multiple cases. When using multiple cases, the researcher may be limited in resources (e.g., time and money). This may impact the amount of depth and detail for each case.

Participants

Participants in this study are male student veterans enrolled at one of four higher education institutions in Louisiana: Baton Rouge Community College (BRCC), Louisiana State University (LSU), Southeastern Louisiana University (Southeastern), and Southern University A&M at Baton Rouge (Southern). Participants must meet the following criteria:

1. Served in the Iraq or Afghanistan conflicts between 2003 and 2010,
2. Graduated from a Louisiana high school,
3. Enrolled full time in one of the four institutions at the time of this study,
4. Completed one semester of college since return from military service, and
5. Not on active military duty.

Students receiving full military pay and benefits are excluded from this study. The focus is on student veterans who are exiting the military culture completely and entering the collegiate culture. Further, as the notion of the southern military tradition is a male focused idea, women will not be included in this study.
The institution sites included in this study are selected because of their proximity to one another (all are located within 50 miles in south Louisiana) and the representation of institution type: a community college, a regional institution, a Historically Black College/University, and a research university. The majority of the undergraduate population at each institution is composed primarily of Louisiana residents who likely have similar understandings of Louisiana and southern culture. This population characteristic is critical to the study as the influence of the regional cultural experiences and the southern military tradition are key concepts in this investigation.

The Carnegie Commission on Higher Education developed a classification of colleges and universities to support its program of research and policy analysis. This system of classification, derived from empirical data on colleges and universities, is the leading framework for describing institutional diversity in U.S. higher education (Carnegie Foundation, 2010). Classification by Carnegie institution type, admission requirements, and undergraduate enrollment for all four institutions are displayed in Table 1. Admission requirements were obtained from each institution’s enrollment management website. Enrollment data was confirmed by each institution through the budget office, chancellor’s office, registrar, or institution research department on April 9, 2010. As discussed in the review of literature, LSU and Southern have distinct, established military histories, offer military curriculum and ROTC programs. LSU offers Army and Air Force ROTC while Southern provides Army, Navy, and Air Force ROTC. The collegiate experience on each of these campuses is traditional with many co-curricular offerings and involvement opportunities for students as well as high profile athletic programs. The institutions are located in a metropolitan area of Louisiana and also offer residential living facilities on campus. The student population classification is traditional on each campus in this study.
Table 1
Research Sites by Institution Type, Admission Requirements, and Undergraduate Enrollment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution Type</th>
<th>Admission Requirements</th>
<th>Fall 2009 Enrollment</th>
<th>Spring 2010 Enrollment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BRCC</td>
<td>High school diploma, GED, or 2.0 CUM Transfer GPA</td>
<td>8,104</td>
<td>7,841</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeastern</td>
<td>Completion of Regents Core Curriculum, ACT of 21 or top 25% of class or high school GPA of 2.5, no more than one developmental course</td>
<td>15,160</td>
<td>14,117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern</td>
<td>High school GPA of 2.0 or ACT of 20 or top 50% of class, no more than 1 developmental course</td>
<td>7,631</td>
<td>7,186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LSU</td>
<td>Completed 18 units of college preparatory classes, 3.0 GPA, and ACT of 22</td>
<td>23,017</td>
<td>21,424</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Southeastern, a regional institution founded in 1925 in a rural area of south Louisiana, has a less well known military history. During World War II, many of the male students left the university to serve in the military. The deficit in male students was so significant that many classes were eliminated and remaining class meeting times were adjusted to allow more female students to continue attending while working in the agricultural community. At the end of the war, the university experienced a significant increase in enrollment resulting in the addition of new residence halls and classroom buildings. The War Memorial Student Union is the visual monument that commemorates the students who lost their lives while serving their country during World War II.

Until the late 1980s, Southeastern had an ROTC program but eventually this program was eliminated for fiscal reasons. In the mid 1990s, the Office of Adult, Commuter, and
Veterans Affairs was also closed for financial purposes. Today, the Office of Veterans Affairs, a department within Financial Aid, provides financial services for student veterans. The University Counseling Center offers the only counseling group for student veterans of the four institution sites in this study.

Baton Rouge Community College (BRCC), the youngest of the four institutions in this study, opened its doors in 1998 and offers two-year degree programs in a wide variety of disciplines. BRCC, a commuter school, is located near LSU and Southern. Although Southeastern and BRCC do not have ROTC programs, students may cross enroll at either LSU or Southern in order to participate in ROTC. In terms of support programs for student veterans outside of the Veterans Affairs offices within the Financial Aid unit, BRCC was the only institution of the four with an active student organization for student veterans at the start of this research. By the conclusion of the study, Southeastern and LSU also had active groups.

Sampling and Participant Recruitment

Qualitative research methods, such as interviews, are not designed to have statistically representative samples but samples based upon the nature of the study. Patton (2002) says “what would be ‘bias’ in statistical sampling, and therefore a weakness, becomes intended focus in qualitative sampling, and therefore a strength” (p. 230). The sampling method employed for this study is purposeful sampling utilizing snowball typology. This method is appropriate because the student veteran population is somewhat hidden and unknown on campuses. A key informant, likely a representative in the Veterans Affairs office within the Financial Aid department, on each of the four campuses will provide a list of student veterans who meet the participant criteria. Key informants have already been identified for each site. The researcher will recruit participants from the list provided by each key informant via email and/or personal contacts.
In qualitative research, sample size is contingent upon credibility and saturation (Patton, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility refers to the researcher’s effort in ensuring everything has been done to get the variation in sample that is reflective of the population. Saturation refers to the point at which the researcher feels new information is no longer emerging from participants and the responses become somewhat repetitive (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). Creswell (2007) suggests using no more than 4 or 5 cases in a single study and states that this number allows for identifying themes as well as for conducting cross-case theme analysis. For this study, the researcher will seek an equal number of male participants at each institution.

Table 2 summarizes the number of student veterans utilizing military benefits at each institution for the Fall 2009 and Spring 2010 semesters. It should be noted that these numbers include those students receiving Montgomery G.I. Bill benefits as well as New G.I. Bill benefits. Additionally, these numbers include male and female student veterans.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Students Receiving Military Benefits Fall 2009</th>
<th>Students Receiving Military Benefits Spring 2010</th>
<th>Approximate Percentage of Total Undergraduate Enrollment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BRCC</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeastern</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LSU</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>377</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Totals were obtained from the Office of Veterans Affairs at each institution in April 2010.*

Procedure and Interview Plan

Four to eight students from each institution will be interviewed for a total of 32 maximum cases. Each participant will be assigned a pseudonym and will be known only to the researcher. According to Maykut and Morehouse (1994), an interview is a purposeful discussion. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) add that interviews are “directed by one in order to get information from the other” (p. 93). Interviews vary in structure and may last thirty minutes to an hour.
(Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Predetermined questions or topics are used to guide the interview (Patton, 2002). Interview data is useful in many ways. First, interviews are excellent methods of gathering rich, detailed information (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Second, interviews allow the researcher the opportunity to seek immediate clarification and context about subjects for which little is known (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). For these reasons, interviewing has been selected as the appropriate method of data collection for this study.

To elicit authentic accounts of student veterans’ experiences, the researcher will conduct interviews using a semistructured protocol known as active interviewing (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). In terms of structure and formality, active interviewing falls between rigid-traditional scripting and the free form, such as narrative interviewing or story telling. The key to active interviewing is to gain rapport with respondents and avoid manipulating them or their answers. The interview questions are open-ended, thus allowing participants the freedom to tell their stories with minimal interference from the researcher. The entire interview script appears in Appendix A.

Initial individual interviews will last a minimum of one hour and will be conducted on the participant’s campus during regular college/university business hours to ensure access to campus counseling services if needed. These interviews begin once institutional review board approval has been received. All interviews will be audio recorded for accuracy. Rapport will be established at the start of the interview by explaining to the participants exactly what types of information will be discussed and in what ways the information will be shared. During this time, the researcher will ask if the participant would allow the interview to be recorded for accurate record analysis and reminded that individual responses will be kept confidential. Finally, because of the sensitive nature of the topics covered in the interview, the participants will be provided with resources for addressing any emotional needs or psychological concerns that may surface as
a result of the interview including contacts for counseling. These resources will include both community resources and institution specific resources. If at any point during the interview, the researcher, who is a certified counselor, or the participant determines that the interview has become too emotionally stressful the interview will stop and the researcher will assist the participant in immediately accessing a mental health counselor on campus.

A second round of interviews will be conducted based on questions developed in the first interview series. As such, the questions for the second interview will be tailored to each participant. Follow up interviews will be conducted on university campuses during regular university business hours in order to ensure access to counseling if needed and will be audio recorded.

Validity Enhancing Strategies

There are various types of strategies to enhance validity in qualitative research. For this study, the researcher will utilize the following validity strategies: low-inference descriptors, triangulation, participant feedback, and reflexivity. Engaging in these validation strategies ensures an accurate depiction of the participants’ experiences (Creswell, 2007). Direct quotations from interview participants are examples of low-inference descriptors. Audio recordings of the interviews will be transcribed verbatim for analysis and this ensures that low-inference descriptors are used. Triangulation, the idea that the data comes from multiple sources, will be achieved in this study because multiple participants will be interviewed at four different sites (Creswell, 2007). The researcher will use participant feedback throughout the interview process for verification and may also contact participants following the completion of the interviews if additional clarification or insight is warranted. Finally, the researcher will engage in reflexivity, which is defined as critical self-reflection, to address and disclose any biases and predispositions that may affect the research process and conclusions. Johnson and Christensen (2004) explain
that researcher bias tends to result from selective observation and recording information and from allowing the researcher’s personal values and perspectives to affect how the data is interpreted. The researcher may have several biases for this study as the researcher is not a member of the military and does not have personal experience with military culture. Additionally, the researcher is a disability service provider and a trained counselor. These roles could potentially alter the data collection process or the interpretation of data because of the researcher’s existing knowledge base.

Data Analysis

Marshall and Rossman (2006) state that qualitative data analysis includes five modes:

1. Organizing the data,
2. Generating categories, themes, and patterns,
3. Testing the emergent hypothesis against the data,
4. Searching for explanations of the data, and
5. Writing the report.

Upon the completion of all interviews, the audio recordings and field notes taken during and after each interview will be transcribed. Following transcription, I will analyze each case individually searching for patterns. After within case analysis is complete, I will begin a cross analysis that will include selecting categories and looking for within-group similarities coupled with inter-group differences. The similarities and differences between each case will be highlighted. The cross case analysis will be written in third person to allow for equal detail and attention across each case. This is necessary so that the uniqueness of each case is not absorbed into generalizations made across all of the cases.

The primary means of data analysis in qualitative research is coding. Coding refers to organizing and making sense of textual information resulting from a study by determining
themes or patterns in the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Open coding, also referred to as inductive coding, is a term used to describe the determination of themes from within the data (Patton, 2002). It is a common method of analyzing qualitative data, specifically interview data with the researcher identifying themes and sub-themes within the data.

Once the theme identification and coding of data is complete, three other analysis methods will be employed to ensure that researcher biases do not impede the identification of themes. First, the researcher will employ the method of emergent understandings. Marshall and Rossman (1999) suggest the researcher revisit earlier data to ensure that nothing was excluded as new patterns emerge during the identification of themes and coding. Next, the researcher will use personal memos to keep track of thoughts about the data. This will assist the researcher in separating personal reactions from the analysis when appropriate (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Finally, the researcher will conduct negative case analysis. This strategy involves reviewing the data for information that conflicts with identified themes (LeCompt & Preissle, 1993; Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Conclusion

The following chapters will consist of case studies, cross case analysis, and implications and conclusions. The case studies will construct the experiences of contemporary student veterans as they negotiate the transitions between cultures: military, regional, and institution. The cross case analysis will display how the transition process works across institution type, culture, and individual student experience. The implications and concluding chapters will discuss specific ways higher education professionals can create supportive environments for student veterans specific to their regional culture and institutional type. The interview protocol, consent forms, letters to key informants, institutional review board forms, and resources for the study participants are included in the appendices.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore and document the transition experiences of male student veterans at Louisiana colleges and universities who served in Iraq and/or Afghanistan between 2003 and 2010. The following research questions guided this study:

(1) How do contemporary student veterans navigate the transition from military life to campus life?

(2) How does institution type influence transition for contemporary student veterans?

(3) Are the transition experiences of contemporary student veterans in Louisiana consistent with the cultural expectations of the southern military tradition?

Interviews using a semi-structured protocol served as the primary means of data collection. Students from Baton Rouge Community College, Louisiana State University, Southern University, and Southeastern Louisiana University who met the research criteria were sought as participants. Observations of student veteran club meetings provided supplemental data. This chapter presents participant profiles and the findings from the data analysis. It begins with a description of the participants and the chronological steps of analysis. Finally, a description of the themes with supporting evidence is provided.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted in late November 2010 with a former Southeastern student who enrolled as a law student at Southern University. The student, classified as a graduate student, is an Army veteran who served in Iraq. As this student did meet the participant criteria, his responses are not included in the findings. The pilot study proved useful, however, in clarifying terminology and strengthening the interview protocol. For instance, in demographic information on the protocol the researcher asked respondents for their classification, meaning
military classification. The correct term was rank and this, as well as other terminology, was corrected as a result of the pilot study.

Interviews

Five participants from Louisiana State University and five participants from Southeastern Louisiana University were interviewed. The researcher made numerous unsuccessful attempts to identify participants from Southern University and Baton Rouge Community College over a five month period. The researcher contacted the Office of Veterans Affairs and the Office of Disability Services at each institution, the student veterans club at Baton Rouge Community College, and the NROTC program at Southern University for assistance with participant recruitment and identification. Flyers were distributed at each campus and participant recruitment emails were sent to professionals at each institution to forward to potential participants. The researcher also made numerous visits to Southern University and Baton Rouge Community College to meet with a representative from the Veterans Affairs office. The attempt at Southern University proved unsuccessful. After meeting with the Coordinator of Veterans Affairs at Baton Rouge Community College, the researcher learned that the student leaders/officers for the veterans club had been deployed or were no longer enrolled. As a result, the group was not operational during the 2010/2011 academic year. The Coordinator of Veterans Affairs was willing to distribute recruitment materials but felt that the majority of student veterans at his institutional would not be willing to speak with a researcher. In consultation with the researcher’s dissertation committee chairperson, Baton Rouge Community College and Southern University were ultimately eliminated from the study due to time restrictions and inability to identify participants.

The researcher identified participants at Southeastern Louisiana University using a master list of all veterans accessing military benefits during the Fall of 2010 provided by the Office of
Institutional Research. Participants were sent a participant recruitment email in December 2010. Ten student veterans responded indicating an interest to participate in the study and their availability for interviews. Following a pre-screening over the telephone to ensure that respondents met the participant criteria, interviews were scheduled and conducted on campus from December 2010 through February 2011.

Participant identification at Louisiana State University began with a key informant, a Marine Captain who maintained an email database of Marines throughout Louisiana. The key informant sent a mass recommendation email endorsing the research study to over 100 Marine veterans. The researcher was then contacted privately by student veterans. The veterans were pre-screened via telephone conversations to verify participant criteria were met and interviews were held December 2010 through March 2011. Four interviews with Louisiana State University student veterans were held on campus, one was held at a coffee shop near campus.

Interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and were guided by a semi-structured protocol that explored the nature of the student veterans’ transition experiences from the military to college. While the protocol was structured in order to have comparable responses for analysis purposes, the nature of the interview and the protocol itself allowed for participants to provide additional responses or themes that had not been predetermined. All interviews were transcribed along with field and observation notes shortly after the completion of each individual interview. Pseudonyms were used for all participants and identifying information was removed from transcribed data to protect participant anonymity. All audio recordings and transcribed data were stored in secure locations at all times when not being analyzed. Anonymity and confidentiality provisions were also addressed as part of the Institutional Review Board approval process and the informed consent document.
Observations

From the start of the research process through the Spring 2011 semester, a student veterans’ club organized at Southeastern Louisiana University. The group began meeting at the end of the Fall 2010 semester and the researcher was invited to attend two meetings. The researcher also received an invitation to attend the LSU Student Veterans of America meeting in February 2011. The researcher compiled field notes from all meeting observations. It should be noted that none of the Southeastern Louisiana University interview participants were affiliates of the student veterans club at the time of their interviews, while four of the five student veterans interviewed at Louisiana State University are active members the of LSU Student Veterans of America.

Data Analysis

The data for this study is primarily from the interviews conducted with each of the interview participants, observation data serves as secondary data. Each interview was audio recorded with participant permission and transcribed verbatim, as transcription is one of the primary sources for data analysis when interviews are used in qualitative studies (Esterberg, 2002). Throughout each interview, the researcher noted observations, thoughts, and feelings as they arose to assist with data analysis.

Once all interviews were completed and transcribed, and any observation data was recorded, the researcher completed a contact summary sheet for each participant. The contact summary sheet is a single sheet containing the following questions:

1. What are the main themes or issues in this contact?
2. Which research questions did the contact touch on most centrally?
3. What new themes or hunches were suggested by the contact?
The contact summary sheet aided in organizing the data and provided an overall summary of the key points in each contact (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The contact sheet also proved helpful when deciding which participants would be re-interviewed. Subsequent reviews followed to identify general patterns and potential themes. At the completion of this process, the researcher determined that four participants would be interviewed a second time.

Steven, Greg, James, and Bryan were interviewed a second time. These four participants were selected because they were all Marines who had experienced front line combat in Iraq. James, Steven, and Bryan were enrolled in college prior to their military experience while Greg was entering a college campus for the first time. Steven and Greg completed some online coursework during their service period. During the second interview, the researcher was able to explore their transition and academic experiences deeper and also clarified several ideas that emerged from the data related to the notion of the southern military tradition. Some interviews were conducted in person and some were conducted over the telephone as a result of time restrictions.

Data Saturation

Data saturation is ultimately a subjective determination on behalf of the researcher; however, the researcher worked with her dissertation committee chairperson to verify saturation (Creswell, 2007). Multiple interviews and multiple interview rounds ensure data are saturated, thus the researcher purposely re-interviewed three participants in order to clarify existing data and confirm saturation (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Data saturation began to occur after six interviews in this study.

Data Triangulation

In triangulation, the researcher uses multiple sources and different methods to collect qualitative data (Creswell, 2007). In this study, multiple participants were interviewed and the
insights gained through observations of student veteran club meetings are also referenced.

Evidence gained from initial interviews is also further corroborated by re-interviewing four participants.

**Participant Profiles**

All participants in this study identify as Caucasian and have an average age of 24 years. Four participants served in the Marines, four served in the Army, and two served in the Navy. Seven of the ten participants attended college prior to enlisting in the military with two having earned associate degrees at community colleges. Four of the ten completed some online coursework during their service through universities outside Louisiana or for profit institutions. Six are classified as seniors, one as a junior, two as sophomores, and one as a freshman. The following ten participant profiles provide background information for each interview participant. The profiles are not detailed descriptions of participants’ lived experiences but briefly discuss each participant in terms of their family, military, college, and personal backgrounds. Each set of profiles begins with a table summary of the participants’ profiles separated by institution.

Table 3
**Student Veteran Participants at Southeastern Louisiana University**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Branch of Military Service</th>
<th>Military Rank/Job</th>
<th>College Classification</th>
<th>Self-Reported Grade Point Average</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bryan</td>
<td>Marine</td>
<td>E5 Sergeant/Sniper</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trent</td>
<td>Navy</td>
<td>E4 Electronics Technician</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt</td>
<td>Army</td>
<td>E3</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>Navy</td>
<td>E5 Avionics Technician</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zeke</td>
<td>Army</td>
<td>E4 Military Police</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bryan

Bryan graduated from high school in May 2003 and enrolled at Southeastern Louisiana University for the Fall 2003 academic semester. He enjoyed a traditional college experience and pledged a fraternity completing one full year of college before deciding to enlist in the Marine Corp. He returned to Southeastern after completing his service for the Summer 2008 semester. The following Fall and Spring semesters he attended Louisiana State University and declared Construction Management as his major. Bryan returned to Southeastern in the Summer of 2009 and changed his major to General Business Management. At the time of this interview, Bryan was classified as a senior, was attending college full-time, and recently started his own business. He spends a significant amount of his personal time working with the Wounded Warriors Program and recently opened his own business.

Bryan enlisted in the Marine Corp without consulting any family members or friends. Bryan explains, “I mean I knew there were people my age overseas serving and I just didn’t find college right for me at that time. I’ve always been interested in that kind of work and you know one day I just up and decided to go and actually sign up.” Bryan’s mother was initially shocked and upset about his decision to enlist, especially during wartime. Bryan reports, “for like a straight week my mom cried but then it turned in to total support.” Bryan served in the Marine Corp from May of 2004 until May of 2008. He earned the rank of Sergeant and worked as a sniper serving one tour of Afghanistan and two tours of Iraq.

Trent

Trent graduated from high school in 1998 and joined the Navy immediately. He decided to postpone college because he felt he wasn’t ready and didn’t want to burden his family financially. Trent explains his decision, “I was smart enough to know how stupid I was. And I knew I wanted to go to college but my family didn’t have a whole lot of money so I wasn’t going
to ask them to pay for anything. My grades from high school were good and I could have gotten some partial scholarships but basically it boiled down to I knew if I was going to go away to college at that point I wouldn’t be able to concentrate.” Trent has a family history of military service. His grandfather was a Marine during the Korean War and his brother recently enlisted in the Air Force. Trent also had a strong desire to travel and see the world and felt the Navy would give him the greatest travel opportunities.

Trent was at sea on September 11, 2001. The crew’s orders were immediately changed and they were sent to Afghanistan. He completed his service in 2004 and at that time his rank was E4, or Petty Officer 3rd Class. Trent started attending Southeastern Louisiana University in the Spring of 2005.

Matt

Matt is 31 years old, divorced, and the father of two young children who live with him. He owns his own business and attends college full time. He delayed attending college after graduating from high school for two years and worked in his family’s business. At age twenty, he decided to join the National Guard. He started Basic Training in August 2001 and had not completed the process when September 11, 2001 occurred. After Basic Training, Matt returned home and began taking classes at Southeastern Louisiana University using National Guard benefits. He deployed for Afghanistan in May of 2003 and returned in early 2004.

Matt and his family moved into a new home shortly after he returned from Afghanistan and he returned to college. He vaguely considered officer candidate school after a conversation with his Lieutenant Commander but ultimately decided not to re-enlist or pursue that opportunity. He explains, “I’m really not an army person. The only reason I signed up for this stuff was for school.” Ironically, once his service requirement in the National Guard was fulfilled he received no further military education benefits. He reported that based on his deployment time
and self-imposed re-acclimation period with his family, he was never able to utilize his school benefits. Trent is now classified as a senior and majoring in History. He would like to attend graduate school in the future.

Jacob

Jacob, 29 years old, graduated from high school in Baton Rouge and immediately enrolled in a university in Tennessee. He attended for one year and then withdrew. He explains, “I had kind of gone off the rails a little bit…I just drank too much and wasn’t taking care of business.” He began working part-time jobs to avoid moving back in with his family and when the events of September 11, 2001 happened, he decided to enlist in the military. Jacob describes his decision making, “So with September 11th happening I was like, I can go back to college and I might get back into the same bad habits or I can do something for my country and better my life at the same time.” He ultimately enlisted in the Navy, with the full support of his parents, in February 2002. Jacob says his parents are “really happy with who I have become but they were really concerned at first.” Jacob says that he was fairly sheltered from the violence during his deployment and was actually land based his entire time in the Navy.

At the conclusion of his original service contract, Jacob entered into an extension because he was unsure what he wanted to do with his life. After the completion of his extension, Jacob moved to Texas to be closer to his parents who relocated during the time his deployment. He enrolled in a community college in Texas and then transferred to Southeastern and moved back to Baton Rouge.

Zeke

Zeke entered the military immediately following high school graduation. His parents were nervous about his decision to enlist as it was wartime. As a compromise with his parents, Zeke decided to enter the Army instead of the Marines. His parents felt this decision would put
him in a safer place and he would limit his combat exposure. Upon entering the United States Army, Zeke scored high on his military placement test and was able to pick his military occupation and the location of his first tour. He chose the military police, a low pay grade appointment, because he was “very interested in that type of work.” He deployed to Japan for several months and then was sent to serve in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Zeke was injured during his deployment to Iraq as a result of a fall from an unstable structure. He returned to Maryland and completed his period of service in the Northeast. Zeke is classified as a freshman and is pursuing a degree in criminal justice. He is interested in working as a police officer or possibly an attorney.

Table 4
Student Veteran Participants at Louisiana State University

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Branch of Military Service</th>
<th>Military Rank/Job</th>
<th>College Classification</th>
<th>Self-Reported Grade Point Average</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Darren</td>
<td>Army</td>
<td>E5 Sergeant</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>Marine</td>
<td>E5 Sergeant Rifleman</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greg</td>
<td>Marine</td>
<td>1371 Combat Engineer</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steven</td>
<td>Marine</td>
<td>E7 Sergeant 1st Class Combat Engineer</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>3.777</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>Army</td>
<td>Combat Engineer</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Darren

Darren is 29 years old and enrolled initially at Louisiana State University in 1999 following his high school graduation. He transferred to Baton Rouge Community College after an unsuccessful year at LSU. He earned an Associate degree in December 2003 and then decided to enlist in the Army. He explains his rationale for entering the military during wartime, “I was an able bodied male and I felt it was my duty. I knew I could get in and support my country and
do what needed to be done.” Darren deployed to Iraq twice and during his second deployment was able to complete online coursework to earn more credits toward a Bachelor’s degree. He enrolled again at Louisiana State University after completing his military service and maintains a 3.8 grade point average. He plans to pursue a Master of Business Administration degree at LSU.

Darren sustained several injuries during his time in Iraq and suffers from chronic back pain. He also experiences difficulty as a result of post-traumatic stress disorder. He was unable to drive a vehicle in the United States for a significant period of time because of his experiences in Iraq.

James

James, age 27, attended a four year university in south Louisiana for two semesters immediately following high school. He struggled academically and by the end of his second semester, his cumulative grade point average was .9. His father discontinued his financial support and James did not continue in college, working instead full time for a year. He decided to enter the United States Marine Corp in 2003 after being arrested. James explains, “Plan B was always if school didn’t work I would go into the military and it would be the Marines. And if I went into the military I would go into infantry.” James’ criminal record was expunged when he entered the military but he claims this was not the motivation for joining.

James deployed to Iraq in 2005. He was part of a unit that conducted many night raids. During his time in the Marine Corp he was critically injured and sent home before completing his second Iraq deployment. He completed therapy and rehabilitation and another tour of duty before receiving an honorable discharge. He was awarded a Purple Heart and is known as the first wounded warrior to return to Louisiana.

James is now pursuing a degree in biology with aspirations of attending medical school and becoming a doctor. His grade point average at Louisiana State University is 3.87 and he is in
the process of declaring academic bankruptcy to expunge his first attempt at college from his academic record. James was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder and also has a physical injury that causes him challenges in the college setting.

Greg began meeting with a military recruiter at the end of his junior year in high school. He originally hoped to attend college out of state but his family was not in a position to cover the expense even with financial assistance and scholarships. As a result, Greg elected to enter the Marine Corp. He explains his decision to enlist in the Marine Corps, “I joined the Marine Corps because I know it is the hardest and they have the most discipline which if I was going to do something I wanted to do the best of the best.” Greg’s parents were not supportive of his decision to enlist even though his mother served in the Marine Corps. They were hopeful that he would reconsider his wish to attend college out of state and go to a Louisiana university which would have been more affordable. Greg, however, enlisted the day he turned eighteen. He deployed to Iraq for over a year and reported being disappointed that he was not eligible to deploy a second time. He also reported being frustrated and upset that he did not have enough service time left to deploy with his unit to Afghanistan.

Greg married his girlfriend a few weeks prior to his deployment. He maintained contact with her only, not his parents or other family members, during the time he was deployed and she moved with him when he returned to the United States to complete his service time in New Mexico. Greg claims that he would re-enlist and would be excited about the possibility of deploying to combat zone if he was not married.

Greg is pursuing an engineering degree currently. He sustained a head injury during the time he was in Iraq and has difficulty with his memory. He reports having difficulty with his math classes and feels that he has forgotten a lot of what he knew before being deployed.
Steven

Steven originally entered Louisiana State University in the Fall of 1999 on a full scholarship. After three weeks at the university, he decided that college was not a good fit for him. He explains, “From the beginning I told my family I wanted a year off but they really pushed me because I had TOPS. It just didn’t feel right for me from the very beginning.” He enlisted in the Marines after meeting with a recruiter while visiting a friend over a weekend. His parents were not initially supportive, “My mom actually hated my buddy for at least the first three years while I was in the Marine Corp” Steven explains. He attended boot camp in January 2000.

Following boot camp and his job specific training, he was stationed in Japan. Steven later was stationed in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina. During his time in New Orleans he met and married his wife. In early 2007 he received notification that he would deploy to Iraq and, subsequently, completed multiple deployments to combat zones. During his various deployments and station assignments he completed an associate’s degree through Kaplan University. Currently, Steven is pursuing a business degree and he and his wife are expecting their third child.

Ben

Ben entered the military after completing an associate’s degree at Baton Rouge Community College. He reports feeling a sense of patriotism following the events of September 11th which led him to the military. Ben chose to enlist in the Army because his father had served previously. Following boot camp, Ben deployed multiple times to Iraq and Afghanistan to “hot zones.”

Ben reports having challenges as a result of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and a physical injury that he sustained while deployed. He is currently enrolled and is pursuing a
business degree with hopes of attending graduate school. Ben’s interview was rescheduled twice by the researcher. When communicating with the researcher, Ben often seemed stressed, frustrated, and angry to the extent the researcher did not feel comfortable interviewing him alone. Consequently, his interview was the shortest.

Findings

Following the completion of all interviews and transcription, participants were provided copies of their transcripts via email. The participants were given two weeks to clarify, add, or delete from their responses. Three of the ten participants provided feedback indicating that no changes were needed. The remaining seven did not respond. Once feedback was received and the two week deadline passed, the researcher began to identify themes in the data using the open coding process as outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994).

Each transcript was thoroughly reviewed to identify categories in the data. The initial categories included military tradition, support, service branch differences, feelings of isolation, feelings of entitlement, identity differences, and academic success and challenges. Once this process was complete, another review occurred to further synthesize general patterns and emerging themes. These general patterns and emerging themes were shared with the four participants selected for re-interviewing. The four participants were again provided with their initial interview transcripts and were given an overview of the main themes that emerged from the initial analysis. Participants were asked to give feedback, thoughts, and feelings about the identified emerging themes. This strategy of involving participants in data analysis and soliciting their feedback concerning emerging themes is called member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checks not only clarify findings, but are also “the most useful technique for establishing credibility” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314).
Themes

Using Schlossberg’s et al. (1995) theory of adult transition as a guiding framework, the transition experiences of student veterans at Louisiana institutions of higher education were documented. Specifically, the researcher considered the four factors that constitute a readiness for change (self, situation, support, and strategies) in the context of the transition from military life to campus life. With this framework in mind, four main themes emerged during the analysis of the interview and observation data: identity change negotiation, post-service privilege and entitlement, on-campus isolation, and enhanced academic maturity. These themes speak to the shared experiences of the research participants. Following these four transition specific themes is a final theme, southern military support, relating to the culture of the area and its impact on the transition experiences of the student veteran.

An in depth description of each theme follows. The first theme describes the change that student veterans experience upon entering the military, completing military training, and deploying during wartime. The participants discuss how these experiences impacted their identities and how they negotiate this change in their interactions with others, specifically in a college setting. Next, participants describe the challenges they experience accessing military benefits for higher education and the interactions they have on campus while accessing support services. The discussion then shifts to the manner in which the student veterans interact with their peers, faculty, and staff members on campus and also touches on the support they experience off campus from family members and friends. The participants then address how they experience the classroom and their approach to academics given their military experience. Finally, participants describe their understanding of the southern military tradition and the cultural implications.
Identity Change Negotiation

Participants report various reasons for enlisting in the military. Bryan, Darren, and Ben report joining in response to the events of September 11th and an increased sense of patriotism. Trent, Zeke, Greg, and Jacob report joining in order to secure funds for education while James, Matt, and Steven report joining because they felt they didn’t have the discipline needed to be successful in a school setting or the workforce. Bryan, a Marine Corp veteran, explains, “A lot of people join because they need that lifestyle change. They were bad before, or hey, they were lonely and needed some sort of organization like to feel they mattered to somebody.” Different factors lead individuals to the service and the participants in this study report common reasons for enlisting.

Individuals also cite different reasons for choice of service branch. James, Bryan, and Greg enlisted in the Marine Corps because they wanted to fight in a war. Bryan explains, “The Marines are known for being the best fighting force and the hardest ones. Anything I was going to go I wanted the biggest challenge you know and that was the Marine Corp.” Greg adds, “And I joined the Marine Corps because I know it’s the hardest and they have the most discipline which if I was going to do something I wanted to do the best of the best.” Ben and Darren, Army veterans who experienced much combat while deployed, also said that they enlisted in the Army because they wanted to fight. Darren shares his decision making.

I knew I would deploy and I knew I would be over there. It was the most logical step. If you to war you go the Army. If you want a cushy job, there’s no water in Iraq so you just join the Navy. We had Navy guys there, but they were few and far between. The Air Force did like three month rotations and that was it. They weren’t really in the combat zone, they were just far enough away to fly in if needed. They could drink and wear civilian clothes. Yeah, there was a little bit of tension between the services because they
would complain about their ninety day deployments and here we were there for fifteen months. We were highly deployable, it seemed constant.

For these participants, the appeal of the Marine Corps and the Army was the front line combat and taking an active role in the war.

In contrast to the experiences of the Marine and Army veteran participants, Jacob, a Navy veteran, explains his decision to enlist in the Navy, “I chose the Navy primary because I did not want to get shot at. And the Air Force wasn’t open yet when I went to go talk to Recruiters, so Navy it was.” The reason to enlist and choice of service branch relates to the amount or degree of identity change the student veteran reports experiencing. Some of the Navy participants were already enlisted when September 11th happened so they did not necessary make the decision to enlist in wartime.

The participants credit service branch choice, military training, and deployment during wartime for this identity change. All individuals who enter the military complete a boot camp training that hones the skills necessary to be a soldier and also teaches soldiers the core values and culture of the military. The intensity of the training varies based on the branch of military service. Marines, who claim the most experience on the front line of combat, receive the most intense, warlike training. James discusses the training he received in the Marine Corps, “There’s a lot of psychology that goes into the Marine Corp. That’s very necessary and it’s very effective. There’s a type of mentality that you have to develop and then once you get out it, you know, it’s hard getting out of it.” Greg explained that during boot camp, Marines are very aware of the length and dates of other service branches’ boot camps. Marines conduct boot camp for the longest period of time, followed by the Army, Navy, Air Force, and, finally, the Coast Guard. Servicemen who deploy typically undergo additional rigorous training to prepare them for deployment, including combat training and cultural information. James describes the training he
receive once he learned that he would deploy to Iraq from Marines who had just returned from combat,

The guys that trained me were the guys that went in, took the place [Iraq] and there’s still serious real combat going on. So they – you’re a boot and you get, you know, they just basically – they torture you. They torture you and train you all at the same time non-stop through lots of different tactics. Hazing is one of them obviously…So they do the best they can with tactics that are probably I guess world view wouldn’t agree with but I would think, in my opinion, was necessary.

This training includes simulated combat experiences, sometimes with live ammunition.

Given this level of intense training and combat exposure, it is expected that an individual’s identity would be impacted. James describes how the training and combat experience influenced him,

I have discipline now, you know. The Marine Corps show you, you know, they show you what you’re made of and what you can do. And they, you know, they push you beyond your limits so you know what you are capable of. I had one particular, when I became a squad leader, I had one particular sergeant that gave me a chance to be a squad leader and he believed in me and gave me a chance and he basically – he pulled the best out of me and I learned who I was and what I could do.

Ben further reflects training, “I really think it’s a good transition period – brutal at times – but it teaches you to immediately take care of yourself because nobody else is going to do it. It gives you pride and accomplishment.” Marines and Army veterans learn through intense training and combat situations how to suppress their emotions and push forward even under emotionally or physically taxing conditions. They learn not to complain and to intensely focus on set goals.
Servicemen in the Navy and Air Force train differently in preparation for deployment because their role is different, more technical, with limited to no combat experience.

Jacob’s pre-deployment training is in direct contrast to James’ reported experience, “We had to go through arms courses, which I had been through multiple times in the service prior to that and also had to do just some basic getting to know what you’re getting into kind of power point Presentations instead. It wore the heck out of you but, there is some useful information.”

As the training is less intense, the identity is impacted to lesser degree. Trent offers an explanation of the impact of the military lifestyle from a Navy perspective, “The military lifestyle is do it now. You take everything a little bit more seriously and just living structured like that…it did give you better self-motivation instead of coming right out of high school where you’re kind of held by the hand.”

Matt, an Army veteran who did not experience combat while deployed, was charged with guard duty during his deployment. Part of his role was to monitor the Iraqi workers who would come on base to complete jobs that the military would not pay soldiers to do, such as cleaning latrines. This role gave Matt the opportunity to interact with Iraqi citizens and develop somewhat personal relationships which ultimately impacted his worldview. He explains, “It was probably the most impactful situation of my entire life. Impactful insofar as like seeing other cultures up close. I am obsessed with the Middle East now.”

Matt is not necessarily a different person because of his experience, though, he does have a different worldview.

The experience of training and simply deployed did have an impact on the identity of Navy veterans and others who didn’t experience combat in the same way that veterans who experienced combat did. These varying degrees of change mean that veterans will experience campus transition and academic life based on their service branch choice and whether or not they were exposed to combat. Transition to college life will likely be more profound for Marine Corps
and Army veterans while Navy veterans will more likely assimilate into college life with more ease depending on their exposure.

Post-Service Privilege and Entitlement

During Darren’s interview for this project, a student sitting close enough to hear portions of the conversation approached him. The student introduced himself, shook Darren’s hand, and thanked him for serving. Darren was appreciative but also mildly embarrassed and even apologized for the interruption. He was visibly uncomfortable with their exchange. Bryan, in his second interview, addressed this, “It’s what we are supposed to do. It is really nice to be thanked but no Marine, or military personnel for that matter, wants to be singled out.” Veterans do not want to be singled out, however, they do want the privileges they are entitled to after completing their service. These privileges or entitlements include accessing educational benefits and other financial benefits for small business loans and housing loans.

Accessing the educational benefits can cause some dissonance in higher education. James’ academic standing and college re-entry serves as an example of this dissonance. Recall James’ first attempt at college, he earned a .9 grade point average after two semesters. When he returned home from deployment as a Purple Heart recipient, he was unable to enroll in any college or university because he did not meet the admission requirements with his previous college grade point average. He felt that as a veteran, he should be given special consideration given his service but was hesitant to use his veteran status for the appeal process. He explains,

I wanted to get into college, you know, I wanted to get into college and then everybody was pumping me up. You know, yeah you’re a Purple Heart veteran and you’re this, and this, and that, and you know you’re going to have no problem getting into school. Well I applied for [Louisiana institution] and it was just like almost impossible for them to accept me into school. I wrote them a personal letter. Stuff which I don’t think even got
read. I had, for them to accept me I had to get – because of my old GPA I had to get, I had to pull the good old boy family contact stuff to be able to get in that school.

Bryan clarifies that “veterans don’t want to have to play the ‘veteran card.’” He believes that veterans should receive certain privileges and questions current university practices,

How come the university president can’t host a dinner at his house for veterans? You know, it could happen at the start of the Fall semester and he could just welcome the veterans and thank them for their service. How hard would that be? It would go a long way with veterans to get something like that, especially considering what they’ve done.

James describes how having to use his veteran status makes him feel, “You know I’m not, I’m not a hobo. I’m not like I shouldn’t have to be begging for stuff. You know, I deserve this because I’m a veteran or this and this and that. I mean that’s just degrading to me.”

Though most student veterans do not express a desire for direct time with senior university administrators as Bryan suggests, they do feel that institutions could be more accommodating as they navigate enrollment and financial aid processes. Student veterans are largely unaware of available services and resources on campus and resent having to seek them when needed. Bryan, for instance, expresses a desire for more personal contact from the Veterans Affairs office,

I didn’t know the process [for accessing benefits]. Nobody told me about the process. I thought there was a way that they already knew you were a veteran and you would automatically get. The only way I found out was I actually called the Veterans Affairs through the federal government that handles the payments…I mean somebody could have told me from the beginning.
Most of the participants indicated that they completed a crash transition course upon exiting the military. Educational benefits seem to have been only briefly covered with the majority of the transition course focusing on extending a military contract or enlisting in the reserves. 

For others, the desire for assistance extends beyond the enrollment process. Greg and Ben voice concerns with parking and other university policies,

They [the university administration] can give us more privileges. I mean that’s kind of saying a lot. Like saying, “Oh just because he did this he gets all this.” I mean I’m being nice because it’s just, my body it feels like it’s went through so much more. Like my knee seriously feels like it’s going to give out every day. I’m sore when I wake up. I’m like, “Gosh why?” I feel like I’m one hundred and twenty thousand years old. I feel like a dinosaur. I feel horrible and I just wish they’d give us more. See I act like a begger. I’m not trying to beg for it, I’m just asking if they can kind of bend with us.

Ben continues,

Parking is ridiculous. I got to park way out there to walk all the way in here and I got classes spread out all around campus. And why can’t I just park, you know, in the middle of campus and work my way out. I mean why couldn’t they do that for us? That’d be nice.

While they want and/or need support beyond that which is traditionally offered, there is a sense of shame or guilt in even feeling that they have to ask. Even during the interviews, participants struggled with their emotional composure over this topic. James provides a summarizing comment, “I feel uncomfortable when people come and tell me, “thank you.” I don’t want people doing things for me. You know I do want respect when it’s deserved, you know, like when it was time for me to get into school.”
Outside of the boundaries of higher education, these desires and requests for special care beyond the scope of the traditional student do not seem unreasonable. However, with the confines of the institution where the student veteran must identify themselves as a veteran before any assistance can be provided, this seems a daunting undertaking. Institutions of higher education pride themselves on following policies and procedures consistently. Admissions requirements, for instance, are not waived based on race, ethnicity, or disability. Most admission applications do not request veteran information and this makes it difficult to even identify potential students who are veterans.

Finally, in identifying the name of this theme, the researcher struggled with the terms “privilege” and “entitlement.” In higher education research, the term privilege tends to have a negative connotation (i.e., white privilege) while, in general, the term entitlement also bears a negative sentiment. In this theme, the researcher is not trying to sway the perception of a student veteran as positive or negative but to describe the struggle they experience with taking advantage of their own benefits and, in a sense, advocating for themselves.

On-Campus Isolation

Participants in this study report receiving strong support from families and friends throughout their military service even though several report that their parents were initially upset about the student veteran enlisting. Many report receiving significant amounts of support from their communities. Matt recalls his experience, “My mom was the most nervous, but supportive. Everyone was supportive. My dad was probably the proud one. They extended any support they could, they got me a laptop for communicating with everybody.” Darren had a similar experience, “Mom was worried but everyone else was cool with it. My mom’s happy I did it now because it really helped me out in a lot of ways.” Relationships seemingly changed little during
their time in the service. What changes did occur resulted in more meaningful, intimate relationships like marriages or closer relationships with parents or children.

For those students returning to college from the military, relationship changes were obvious. Bryan, who enjoyed a traditional college experience before entering the Marines, felt so different from his fraternity brothers that he elected to maintain alumni status and did not interact socially with the fraternity. He explains, “I didn’t see myself above those guys at all, you know, or anything like that when I got back. I was just at a different point in my life.” In fact, nearly all student veterans express feeling different from the general student population as a result of their military experience. Greg states, “I will talk to anybody and everybody I have to. But I don’t have to talk to and communicate with them. I just feel like there’s big difference, huge difference.” James agrees, “I don’t feel like I can truly relate to a lot of these people around here because I see things so differently. And you know, I feel like an alien.” This feeling of difference leads to varying degrees of isolation on campus.

Several veterans are not comfortable sharing their military status with others. Sometimes sharing their past can lead to uncomfortable questions or remarks. Greg and Ben share an experience from a class,

We’d be talking about random things and he’s [a non-veteran student] be like, “Oh Army and Marines, I never thought I’d see that happen.” And he’s never seen any of that. How the hell would he know? He’s watching too much Discovery Channel or something like that. And he’s just being stupid. He asked me, “Oh so you going back in the Marine Corps as an officer?” “No, I don’t want to be an officer.” “Well why not you know, it’s so much better.” And I’m like, “No.” And it’s just – some kids are really retarded. They ask you the stupidest questions and you’re like, “Just shut up, dude, don’t talk to me right now.”
An interaction such as this one, may cause a student veteran to isolate himself from the general student population. Some veterans, however, do find it helpful to share pieces of their military past when they are able to choose which aspects to share. Darren confirms this, “I don’t really go into all of the details with them [classmates and faculty] but they know that I was in a combat zone. My classmates don’t know the extent to what I did. Not the details. They’ve been cool to me though.” James reports that in class work, such as group projects, was somewhat helpful in combating the isolation felt on campus. He clarifies, “Last semester I had group projects and that helped. This semester I don’t. So this semester’s been real, like I don’t really talk to anybody or anything.” Student veterans won’t necessarily take the initiative to interact with traditional students, but will in the classroom setting when the interaction is academic based and not social. Jacob explains, “I pretty much keep to myself. I try and help my classmates as much as possible but I’m not trying to make friends on campus.” Greg elaborates,

   At first like I don’t talk to any students at school. I really don’t. When I sit in class I’ll probably say hey to somebody but I won’t start up a conversation. Somebody can be sitting next to me the entire time and I won’t talk to them unless they talk to me first.”

Avoiding social interactions with non-veteran students seemed to be the norm and the result of a lack of understanding and lack of common experiences.

   Surprisingly, participants emphasized that college was a place for them to interact with other veterans socially. They felt a sense of comfort in identifying other veterans on campus and enjoyed opportunities on campus to interact with other veterans. This is consistent with others studies of student veteran transition (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). Trent explains the importance of connecting with other veterans on campus,

   As a veteran, you come in at least four years older than everybody else here and from 18 to 22 is a big age difference. At least you’d have the other veterans. I was lucky enough
to be from around here so I knew people but not every veteran has that. Having someone
to hang with between classes is nice. It’s a comfort zone. With another veteran you can fit
in, relax.”
Oddly, even within the safety of a student veterans’ club meeting, student veterans still displayed
a sense of discomfort.

The researcher observed student veterans’ club meetings at Southeastern and LSU. The
club meeting at Southeastern, organized by older veterans who served in Dessert Storm, was
quiet and organized. Participants followed an agenda prepared by the president and vice
president. The president and vice president relied heavily upon the faculty advisor, a Korean War
veteran, throughout the meeting. All communicated in an orderly fashion. The business of the
meeting centered on the university requirements to form an organization and the purpose and
goals of the group. The officers and faculty advisor worked hard to get feedback from the group,
who seemed hesitant to speak in the meeting. This sense of protocol and politeness may have
been mistaken for shyness or discomfort as the majority of meeting participants had only just
met and the group was relatively small, less than 10 participants of varying ages. After several
months, the group became more visible on campus. The group was observed recruiting new
members in the Student Union Mall and worked with other organizations on campus on several
service projects. Members were also observed communicating informally and gathering for lunch
and coffee. It was apparent through their interactions that they had become more comfortable
with one another and had found a support system on campus.

At LSU, the student veterans group organized in the previous semester and the researcher
was expecting that the group would be further along with their goals and programmatic
initiatives. The current meeting was led by Iraq and Afghanistan veterans in their mid to late
twenties. It was attended by less than 20 participants, mostly males. The faculty advisor, who
was not a veteran, was not present and the membership was not happy about her absence. In fact, the secretary of the group was quite vocal about not feeling like the faculty advisor was supportive enough. There was no paper agenda and there were also issues with who from among the membership was qualified to be an officer as stated in the university’s policies for student organizations. There was also a focus on a former member who was dishonest about his military service. Darren provided background on the issue,

   At our first meeting, we had like 40 people show up and the guy that wasn’t honest about his service was running the meeting and told the classic military story about being in a classroom and someone dropping a book and then him having a flashback. It just sounded so fake and not real. He got up there for like two hours and it shouldn’t have taken that long. It was in a classroom when most of us had been in a classroom all day. Nobody wants to sit there that long and then he’s up there talking about his PTSD. It just wasn’t good. It was a turnoff. He used everything as a crutch. We haven’t had that many people at a meeting since.

By the time we got around to the third meeting, only 12 people showed up. He was a buzz kill. He depressed everybody.

The group had significant struggles in the beginning to overcome and it was obvious that the members were not interested in dealing with any emotional post-deployment issues during formal meeting time. At one point, the business of the meeting came to a halt as they watched news footage from several months past of the member dishonesty issue. The group was having a difficult time getting past the incident.

   Based on this observation alone, it may initially appear that this is a poorly run student organization that does not offer assistance to student veterans or encourage university
connections. However, when discussing the purpose and the meaning of the group with several interview participants, it becomes clear how important the group is for the student veterans. Darren elaborates on the purpose of the group,

We’re figuring out our focus. We’re not a political organization. We do things like go to basketball games and fun things. Things where a vet can feel welcome and have a social opportunity with other vets to get back into the swing of things. It is a social support more than anything, but not counseling. That’s an individual, one on one thing. But we don’t do group counseling at the meetings.

Even though the meeting and the group appeared to be disorganized and unproductive, there was more of a sense of camaraderie among the members. Greg explains that there’s a sense of safety within the membership, “I can talk with them, I can relate. And I can just say the stupidest things and everybody’s like, ‘Oh yeah, I remember stuff like that.’” The idea of feeling less isolated through the association makes sense. The poor management of the group by individuals who were formerly part of the most organized, policy driven mechanism in the United States, the military, is surprising; however, this should not overshadow the importance of the group to the membership. Through this association, the members can identify with other students who have common experiences. They can also experience some aspects of informal mentoring and may become connected with other university resources such as counseling or tutoring. Without this group, student veterans would likely not have a mechanism for connecting with the university or a way of becoming engaged outside of the classroom.

Enhanced Academic Focus

Military service influences the way student veterans experience the classroom. There are numerous positive and negative service implications that surface in the classroom setting. Veterans with prior college experience and veterans who are first time college students have
different issues. The common ground, however, is that their experiences are certainly different and unique from the traditional college students’ experiences.

Student veterans returning to college a second time reported differences in their performance and approach in college before the military as compared to their performance and approach in college after military service. Jacob discusses his experience before the service, “I would show up for a test and maybe study someone else’s notes before going and taking the test. I skipped a lot of class, I didn’t have the right kind of mentality and discipline that it takes to be a successful college student.” Matt details a different mentality in the classroom towards professors before military service, “Before deployment, say in a sociology class, I might have thought the instructor was just a liberal but now I’m like ok. I can see both sides. In that way, I think it has definitely influenced the way I analyze things and concepts in my head.” Most report being more focused and disciplined in respect to their academic work. Trent actually feels that veterans have a different mindset when they enter college, “Veterans come in and they’re ready to learn.” Bryan agrees,

You’re so much more focused about life and what you want to do and what you need to do to get to that point. You see college as such a stepping stone to get to what you want to do. You know you just have to get it done. You’re so much more focused. When you come back [from military service], you have more direct focus.

Participants report an ease with focus in the classroom as well. Bryan says,

The concentration needed in the classroom couldn’t compare to the way we had to concentrate for our missions in Iraq. An hour and thirty minutes in the classroom can’t compare. The only thing that can kill you in the classroom is the boredom.

Others say they also respond differently to professors. Jacob describes the influence the military had on his interaction with professors,
If you’re in the military and you don’t work hard, people look down on you. And if you have too many people looking down on you it’s a really bad feeling. And it’s just kind of followed me. I want to prove myself to the professors that I’m going to do the work that they assign and I am going to do it to the best of my ability. It’s all about proving yourself.

This new maturity and outlook does not necessarily mean that student veterans do not experience challenges in the classroom. James and Darren talk about the stressors in the college setting. James says, “School is stressful, but it’s a different kind of stress.” Darren agrees, adding,

The amount of stress is certainly different. I mean, having to read the Harvard Business Report and write a three page report just doesn’t compare to what I did in the military. It’s completely manageable and I do not get stressed out over things like that other students do get worked up about. They don’t really know what stress is.

Stress and stress management are not the only challenges student veterans encounter.

Some of the veterans are returning students and some are first time college attendees. Military service creates a significant time break in academic work. It is difficult for student veterans to catch up with their classmates or recall information covered in courses that they took three to five years ago. Darren describes his experience, “Most people were right out of high school or whatever and I was fresh out of the desert. I hadn’t thought about that material in a long while.” Greg, who went straight into the military following high school, struggles as well, I’m so rusty. Like that’s, I get frustrated I guess cause I’m sitting in class and our teacher is like well y’all should already know how to do this, this, this, and this. And all the kids are like, “oh yeah, I remember how to do that. I can do it with my eyes closed, no problem.” And I’m still struggling, like two plus two is five?
Like Greg, Zeke entered the Army immediately following high school. He says his military experience has been both beneficial and challenging in the classroom setting,

Being off so long from the school mentality is really tricky to get back into. I’m still not very good at math. I’m still really struggling with math but in my other subjects, it’s not so much about knowing the material but a way of thinking. That’s what’s most important. I can think quick on my toes too and the military helped me with that.

Zeke reports that he some of his English papers have been published and an assignment he completed for his university seminar class was included in the new textbook. He feels that overall he’s doing well in school.

Some veterans are also inadvertently penalized for taking online courses and earning college credits. Greg earned so many college credits online that he was admitted to LSU as a transfer student and was not mandated to attend orientation. He reported being very confused about his classification. Greg’s advising session did not go smoothly either. He was placed in classes that he felt he wasn’t prepared for and now wishes he had attended a community college first. He is not aware of tutoring services or other resources available on campus and has no idea who to contact for assistance.

Finally, a student veteran may be performing well academically, but that doesn’t necessarily mean they are mentally healthy. Coping strategies that were practiced in the military are not always practical or effective in the civilian world. Others are struggling with chronic long term disabilities that impact memory, which affects test taking, and others are struggling with anxiety that can even impact simply being in a classroom setting. Some of the participants in this study, for instance, report higher grade point averages but are struggling emotionally and are not getting the assistance they need from the VA Clinic. Additionally, they are largely unaware of and uncomfortable accessing campus based mental health resources.
Southern Military Tradition

As discussed in Chapter two, the South has a fascination with military traditions. According to Andrew (2001), this region of the United States is particularly fond of military display, preoccupied with war and the concept of martial glory, and holding up military service and military training as honorable activities for males. Beginning with the American Revolution, Southerners have been among the first to volunteer for military service for their country (Wilson, 1990). In particular, Louisiana’s military history dates back more than three centuries. This history combined with the current level of military service of its citizens makes Louisiana one of the most supportive military states in the nation.

Andrew (2001) describes the evolution of antebellum southern military schools to the public and private institutions that we know today. These modern day institutions suggest a strong sense of military support based on the importance placed on the institutions’ military histories, ROTC programs, and physical campus attributes. Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana is one such institution. Southeastern Louisiana University, located approximately fifty miles to the east of Baton Rouge did not originate as a military school. The institution does, however, have a local storied connection to World War II, war monuments, and a history of the ROTC tradition. Given the military connection of the two institutions and the military support common in Louisiana, the researcher sought to understand how the southern military tradition, as described and defined by Andrew (2001), influenced a student veteran’s transition. Of particular interest, was whether or not student veterans had specific expectations about the college transition based on the perception of the southern military tradition at various Louisiana universities.

Student veterans interviewed express strong opinions about the notion of the southern military tradition. Their definition of the southern military tradition emphasizes patriotism and
pride and focuses on military support from family, friends, and their local communities. Steven, a Marine veteran at Louisiana State University, began by saying,

Just by saying ‘southern military tradition’, you kind of reflect back to the civil war and everything else. It just seems like in the South there’s so much pride in the military and what you do to actually serve your country and everything else. And not to get into the context of liberal or any of that other stuff but like in the south, you have more of an attitude of we’re going to do for ourselves because we have to.

Trent, a Southeastern student who served in the Navy, describes military service and support as common place in Louisiana, “Around here, everybody knows someone who served in the military. It’s a culture. I mean, probably somebody next door was in the military. It’s not a big deal because everyone around here’s used to it.” In fact, six of the ten participants reported having a parent, grandparent, and/or sibling who served or currently serves in the military. Matt, who served in the Army and attends Southeastern, speaks of his family’s experience with the military,

My family definitely has a military tradition, other than my father. Both my grandparents were in the military. I had numerous uncles and cousins who were in the military. My brother after me served too. I would advise my son to do the military before he started college.

Trent discusses the idea of family tradition and military service, “I’ve known several people who went in because it was a family tradition. You go in, you do your time, you do your service, and then you come out and move on.”

Student veterans also associate specific social ideals with the southern family tradition of military service. Bryan, a former Marine sniper who attends Southeastern, explains,

My mom almost joined the military when she was younger and she’s always been very
support of the military. But, that’s not really my idea of the southern military tradition.
The tradition is that males go off to serve and that women stay home and take care of things at home. That’s the tradition. So, if you want to compare, the North would probably be more accepting of a girl going off to serve than the south would. That goes along with southern ideas of gender roles and all that.

Participants address differences in support for service men and women in the South versus the experience of service men and women in the North. Bryan highlights the difference in support for his peers from the North compared to his experience in the South,

I have a good friend from the unit who lives in Ohio now and he’s always like, ‘Dude, I wish the support for the military was the same that you get down there.’ I mean, it’s just not the same. Me being a vet down here is totally difference than it is for someone up north.

Trent too notes a difference in the experiences of veterans from the North and the South as he describes the motivation to serve, “Well, I’ve seen a bunch of people from the North. Southerners see it more as a duty, as giving back. They take more pride in it. They actually see it as service.” Zeke, however, feels that regardless of geographic location in the United States, military service is not a priority choice for most,

A lot of Americans today aren’t necessarily proud to serve. After 9/11 there was a big patriotism movement and campaign to join the military. People did it but I called it part-time patriotism cause it really wasn’t a career choice or anything like that for most people.

The tradition of military support and military service in the South was debated by nearly every research participant. Jacob, a Navy veteran at Southeastern, emphasized military support in his description of the term but pointed out that the tradition of actually serving was not as common,
There’s a huge tradition of supporting the military. You can see that with five out of every ten cars displaying something on them relating to the troops…you do see a good bit of veterans’ plates too. I just see it more as a sense of military pride, not as much southern military service.

Zeke, an Army veteran, agrees,

Southern military tradition. I don’t particularly think there is a tradition of serving any longer. The idea is that it’s something that’s past down from father to son. My dad was in the Army and he tried to talk me out of it. He even tried to talk me into serving in the Air Force because it was easier and safer.

In contrast, Bryan argues,

I think more of your families are bred down here to teach their kids to support the military and military importance. More kids down here see joining the military as not a bad thing at all. I had some friends from the north in the Marines and when they joined they said all their family and friends were like, ‘What the hell are you doing? You’re crazy! You’re giving up everything! Why would you go and join the student military?’

There’s just that different swagger.

Jacob disagrees,

I just see more of a southern military pride not as much southern military service. I’m not trying to take away from the people from the south that do go into the military or the veterans that came before us I just, I don’t see a lot of it now. I mean the kids here have TOPS now so why do they need to go into the military? I know way, way more people that like to talk big and talk about their patriotism for their country and their what I would like to call Nationalistic behavior rather than patriotic behavior but would never strap on the boots and go themselves. A lot more people are the first ones to shake your hand
when they find out that you’re in the military but, at the same time would never send their kids there. Would never go themselves, so on and so forth. I just don’t think that there’s that much of a tradition there. There’s a tradition of supporting the military.

Considering the student veterans’ definition of southern military tradition that emphasizes military support, pride, and patriotism rather than service, the researcher sought to understand how they experienced being a student veteran on a Louisiana college campus. Student veterans’ expectations for the services and programs offered at each campus were certainly different. Students at Southeastern report not having high expectations as a student veteran beyond the services offered for non-veteran students. Trent explains, “I didn’t come here expecting anything. I just knew I was coming to school to get a degree and move on to the next step.” Bryan also reports having minimal expectations, “I had already spent one year in college so I kind of knew what the experience was like.” Jacob and Trent note the helpfulness of the Veterans Affairs office at Southeastern. Jacob reports, “They [the Veterans Affairs office] were really helpful…once I got the wheels in motion, got accepted to Southeastern, everything went smooth.” Trent describes his experience with the Veterans’ Affairs office,

The Veterans Office was really helpful. They did a lot for me. I was in a real bad motorcycle accident in 2007 and I was in the hospital for like two months and had to sit a semester out and you know didn’t make it very well. They worked with enrollment and put everything on hold so that I wouldn’t lose any funding instead of saying I wasn’t attending class. That way I didn’t get all Fs or all Ws. They were awesome.

Southeastern students, however, did express a desire for a way to connect with other veterans on campus. Coincidently, a student veterans club formed during the data collection phase of this research study and most Southeastern participants were pleased to learn of this.
Student veterans at LSU had varied experiences and expectations. For instance, Steven, who attended college prior to his military service and fulfilled the requirements for an associate degree during his service period, feels pleased with the experience he’s had at LSU,

We [the LSU community] have a certain pride in the military. Beforehand, not having military experience, I couldn’t say the same thing. But, now that I’ve had the military experience and coming back home and you see, I mean, it’s the same thing as if you buy a certain car. You’re going to see that many cars driving down the road where you never saw them. You notice. So now that I have military experience and background, you see the signs of the appreciation and everything else, that heritage. I mean, especially here at LSU. You see all over. I mean just the watch tower you have and the memorial here with the flag and you have all those different things that kind of push, ‘Hey, look, we want you to know this institution was founded on military tradition.’

Darren, an Army veteran who also earned an associate degree and completed online coursework while deployed, explains that he knew what to expect from college because of his prior experience in higher education. He also relays a positive transition experience at LSU,

Everybody’s been real supportive. Like when I have to go to the doctor for my back or something like that they always excuse my absences and never make me bring in documentation… I was surprised that it was easier than I expected it to be. Once you get in your upper level classes, you know people and everyone helps each other out. So that’s been really good. It’s not a competitive thing but more of a family atmosphere.

In contrast, Greg, who attended college for one semester prior to his first interview and completed some online coursework while deployed, does not feel LSU is meeting his expectations as a student veteran. He explains,
LSU supposedly said they have a military tradition. I think its complete bullshit. I mean, that’s just kind of out there for me to say that but they’re like, ‘we’re a military friendly da, da, da’ and I really do not find that at all. If they were really military friendly, I’d see more things about student veterans. I’d see like a bigger thing going on. I don’t see anything. I would see more help towards me. Like just recently this fall they just made us – they said if you’re a veteran you get priority scheduling. You know, that could have been handy before I got here.

Despite Greg’s comment, the LSU Office of Veterans Affairs appears to have more contact with individual student veterans and also works closely with the student veterans club on campus to provide services and programming for the student veteran population. In fact, the student veterans’ club president receives, at minimum, monthly communication from the Office of Veterans Affairs. The president in turn provides a report at the organization’s meetings and also passes said information along to student veterans via email. Darren, one of the founders of the student veterans’ club describes the support the group has received from the university,

We have great support from the university. Once our article came out in the newspaper, the school helped us find faculty members to work with us and helped us find contacts for stuff like that. We’ve really met some great faculty and staff members who support what we’re doing and that’s been a big thing. We have good communication with the university.

In summary, student veterans experience support from the university during their transition from military life to life as a college student. Student veterans at Southeastern feel that their expectations about campus life were met, though none of the students reported using services beyond those offered through the Veterans Affairs office. Consistently, Southeastern
student veterans requested that a veterans club organize and were pleased to learn this was in progress.

At Louisiana State University, student veterans with previous college experience reported favorable feelings toward the university and the Veterans Affairs office. One participant, Greg, had no prior college experience and vastly different expectations about the services and programs available for student veterans. Overall at LSU, the Veterans Affairs office is well staffed and the veterans club is active. The university recently granted priority registration to all student veterans who receive military benefits and seems open to exploring ways to improve the veteran experience. LSU student veterans did express a need for more assistance with accessing tutoring in math and science related courses and also voiced concerns with documentation requirements needed to access handicap parking and needed psychiatric medication. These concerns are consistent with those raised by other veterans in previous studies (Branker, 2009; Church, 2009; & DiRamio et al, 2008).

Louisiana student veterans consider the southern military tradition as a strong sense of patriotism and pride that focuses on support for the military rather than actual military service. All participants agreed that throughout Louisiana and the American south, the military is supported. Participants, however, could not conclusively agree on what supporting the military entailed or meant in the South. Further, the majority of participants did feel that military service is not necessarily a priority decision for a high performing high school graduate or for recent college graduates. This is in contrast to the Antebellum South where sons of the wealthy and elite were sent to universities for military educations. The southern military tradition, as defined by Andrew (2001), is not a practiced tradition in the contemporary South. The new tradition is one of support and respect for individuals who choose the military path in a time when the
military path is not emphasized as a necessity in achieving success or accessing higher education.

Conclusion

Chapter four described five themes that emerged from an exploration of the participants’ transition experiences based on data gathered through interviews and several observations of student veterans’ club meetings. The five themes were: military identity negotiation, post-service privilege and entitlement, on-campus isolation, increased academic maturity, and southern military tradition. The first four themes describe aspects of the student veterans’ transition experiences. The final theme, the southern military tradition, relates to the culture of Louisiana and the implications it has for student veteran transition at Louisiana institutions of higher education.

Participant profiles were also presented in this chapter. The profiles provided an overview of each participant and highlighted the participants’ military careers, war service, family and other supports, and academic standing. The profiles were especially useful in understanding the differences among service branches and reasons for military enlistment.

The final chapter of this dissertation, Chapter 5, presents discussion and conclusions, limitations of the study, and recommendations for student affairs practice, and suggestions for future research. The five themes provide the structure for the discussion. The theoretical implications of this study related to Schlossberg’s (1984) theory of adult transitions and Schlossberg’s (1989) idea of mattering and marginality are also considered.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

This study documented the transition experiences of student veterans in Louisiana enrolled at Louisiana State University and Southeastern Louisiana University. Data collection consisted of multiple interviews and a limited number of student veteran club meeting observations. Data analysis revealed themes representing the experiences of student veterans. These themes were presented in Chapter 4.

Chapter Five is the final chapter of this study. In this chapter, the researcher discusses the research findings in relation to Schlossberg’s (1984) theory of adult transitions and Schlossberg’s (1989) concepts of mattering and marginality. Additionally, implications for practice are noted. Finally, the researcher notes the limitations of the study and makes recommendations for future research.

Theoretical Implications

The work of Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) served as the theoretical framework for this study. To review, Schlossberg et al. (1995) define transition as “any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (p. 27). Schlossberg et al. (1995) suggest that the significance and insignificance of events that occur relate to the extent of the transition the adult is facing. The meaning that individuals assign is based on the type (anticipated, unanticipated, non-event), context (relationship to transition and the setting), and impact (alterations in daily life) of the event/non-event (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998; Schlossberg et al., 1995).

Student veterans experience numerous transitions, both anticipated and unanticipated, beginning with enlisting in the military, deployment, returning from deployment, and ultimately enrolling in college. This theory of transition is applicable to a veteran transitioning from the military to civilian life and has many implications for a military veteran experiencing transition.
on a college campus. Additionally, DiRamio et al. (2008) and Rumann and Hamrick (date) used this theory as a framework for previous student veteran research. As such, this theory is an appropriate framework for understanding the participants’ transition experiences.

The second component of the transition model addresses the transition process. According to Schlossberg et al. (1995), the readiness for change or transition depends on four factors that help adults cope with transition: self, situation, support, and strategies. It is important that the individual not only has the tools to cope with the transition but also has the ability to use those coping skills appropriately (Weisenberg, 2001). Schlossberg et al. (1995) view this process as a series of “moving in,” “moving through,” and “moving out” phases. The participants in this study are in the “moving through” and “moving out” phases. All participants completed the “moving in” phase of college transition as when they enrolled or reenrolled and completed their first semester. Several of the participants are classified as seniors anticipating graduation which places them in the “moving out” phase. The remaining participants fall in the “moving through” phase.

The four factors of self, situation, support, and strategies are helpful in understanding the student veterans’ transition processes. The situation includes trigger, timing, control, role change, duration of the transition, previous experience with a similar transition, concurrent stress, and assessment factors. The support factor refers to four types of social support: intimate relationships, family units, networks of friends, and institutions and communities. Next, self considers personal and demographic characteristics such as socioeconomic status, gender, and age. Psychological factors such as ego development and the degree of self-efficacy also affect the transition process. The final factor for coping with transitions is known as strategies. This part of the transition model consists of three categories (modify situation, control meaning, and manage stress in aftermath) and four coping modes (information seeking, direct action, inhibition...
of action, and intrapsychic behavior) (Evans et al., 1998). An explanation of these factors layered with the participants’ experiences follows.

Self

The self factor considers the strengths and weaknesses of an individual. In terms of weaknesses, or aspects of the self that could potentially create a challenge for transitioning, three of the four Marines and two of the Army veterans reported combat injuries. These injuries impact their daily functioning. Some of the participants experience chronic pain and others report challenges with short term memory. Several participants cite challenges as a result of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, a common psychological disorder for combat survivors. Participants access their local Veterans Affairs clinic for treatment which includes medication management and occasional counseling. Unfortunately, immediate access is not always possible due to the volume of patients at Veteran Affairs clinics. Veterans can feel a loss of control as a result. They may not seek other treatment options or may resort to other means to obtain medications. Most veterans are hesitant to access counseling, including those resources and services offered through the military and on campus. Seeking such resources in the military is viewed as a sign of weakness and veterans have a difficult time following their discharge to overcome the stigma associated with any type of counseling or mental health maintenance.

When considering contemporary veterans’ strengths, the high tolerance for academic stress and enhanced focus in class must be noted. Military training and experience causes a heightened sense of academic focus and maturity that sets student veterans apart from other veterans. They are more focused on school and seem to approach the work with more maturity and seriousness. For those who are not dealing with injuries that caused cognitive impairment, they may even notice that they are able to retain larger quantities of information which makes test preparation much easier. Also, their vast travels and exposure to different cultures and
diverse people helps them understand and appreciate such concepts in the classroom better than the tradition student. Finally, their sense of resilience is generally heightened because of their previous experiences. They feel that they can handle most obstacles in the college setting, though certainly would prefer to avoid them.

Situation

In Chapter 2, military culture and values were described. For enlisted servicemen, this culture is heavily and consistently enforced for a significant periods of time and does not diminish easily. Even though an individual may no longer be an enlisted member of the military, they are likely to continue living, to a certain extent, by military standards. This is the case for many of the participants in this study, though there is some variation from person to person. A student veteran’s role changes significantly upon exiting the military and entering a college campus. This role change is particularly significant if the student veteran was ranked high enough to supervise others. Some aspects of the military culture prove very beneficial to the student veteran. For instance, many veterans report feeling more disciplined and better prepared to manage stressful situations as compared to their pre-military experiences. Other veterans even discussed how the military impacted the way they drive, diet, and sleep. Still others wanted to maintain some semblance of the military in their everyday lives. For example, some made the choice to continue working out in a fashion consistent with military physical training or prefer the military method to tell time.

The military culture continues to affect student veterans in the university setting; though, student veterans detail uncommon challenges with college transition. Student veterans report different political views from faculty and students in their classes as a result of their deployment experiences. They do, however, report few unanticipated challenges as the majority of the participants had previous college experience. The most significant challenges with transition
were reported by student veterans who had sustained injuries while deployed, such as head trauma or other physical injuries. These injuries resulted in difficulty with short term memory and had implications for testing situations. Other challenges resulted from time away from material and loss of skill.

Situations and roles at home also changed for student veterans. Some who were married prior to deployment were now divorced and have family responsibilities that impact school. Others were recently married and adjusting to life with a spouse and children in addition to the transitions at school. All participants felt that returning to school would be a positive change, with most reporting that it was an important step for meeting their career goals. Some of the role changes away from campus may not have been desirable or may not have occurred at a favorable time their lives. Regardless, the positive and negative, expected and unexpected role changes impact campus transitions in meaningful ways.

Support

Participants acknowledge feeling supportive relationships with individuals on and off campus. The significant supporting relationships were with parents and/or spouses, other veterans, and some non-veteran friends off campus. Participants consistently stated that they did not feel comfortable interacting with non-veteran students and, therefore, did not pursue relationships with them.

Participants noted that one of the most significant sources of support were other student veterans. They described a bond among military personnel that extended across the boundaries of the various service branches. In relating to other veterans, participants could speak about their deployment experiences openly. This was important for them because even in their relationships with immediate family members they did not always disclose deployment details or speak freely of the experience. They also cited an importance in relating in terms of not having to explain
technical military terms. In many ways the association with other veterans provided a sense of security and stability during the transition experience and proved to be somewhat therapeutic.

Four of the five LSU participants affiliated with the student veterans club on campus and referenced the group as a strong campus support. In fact, several credited the group with making them feel part of the campus community and having a connection outside of the classroom. This affiliation provided them with social support that they were uncomfortable seeking from students who were not veterans. Though none of the Southeastern students were affiliated with the student veterans club, all indicated a desire or need for such an affiliation and were pleased to learn that the opportunity to join the group was coming to fruition.

Strategies

The strategies factor describes an individual’s ability to manage emotions, be flexible, and utilize more than one coping skill. This factor may be the toughest factor for a student veteran and is contingent upon where the student veteran is in the transition (i.e., moving in, moving through, moving out). For student veterans who are moving in, their ability to handle the emotional stress and be flexible may not be as developed in civilian terms as a student veteran who is transitioning out and near graduation. Greg and Bryan, both Marine veterans, provide a strong example of this. Greg is in the early stages of his coursework. He is easily flustered by the rigor and stressors of college. However, by accessing the student veterans club and seeking affiliation with a group he can relate to, he is utilizing a coping skill that is situation appropriate. Bryan is well versed in how to manage his emotions and practice flexibility. This is likely a result of the length of time he’s been out of the service. He’s had more time to transition back to civilian culture and had previous experience with college. He also has an established support system. In short, he’s had the time to learn flexibility and cultivate numerous coping strategies. In time, Greg’s skill will likely improve and develop.
Mattering vs. Marginality

Schlossberg (1989) also discusses the concepts of marginality and mattering to explain how institutional support impacts a student’s commitment to persist in college. Responses from the research participants validated many elements of the theoretical framework in regards to transitions and the meaning assigned to the extent of the transition as well as ideas of marginality and mattering. In particular, the themes on-campus isolation and post-service privilege suggest that at times student veterans experience some feelings of marginality and moments where they question whether they matter.

Recall that marginality is defined by Schlossberg (1989) as “a sense of not fitting in” (p. 5). Feelings of marginality can heighten students’ feelings of irritability or depression when placed in a new environment or taking on new roles and their accompanying expectations. Participants expressed varied feelings of isolation from their on-campus peers. The participants reported having little in common with the majority of traditional students as a result of their military experience. Those with prior college experience felt they had outgrown traditional college activities. Though they were interested in some form of association with other veterans on campus, they remained leery of social interactions with general students and even were uncomfortable with study groups and group assignments. When they did have to complete group work, veterans kept the sessions formal and businesslike, emphasizing that they were not in school to make friends.

Mattering is defined as “our belief, right or wrong, that we matter to someone else” (Schlossberg, 1989, p. 5). There are four dimensions to mattering: attention (a student feels noticed), importance (a student feels cared about), ego extension (a student feels that others will be proud of his or her accomplishments and understanding of his or her failures), and dependence (a student feels needed) (Schlossberg, 1989). Schlossberg (1989) posits that a
student must feel as though they actually matter to the institution before they can feel capable of becoming involved in academic and social activities that ultimately lead to higher levels of persistence. In essence, the more support veterans receive the greater the likelihood that they will have a smooth college transition and successfully matriculate (Ryan, 2010).

The theme “post-service entitlement” speaks directly to the idea of mattering. In particular, student veterans focus on the attention and importance dimensions. Student veterans have a connection with the veterans’ affairs office at their respective campuses because they need them to process their educational benefits. While they report being mostly satisfied with the interactions they have with the veterans’ affairs offices, some veterans would like to more personal communication. For instance, Bryan would like to receive calls or emails from the staff representative at Southeastern at least once per semester. Several veterans indicated that separate orientation sessions for veterans would be helpful in understanding how their benefits work. Although they don’t necessarily want to discuss their military experience and status in classes, they do think that as military veterans they should receive some personalization and privileges with regards to admission processes and financial aid. Further, student veterans do not necessarily want to be singled out for their service, but they do want the institutions to acknowledge Veterans’ Day. When this does occur, it has deep meaning for veterans and they report feeling more comfortable on campus.

Limitations

Several limitations exist in this study. First, the participant sample is not diverse. All participants in this study are males, as females were intentionally omitted, and all participants are also classified as Caucasian. There also was not a diverse representation of service branches as four of the participants were Marines, four served in the Navy, and two served in the Army. The participants’ perspectives and experiences are greatly shaped and influenced by their service
branch. It can certainly be assumed that the results of the study were affected by the service branches represented. While qualitative research methods sometimes prohibit a larger, more inclusive sample, a more diverse group of participants could have yielded additional data and provided greater context for the study. The researcher utilized snowball sampling, which further limited the diversity of the sample population and allowed participants to unintentionally influence the study by referring individuals whom they knew and who were likely similar to them. Further, the researcher relied on self-reported data from the participants.

Another significant limitation of the study is the researcher’s biases. The researcher has friends and family members who served in the military and also works closely with student veterans in her professional capacities. As a result, the researcher tends to view all veterans in a positive light. Secondly, the researcher is a trained counselor and currently serves as a disability service provider in student affairs. She tends to consider each participant’s classroom challenges from a disability service provider’s perspective. Finally, the researcher also previously worked with student organizations. When observing the student veteran club meetings, the researcher found it challenging to focus on the communication patterns of the organization without comparing the group’s functioning to other established groups.

Possibly the most significant limitation, is the researcher’s inability to fully comprehend military culture and veterans’ experiences reentering civilian life. The researcher is not a veteran and sometimes experiences difficulty understanding the military terminology, mindset, and structure. While the researcher developed strong rapport with participants, a gap may still exist that could have influenced the interpretation of data.

Implications for Practice

The themes of “on-campus isolation” and “post-service privilege and entitlement” suggest numerous noteworthy implications for practice. Student affairs professionals are charged
with identifying specific student populations and addressing their unique needs and challenges in the campus environment. Student veterans are a specific population of students and have experiences, needs, and expectations that are vastly different from the general student population. One of the most startling discoveries of this investigation is that student veterans often experience feelings of isolation on campus and are unaware of available resources and aids. Some veterans choose to be anonymous and this should be respected, however, student affairs professionals, faculty, and other university staff should be aware of available resources and aids for student veterans in need. The following implications for practice represent avenues for student veteran support.

Several student veterans reported taking online classes during deployment or active military service. Military service may also be converted to college course credit. As a result of the cumulative hours earned during this time period and military service credit conversion, many student veterans are classified as transfer students instead of first semester freshmen. As a transfer student, student veterans are often times not mandated to attend university orientation and may not be advised when they first enter an institution. Many are not aware of support services and campus aids that are often discussed in detail in orientation and advising sessions. This lack of information can result in feelings of frustration and isolation for students during their first semester on campus and may impact a student veteran’s desire to persist. Institutions should consider offering an annotated orientation and advising session for entering and returning veterans, regardless of credit hours earned, in an effort to assist with campus acclimation or re-acclimation for student veterans.

Military service results in separation from the academic environment from three to eight years, on average. During this time period, student veterans can lose or forget many skills needed to be successful in the college environment. The most consistent concern in this area, relates to
math and science skills, though some also experience writing challenges. Many veterans lose basic math skills. Though their transcripts may indicate that prior to service they mastered a particular level or course, for instance college algebra, and are ready to move to a higher math, for instance trigonometry, the student veteran may not be prepared. The student may not be able to recall basic math principles needed to complete the higher level course. If the student is unaware of on campus tutoring resources and also experiencing difficulty with the material, they may become frustrated to the point of quitting. During initial advising sessions with student veterans, advisors should acknowledge this possibility and encourage the student veteran to repeat the lower level course before tackling the higher level course.

Some English courses and other courses with required writing assignments can also be problematic. In freshmen composition courses, instructors sometimes give student veterans topics that they are not able to relate to. For instance, a student veteran at Southeastern who served in the Navy was asked to write about his first visit home after being in college for a few weeks. The student veteran had not lived with his parents in over six years. When he approached the instructor, she told him to do the best he could with the topic. At that point, the student became frustrated and was prepared to withdraw from the course. Other student veterans reported difficulty writing opinion essays. They explained that in the military, they are not necessarily allowed to have an opinion and that it was difficult, but not impossible, task.

Upon discharge from military service, veterans receive brief, limited information about education benefits and available financial assistance. Much information about college access is passed on from other veterans and this information is often incomplete or inaccurate. Some student veterans interviewed also reported that their campus’ Veteran Affairs office was difficult to access, both online and on campus. Benefits are among one of the biggest concerns for student veterans and can be a source of great stress and anxiety when information is not readily
available. A separate session or workshop addressing financial aid for student veterans including a discussion on the steps for requesting benefits and educational aid or precise steps listed on Financial Aid or Veterans Affairs websites would be well received and beneficial to student veterans.

Even though student veterans report feeling a sense of support from faculty and staff on campus, they still experience a level of isolation. Student veterans report feeling different from the traditional student population and are often hesitant to seek interaction on a social or personal level. These feelings of isolation combined with the military’s training that emphasizes independence means that most student veterans will not readily access counseling or mental health services. Student veterans, however, are interested in connecting with other student veterans on campus. The easiest way for student veterans to make these connections is through a student veterans club or organization.

A student veterans club can prove to be very impactful for student veterans. Some clubs will be service driven while others will offer veterans social opportunities. Regardless of the group’s mission, the organization can be a mechanism for group counseling and skill building in a non-confrontational way and safe environment. The group can also provide opportunities for out-of-class networking with faculty and staff members and also for peer mentoring. In short, the possibilities of a partnership between a student affairs unit and a student veterans club are limitless.

Student affairs professionals, as well as other university faculty and staff, are charged with understanding this population of students within in the context of the university setting. Transition is a process that does not happen overnight. For some student veterans, it can take longer than a year to re-acclimate to civilian life and adjust to the culture of a college campus.
These transition adjustments are not easy for the student veteran and may surface in unexpected ways on campus.

One faculty member at Southeastern reported challenges with a student veteran who cursed during class, not in anger but in every day speech. The faculty member viewed this as disrespectful but the student veteran was unaware that he was even doing it because it was an accepted practice in the military, it had simply become part of his vernacular. This serves as a good example of how a student veteran’s behavior may need to be redirected. In this instance, the faculty member met with the student veteran in private to address the behavior and the student veteran then developed an awareness that helped him filter his language in class.

Finally, student veterans need access to a staff member, preferably someone within a student affairs unit, to serve as their advocate, counselor, and mentor. The traditional campus veterans affairs office that is generally a function of the office of financial aid does little more than process benefits paperwork. While this function is essential, it does not fully meet contemporary student veterans’ needs. A student affairs based office could be a clearinghouse of campus resources and be charged with ensuring that first semester veterans, regardless of classification, receive transition assistance. As the number of student veterans on campus continues to grow, this need will become more evident.

Recommendations for Future Study

This qualitative study provides documentation of Louisiana student veterans’ transition experiences from military life to campus life. With ten participant interviews and student veterans’ club meeting observations, much insight about student veterans’ strengths and weakness surfaced. Given the increase of the student veteran population on these campuses, a quantitative study may prove beneficial as colleges and universities address their programmatic needs. Additional qualitative studies, then, could further investigate specific needs.
Individuals enlisted in the military for various reasons. These individuals are also drawn to specific branches of the military for specific reasons. It would be beneficial to more deeply investigate pre-military service and pre-college characteristics of entering student veterans. This information could help universities and colleges understand what motivates student veterans to enter college following military service or to leave college and enter the military.

Finally, the needs of female student veterans are different from the needs of male student veterans. Previous research indicates that their experiences in the military are different from the experiences of males and this has some implications for campuses. This study should be repeated using female student veterans as the participants to raise awareness about their needs. The findings may yield significant programmatic impact as well. Female veterans want to be recognized for their service and have needs that are different from male combat student veterans. The researcher received communication from three female student veterans who were disappointed that they could not serve as participants and that their experiences could not be included. They felt unheard and unappreciated.

Conclusion

Student veterans are flooding colleges and universities in numbers not seen since the end of World War II. Little is known about how these contemporary student veterans navigate the transition from military life to campus life. Few studies have documented the transition experiences of these student veterans by institution type or cultural region of the country. These contemporary student veterans have specific needs that differ vastly from traditional college student that require colleges and universities to rethink the manner in which services and programs are delivered in order to address these needs.

In Louisiana, nearly 7,000 students receive military benefits for higher education with this number steadily increasing (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2009, June). While many
institutions in the state of Louisiana, like those institutions in other states, implemented initiatives to recruit veterans, few have implemented programs or services to attend to or address their specific transition needs. This study sought to explore the transition experience of student veterans from military life to university life at four institutions of higher education in Louisiana. With a deeper understanding of the transition experiences of Louisiana’s contemporary student veterans, universities and colleges could better meet their needs through the provision of veteran specific services and programs.

Qualitative methodology, specifically the case study tradition, was used to address the research questions. Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman’s (1995) theory of adult transition aided in developing an understanding of how male combat veterans of the Global War on Terror transition from military life to college life. This framework also provided the context for the interview protocol.

Two institutions, Southeastern Louisiana University and Louisiana State University, worked with the researcher to identify research participants while two others, Southern University and Baton Rouge Community College, were unable to identify participants willing to discuss their military to college transition. Ten participants were interviewed over a five month period, five students from Southeastern Louisiana University and five from Louisiana State University. The initial interview protocol addressed the participants’ experiences prior to the military, military training and combat, and collegiate experience. The notion of the southern military tradition and its impact on the transition experiences of Louisiana student veterans was also considered. A second round of interviews occurred with specific participants and interview questions were tailored to each participant based on their initial interview.

Participant profiles were created for each respondent. These profiles provided insight and background for each participant and addressed their family histories, military classification and
experience, and college careers to date. These profiles proved useful when considering the interview responses. Five themes emerged from an exploration of the participants’ transition experiences based on data gathered through interviews and several observations of student veterans’ club meetings at Southeastern Louisiana University and Louisiana State University.

The five themes that emerged during data analysis included military identity negotiation, post-service privilege and entitlement, on-campus isolation, increased academic maturity, and southern military tradition. The first four themes described aspects of the student veterans’ transition experiences. The final theme, the southern military tradition, related to the culture of Louisiana and the implications it has for student veteran transition at Louisiana institutions of higher education.

The final chapter of this dissertation, Chapter 5, presented discussion and conclusions, limitations of the study, and recommendations for student affairs practice, and suggestions for future research. The five themes provided the structure for the discussion. The theoretical implications of this study related to Schlossberg’s (1984) theory of adult transitions and Schlossberg’s (1989) idea of mattering and marginality were also considered. Limitations of the study were noted and the researcher detailed implications for practice when serving student veterans. Lastly, recommendations for future study of student veterans were highlighted.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol

[Describe the project and tell participant about the purpose of the study, sources of data, confidentiality of the interview, and interview procedures.]

Participant will read consent form, ask questions, sign the consent form.

Begin recording, turn on recorder.

Part 1: Demographic Information

Pseudonym
Age
Race
Institution
First time college attendee/re-entering
Time at institution
Transfer from another institution y/n
Academic Major
Self Reported Grade Point Average
Branch of Service
Military classification at time of discharge
Length of military service
Hometown/High School

Part 2:

1. What led to your decision to join the United States military?
   A. How did you choose the branch of service?
   B. How did your friends, family, teachers/professors respond to your decision to enlist?

2. Describe the types of transition assistance you received in the military?
   A. What type of special training or orientation did you complete prior to deployment?
   B. What type of special training or orientation did you complete once you returned from overseas?

3. Please tell me about the contact you had with your family and friends while you were deployed.

4. Please tell me about any contact you had from your college friends or other members of the college community (faculty and staff) while you were deployed.

5. What led to your decision to return/start college? What factors led to your choice of college?
6. What services or support did you receive once you enrolled in college? Of these services and support, which ones are specific for student veterans?

7. How did you experience the classroom? What has your classroom experience been like since you returned from service?

8. If you were enrolled prior to deployment, please talk about your collegiate experiences before and after deployment.
   How were you doing academically prior to enlisting? How did your academic performance influence your decision to enlist?
   How did your military experience impact your college experience?

9. What types of expectations did you have about the college experience as a student veteran?
   What would have been/was/would be helpful from your institution with your transition back to college?

10. What comes to mind when you hear the term “southern military tradition”?
11. Describe your experience as a veteran outside of the college setting.

Part 3:

Please share any information that you think is significant regarding your military to college transition experience that may not have been previously addressed in this interview.

Part 4:

Reminders:
• Your identity will be kept confidential.
• This interview will be transcribed. I may contact you at a later date for clarification or follow up if needed.
• Share veteran resources
APPENDIX B: LETTERS TO POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS AND KEY INFORMANTS

Informed Consent for Participation in Research for Dissertation - LSU

1. Study Title: Negotiating Cultural Transitions: Contemporary Student Veterans and Louisiana Institutions of Higher Education

2. Performance Site: Louisiana State University A & M
   Baton Rouge Community College
   Southeastern Louisiana University
   Southern University, Baton Rouge

3. Investigators: The following investigator are available for questions about this study:
   M-F, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
   Ms. Kay Harrison Maurin (principle investigator) 985-969-0200
   Dr. Roland Mitchell (supervising professor) 225-578-2156

4. Purpose of Study:
   The purpose of the dissertation research project is to document the transition experiences of Iraq and/or Afghanistan veterans returning from duty overseas and entering/reeentering college at four colleges and universities in Louisiana.

5. Subjects:
   Male student veterans who served in Iraq and/or Afghanistan between 2003 and 2010 and are enrolled as undergraduate students at one of the four institutions listed

6. Number of Subjects: 32 (8 from each institution)

7. Study Procedure:
   Subjects will be interviewed by the researcher about their transition experiences from military culture to campus culture. Interviews will be audio recorded for transcription.

8. Benefits:
   This study may yield valuable information in understanding the transition experience of Louisiana student veterans and meeting their needs through the provision of services and programming on college campuses. Participants will be provided with a list of resources for veterans on campus and in the local area.

9. Risks:
   Topics covered in the interview may elicit an emotional response. If the participant becomes too emotional to continue, the interview will stop and the principle investigator will assist the participant in accessing counseling immediately.
10. Right to Refuse: Participants may choose not to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of any benefit to which they might be otherwise entitled.

11. Privacy: Results of the study may be published, but no names or identifying information will be included in the publication. Subject identity will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigator or the investigator’s supervising professor. If I have questions about subjects’ rights or other concerns, I can contact Robert C. Matthews, Institutional Review Board, (225)578-8692, irb@lsu.edu, www.lsu.edu/irb. I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigator’s obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this consent form.

Subject signature:_________________________ Date:______________
1. Study Title: Negotiating Cultural Transitions: Contemporary Student Veterans and Louisiana Institutions of Higher Education

2. Performance Site: Louisiana State University A & M
   Baton Rouge Community College
   Southeastern Louisiana University
   Southern University, Baton Rouge

3. Investigators: The following investigator are available for questions about this study:
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The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigator or the investigator’s supervising professor. If I have questions about subjects’ rights or other concerns, I can contact Dr. Patrick Carriere, Chairperson of the Institutional Research Oversight Committee, 225-771-5290 ext. 183, carriere@engr.subr.edu. I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigator’s obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this consent form.

Subject signature:______________________________ Date:______________
1. Study Title: Negotiating Cultural Transitions: Contemporary Student Veterans and Louisiana Institutions of Higher Education

2. Performance Site: Louisiana State University A & M
   Baton Rouge Community College
   Southeastern Louisiana University
   Southern University, Baton Rouge

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The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigator or the investigator’s supervising professor. If I have questions about subjects’ rights or other concerns, I can contact Dr. Michelle Hall, Chairperson of the Institutional Review Board, 985-549-2103. I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigator’s obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this consent form.

Subject signature:_____________________________________________Date:______________
Dear Sir/Madam:

My name is Kay Maurin and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Leadership Research and Counseling at Louisiana State University. I am completing my doctoral studies with a dissertation that will document the experiences of student veterans in Louisiana as they transition from military culture to campus culture. Male student veterans who served in Iraq or Afghanistan between 2003 and 2010 who are currently enrolled at one of four institutions in Louisiana, including Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge Community College, Southeastern Louisiana University, and Southern University, are sought as participants for this study.

Participants in this study will be interviewed for a minimum of one hour about their transition experiences. Interviews will take place on campus during regular university business hours during the Fall 2010 and Spring 2011 semesters. Interview responses will be audio recorded for accuracy. All participants will be assigned a fictitious name and the participant’s identity will be known only to me. During the interview, the participant may refuse to answer any questions and may stop the interview at any point without penalty. All participants will receive resource sheets outlining services and programs for veterans on campus and off campus.

I would greatly appreciate any recommendations you could make for participants in this study. Names and contact information can be sent to me via email, kmaurin@selu.edu, or phone, 985-549-2247. Should have any questions or require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervising professor, Dr. Roland Mitchell, rwmitch@lsu.edu, 225-578-2156.

Sincerely,

Kay Harrison Maurin
APPENDIX C: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FORMS

ACTION ON PROTOCOL APPROVAL REQUEST

TO: Roland Mitchell
E: RG

FROM: Robert C. Mathews
Chair, Institutional Review Board

DATE: October 20, 2010
RE: IRB # 3133

TITLE: Negotiating Cultural Transitions: Contemporary Student Veterans and Louisiana Institutions of Higher Education


Review type: Full _ X_ Expedited ___ Review date: 10/23/2010

Risk Factor: Miniml_ X__ Uncertain _____ Greater Than Minimal______

Approved____ X____ Disapproved_____

Approval Date: 10/21/2010 Approval Expiration Date: 10/20/2011

Re-review frequency: (annual unless otherwise stated)

Number of subjects approved: 32

Protocol Matches Scope of Work in Grant proposal: (if applicable)____

By: Robert C. Mathews, Chairman

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING—Continuing approval is CONDITIONAL on:

1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU's Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects.
2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.
3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submission of a termination report) prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually began), notification of project termination.
4. Resolution of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 2 years after the study ends.
5. Continuing adherence to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants including notification of any information that might affect consent.
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.
8. SPECIAL NOTE: All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU's Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46), and FDA regulations governing the use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at http://www.lsu.edu/irb

115
Colleges and universities are currently experiencing the greatest influx of student veterans since World War II. Little is known about how these contemporary student veterans navigate the transition from military life to campus life. Few studies have compared the transition experiences of these student veterans by institution type or cultural region of the country.

In Louisiana, nearly 7,000 students receive military benefits for higher education and the number is steadily increasing. This study explores the transition experience of student veterans from military life to university life at four institutions of higher education in Louisiana including Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge Community College, Southeastern Louisiana University, and Southern University. Transition experiences are compared by institution type. The notion of the southern military tradition and its impact on the transition experiences of Louisiana student veterans is also explored.

The researcher uses qualitative methodology, specifically personal interviews, to address the research questions. Participants will be assigned pseudonyms and all interviews will be audio recorded. Male student veterans who served in Iraq and/or Afghanistan between 2003 and 2010 and are currently enrolled as undergraduates at one of the four previously listed institutions will be interviewed about their military to college transition experiences. Findings and implications from this research deepen the awareness of how institution type and regional culture influence transition resulting in a richer understanding of contemporary student veterans’ transition experiences.
Institutional Review Board
Box 11851
Phone: 549-2077

DATE: November 29, 2010

TO: Kay Harrison Martin
   Disability Services

FROM: Dr. Michelle Hall, Chair

RE: IRB Action on Proposed Project

This memo is to inform you of the IRB action with regard to your proposal:

Title: Negotiating Cultural Transitions: Contemporary Student Veterans and Louisiana Institutions of Higher Education

This proposal was given: Expected Review: X

   Full Committee Review: 

   Exempt: 

The result was: Full Approval: X

   Denied Approval: 

If anything other than Full Approval is recommended, it is your responsibility, as investigator, to submit changes/corrections or plans to accommodate conditions listed below to the Institutional Review Board prior to initiating the project. This approval is valid for one year from the date above, if data is to be collected after that time frame, the PI must submit a Continuation of Research Form.

Failure to acquire full approval by IRB before implementation for any project which involves human means that the PI is not acting in “good faith” with university policy and is not, therefore, guaranteed the protection of the university.

Committee Comments:

IRB Number: 2011-030
Colleges and universities are currently experiencing the greatest influx of student veterans since World War II. Little is known about how these contemporary student veterans navigate the transition from military life to campus life. Few studies have compared the transition experiences of these student veterans by institution type or cultural region of the country.

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APPENDIX D: RESOURCES FOR STUDENT VETERANS

The Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs
1-877-GEAUXVA
www.vetaffairs.la.gov

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs
http://www.va.gov

National Veteran Service Organizations

- The American Legion www.legion.org
- Veterans of Foreign Wars www.vfw.org
- Disabled American Veterans www.dav.org
- Military Order of the Purple Heart www.purpleheart.org
- Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of American www.iava.org

Military Family Assistance Fund

Louisiana residents, and their immediate family members, in the Guard and Reserve called to active duty for more than 30 consecutive days after September 11, 2001 may apply for this need-based emergency financial assistance. The fund pays for necessities not covered by insurance—food, housing, medical services, etc., as well as certain travel expenses. Applications are available at all parish service offices and at www.vetaffairs.la.gov.

LA Welcome Home / Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program

LDVA welcomes all returning service members home from their service with information on available services and benefits, and participates in the Department of Defense Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program.

University Specific Student Veteran Resources

Baton Rouge Community College
Veterans Club

Louisiana State University
LSU Student Health Center 225-578-6271

Southeastern Louisiana University
Veterans Support Group, University Counseling Center
Facilitated by Dr. Barbara Hebert, bhebert@selu.edu, 549-3842

Veterans Upward Bound, North Campus Main Building, 171
1-800-616-2316 or vub@selu.edu

Southern University – Baton Rouge
Southern University Counseling Center 225-771-2480
## Area Specific Veteran Resources

### Baton Rouge, LA

**Baton Rouge Outpatient Clinic**
- 7968 Essen Park Avenue, Baton Rouge, LA
- 225-761-3400

**Baton Rouge Vet Center**
- 5207 Essen Lane, Suite 2, Baton Rouge, LA
- 225-757-0042

### Hammond, LA

**Hammond VA Outpatient Clinic**
- 1131 South Morrison Avenue, Hammond, LA
- 985-902-5026
VITA

Kay Harrison Maurin was born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, to Henry and Phyllis Harrison. She grew up in Hammond, Louisiana, attending Holy Ghost Catholic School and St. Thomas Aquinas Regional Catholic High School. After graduating from St. Thomas Aquinas in 1995, Kay attended Southeastern Louisiana University.

Kay majored in organizational communication theory with a minor in business management. During her time as an undergraduate student, she was involved in numerous student organizations and held several leadership positions. Most notably, Kay served as chapter president of Phi Mu Fraternity for two years. She was recognized by the organization as an Outstanding Sophomore and received the Senior Service Award. Kay was also honored as a Green “S” recipient, an award recognizing Southeastern students for leadership and involvement on campus.

Following her college graduation in 1999, Kay accepted a position as an Extension Consultant for Phi Mu Fraternity based in Atlanta, Georgia. Kay worked with national volunteers to colonize new chapters of the fraternity at the University of Oklahoma, Wake Forest University, and University of Texas, San Antonio. She was also responsible for chapter management at Oklahoma State University, University of Illinois, Pennslyvania State University, and Virginia Tech. In 2000, Kay decided to return to Southeastern Louisiana University to pursue a master’s degree in counseling. She accepted a graduate assistantship in the Office of Student Organizations and Greek Life and was promoted to Director of Student Organizations/Greek Life the following year. She joined the Association of Fraternity Advisors, serving on numerous committees, and the Louisiana Association for College and University Personnel Administrators. Kay completed her graduate degree in 2003 and also passed the examination to earn the designation of National Certified Counselor (NCC). That same year she was selected to serve as class president of Leadership Tangipahoa, a community organization that recognizes rising professional leaders.
Following a five year tenure in the Office of Student Organizations/Greek, Kay accepted the position of Director of Disability Services, also at Southeastern. She chartered a chapter of Delta Alpha Pi, an international honors society that recognizes students with disabilities for their academic and community service achievements, and established a scholarship fund for incoming freshmen with disabilities. She is currently working to formalize a transition program for college students on the autism spectrum and has partnered with faculty members from the Educational Leadership and Technology department to research technology that enhances the classroom experiences of students with disabilities.

In 2009, Kay was recognized as the L.E. Chandler Outstanding Service to Students Award recipient by the Southeastern Louisiana University Alumni Foundation. She also contributed to several journal publications on technology and crisis management. Additionally, she has presented at state and national conferences on topics ranging from strategic planning to best practices of fraternity and sorority advising.

In January 2006, Kay entered Louisiana State University to pursue a doctorate in higher education. Her dissertation focuses on student veteran transition. Experiences working with new and returning students who completed wartime service led to her dissertation topic choice. Kay hopes that her dissertation will add to the existing knowledge base of contemporary student veterans and will result in a heightened awareness of this student population.