

Tactical Transitions: Examining Military-Affiliate Needs at Appalachian State University

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Abstract

This study focused on a needs assessment of student veterans and military-affiliated students in higher education at a mid-sized institution in the southeast. It examines how this population wants to be communicated with due to the developing advances of technology and the preferred methods of programming and mentorship. A survey was used to gather data on three research objectives: to identify the perceived programming needs of student veterans and military-affiliated students, to examine the best method of communication to reach this population, and to determine what type of mentorship program this population saw as beneficial. Both rewards and difficulties of working with this population of students were found, but it is evident that the rewards predominate. Potential implications for student veteran support services and higher education administrators discussed include better defining their communication, programming, and implementation of mentorship strategies and developing more successful communication with student veteran.

Introduction

The new Post 9/11 GI Bill, signed in 2008 and enacted in 2009, offers some of the best educational benefits for veterans in United States history, and with the drawdown of troops due to the end of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, institutions of higher education are starting to see an increase of veterans and other military affiliated students on their campuses (38 U.S.C. Chapter 33). As these service members return back home, many of them are choosing to pursue their degrees in order to build on the skills they acquired in the military before entering the civilian job market.

The Military Affairs Committee (MAC) at Appalachian State University (ASU) identified needs on campus and researched “promising practices” related to student veterans (L. Gregory, personal communication, February 15, 2017). Using the research gathered, Dr. Gregory, in collaboration with the MAC, wrote a grant that would provide funding for the Student Veteran Student Coordinator (SVSC) in hope to increase student veteran admissions, increase retention, and increase 4-year graduation rates by creating and implementing “promising practices.” Some needs that were identified have been or were being met before this grant by MAC members, however this grant allows resources and initiatives to be centrally located and organized through the SVSC.

Student veterans are a diverse population on campus, and student affairs administrators should not expect universal comprehension of, or blanket programming for, these students. However, there are several ways we can thoughtfully consider student veterans and other military affiliated students in our programs and provide services to this population of students. In this study, through a survey with student veterans and military affiliated students, the needs of this student population pertaining to programming, communication, and mentorship, will be

investigated.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to provide a better understanding of student veteran and military affiliated student needs on Appalachian State University's campus. More specifically, the study will attempt to identify areas of improvement in regards to programming, communication, and mentorship. Between 2000 and 2012, more than 900,000 veterans and military service members received education benefits through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (Sherman, Klein-Collins, & Palmer, 2012). Currently, Appalachian State University serves 302 student veterans. Findings from this research will provide a starting point for the SVSC to improve current services and will provide supporting data of the impact the Major General Edward M. Reeder, Jr. Student Veteran Resource Center (SVRC) has had on military-affiliated students. Appalachian State University's Center of Excellence wrote a grant to help establish the center on campus. The U.S. Department of Education Fund accepted the Centers of Excellence for Veteran Student Success grant proposal, which provides funding through 2018 (Greggory, L., 2015). In order for the SVRC to continue operation after this date, funds need to be located by the University.

Research Questions

Q1: What are the perceived programming needs of SVRC as reported by student veterans and other military-affiliated students at Appalachian State University (ASU)?

Q2: What is the best method of communication to reach student veterans and other military-affiliated students at ASU?

Q3: What type of mentorship program, if any, do ASU student veterans and other military-affiliated students perceive as beneficial?

Literature Review

Historically, information about student veterans and military-affiliated students has been hard to come by. However, recent studies have focused on the re-enrollment of students returning from war zone deployment. Rumann & Hamrick, (2010) indicate that many students reported having high levels of distress after coming back from deployment and transitioning into the classroom. Participants in their study tended not to separate their student transition and their civilian transition, viewing them as one cohesive transition (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). This is an important factor to keep in mind when understanding this population's transitional experiences. Student affairs administrators should avoid confusing individual student veteran and military-affiliated student experiences, and recognize that each individual is unique. Those that serve this population should consider the possibilities of the type of transition each student may be working through.

While soldiers enrolled in degree programs experienced many of the same problems as traditional students, there are unique challenges that accompany many student veterans and other military-affiliated students throughout their educational experience that other traditional students or administrators may not understand. According to the Department of Veterans Affairs (2012), veterans have been designated as a vulnerable population under the Americans with Disabilities Act. Student veterans are often dealing with both the visible and invisible injuries of war. Rumann & Hamrick (2010) describe a lack of information about the Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), and Operation New Dawn (OND) cohort of student-veterans. Future research on the topic of adjustment and transition will be vital to understanding veteran experiences and managing outcomes.

Similar to their counterparts from World War II, combat veterans from OEF and OIF

enrolling in higher education tend to be more mature and motivated in their studies than the general student population (Brown & Gross, 2011). However, there was a perceived lack of campus support found by first-year veterans in comparison to non-veterans (NSSE, 2010). Student veterans in particular, were found to have more family and work obligations, but spent the same amount of time studying as non-veterans. Despite the veterans spending the same amount of time studying, these students were less academically engaged in thoughtful approaches to learning. Additionally, they perceived lower levels of support from their campuses (NSSE, 2010, p. 18). This data underscores the need for alternative methods of instruction and academic support for student veterans, in particular services that ease the burden of work and family obligations while enrolled.

Military-affiliated students come in all shapes and sizes, from active-duty to reserve, civilian, and dependent status. As student veterans and other military-affiliated students' transition to new roles and lifestyles while attempting to adjust various aspects of their lives, student affairs administrators have struggled with how to help this population of students. According to Hanafin (2012) few college students, faculty, or student affairs administrators have military backgrounds, leaving them ill-equipped to understand the challenges that veterans may face. In order to address some of these challenges, there may need to be a shift towards a more thorough self-understanding by student veterans. If this population can understand the changes they are experiencing through entering institutions of higher education, they may, in-turn, help themselves better understand their civilian transition. Important differences in cultural and perceptual perspectives exist between student-veterans and traditional students. Military experience allows student veterans to perceive their student status as unique compared to their non-veteran peers. Student Veterans report having seen themselves as an asset to accomplishing

their academic and career goals due to their maturity level, life experience in the military, and military training (Livingston, Havice, Cawthon, & Fleming, 2011). Transition to student status, while preparing for career goals after graduation may induce various coping challenges, which require strategies to achieve academic and professional goals.

Military-student specific orientations can aid the transition from military to student life according to research done at the University of Colorado-Colorado Springs Office of Veteran and Military Student Affairs (Witkowsky, Kumm, Mendez, Nicholson, Dimandja, & Morris, 2017). This research defined military-connected students as military veterans, active-duty military personnel, and reservists and did not include military dependents. The population of military-connected students reported that while the specific orientation was greatly beneficial for the logistics - VA benefits, resources on campus specifically for military-connected students, and introduction to the supporting staff - they reported low on feeling welcome and connected to the institution. It is noted that the key social, emotional, and personal connection could be solved through a networking option in their schedule to connect with not only new military-connected students, but also current students (Witkowsky et al., 2017). It is also important to point out that much research on transition is focused on military veterans, active duty personnel, and reservists and often specifically mentions the exclusion of dependents, despite their connection to the military.

A Closer Look: Appalachian State University

After Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm in 1990 and 1991, students were put on active duty and withdrew from higher education institutions like Appalachian State University. Just like other times when students were transferred to active duty or told they would deploy, a lot of work had to be done in a short amount of time. Thankfully, leaders at

Appalachian State University saw this trend and began to look into the academic, financial, and emotional needs that would be affected surrounding the military obligations of their students. Policies and procedures began to take shape based off of the perceived needs in order to better support these students and their families. The veteran affairs coordinator at the time, initiated a conversation with administrators, staff, and faculty. Conversations with various departments on campus were endorsed by the chancellor, which made implementing policies and procedures easier. The new academic policies were implemented in time for military students be able to take their final exams early, in order to finish the semester before deploying overseas. Additionally, faculty and staff were able to have conversations via email with service members so that the service members could be informed about their status at the university and what was happening in their classes. Financial solutions and guidelines, such as full tuition refunds and payment plans, were proposed and reviewed by the University of North Carolina General Administration in an effort to help financial aid offices become prepared to answer questions and aid students in understanding their options based on individual situations (Johnson, 2009).

Thanks to the support of the Appalachian State, family members left at home were able to connect with one another by forming family support groups such as Desert Shield Support Group. In addition to this organization, the university's campus leaders made sure that students serving overseas felt like a part of the Appalachian community despite being deployed. During Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm the university sent care packages and provided newsletters that included what was happening at home.

Due to the policies and procedures put into place in response to Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm, Appalachian State University was better prepared for the effects that the Global War on Terrorism, which began in 2001, would have on students at the

university. Today, support continues through campus participation in state and national veterans organizations, as well as new initiatives on campus such as the Military Affairs Committee and new Student Veteran Services Coordinator position.

Student Involvement

Social integration into a campus community is vital to student retention and academic success. According to Vincent Tinto's stages of integration, student veterans often fall into the last two stages: transition and incorporation (Tinto, 1993). This population searches for their place in higher education until they feel that they have fully integrated into the college community. Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, and Gonyea (2008) describe the educational practice of purposeful interaction with faculty and peers as active and collaborative learning. Their research showed the small but statistically significant effect student engagement has on academic success. Examples of effective educational practices found in their study include: orientation, first-year seminar, learning communities, intrusive advising, peer tutoring, and service learning.

The difficulty of adjustment or assimilation to a peer group or the academic culture at college may influence a student veteran's level of involvement. Successful social integration addresses issues of isolation and lack of connection to peers. Peer groups are often the single most single compelling source of influence on growth and development on college campuses. When students are engaged in on campus activities such as student organizations, volunteering, or in campus employment they are more likely to be successful with their learning, academic performance, and retention (Chaleunphonh, 2015).

Student veteran and military-affiliated student support groups have an influence on sense of belonging and persistence to graduation. Chaleunphonh states, that "subgroups such as minority groups do not completely leave behind their culture" (p. 38, 2015). Interactions with

other student veterans and faculty members about academic issues, performance, and membership in clubs and organizations are related to creating a sense of belonging at an institution. According to Summerlot, Green, and Parker (2009), student veteran associations (SVAs) are great starting points for new student veterans to connect to peers, find information, and access other support services. When coupled with student veteran resource centers that have appropriate staffing, student veteran associations are an indicator of a veteran-friendly campuses that have supportive attitudes towards this population. Student veteran resource centers can express a collective voice to advocate for student veteran needs. Cook and Kim (2009) report that only 32% of colleges have a student veteran organization.

Challenges with Resilience and Trust

Student veterans may be faced with negative stereotypes when returning to academia (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). This population often report exposure to insensitive or uninformed comments and questions about their military service by civilians (e.g., “Did you kill anyone over there?”) and may be exposed to anti-military or uninformed opinions on campus or in the classroom. Unchecked stereotyping or anti-military sentiment, whether perceived or real, can breed mistrust between student veterans and faculty, staff, and students. Often, these experiences result in disengagement in the campus community and limits social interactions to only other veterans in the university setting.

Given the military’s closely held values around competence, resilience, self-reliance, and in-group identification, veterans are often reluctant to seek help if academic problems arise. Generally, seeking help doesn’t align with the warrior ethos and may be perceived as an admission of weakness (Lighthall, 2012). This can be complicated by the fact that potential sources of assistance (e.g., professors, counseling center staff) may be viewed with mistrust and

assumed to be unable to understand the veteran experience. While many veterans successfully navigate the transition to the academic setting and often excel in this environment (Cate, 2014), for those student veterans who struggle, the reluctance to seek assistance can hinder their potential for academic success.

Elements of military culture can and often do instill confidence, discipline, and loyalty in its members, some aspects of military culture and experience can create challenges for veterans as they attempt to re-acclimate to the civilian setting, and in particular to life in an academic setting. When stepping onto campus, student veterans are separated from their group of trusted and battle-tested comrades. Veterans also tend to be older than traditionally-aged college students (Rudd, Goulding, & Bryan, 2011). In the academic setting, they may have difficulty interacting with peers, who may have different perspectives and experiences (Lighthall, 2012). Furthermore, student veterans may interact with faculty and staff who lack awareness of the responsibilities and stressors they often experience, including family and work commitments, ongoing military obligations, financial pressure, or medical and psychological conditions, all of which may impact classroom attendance and performance.

Methodology

Participants

Participants encompassed the military-affiliated student population of 302 students which are identified as: active duty, reserve, separated service members, and veteran students. All military-affiliated students were enrolled at ASU and were 18 years of age or older. All respondents were between the ages of 18 to 59 and had been involved in the military in some capacity during their lifetime.

Materials and Procedures

This research study was undertaken using both qualitative and quantitative survey questions, which examined the perceived needs of military-affiliated students and preferred communication methods for this population at a mid-sized rural university in the south. In accordance with Institutional Review Board guidelines ethical approval was received on May 9, 2017 prior to the start of this research. Since this study involved minimal risk and met the exemption category of anonymous educational tests. In accordance with 45 CFR 46.101(b) and University policy and procedures, the research activities described in the study materials were exempt from further IRB review.

We recruited our sample at a university by accessing the Student Veteran Services Coordinator's email listserv and holding office hours in the Student Veteran Resource Center. Because our respondents self-identified as student veterans or military-affiliated students, inclusion criteria primarily focused on undergraduate students who utilize the Student Veteran Resource Center and who provided information about their military background in Banner. To receive the most survey responses, incentives from local business were offered. A questionnaire via an online Qualtrics survey link with both quantitative and qualitative open-ended questions was distributed by the authors in the fall of 2017 and was available starting in the third week of classes and remained open for one month. Over the course of the month, one email reminder was sent out every week to the listserv. The Student Veteran Coordinator mentioned the survey in his newsletter and the Student Veteran Association provided a few minutes at their chapter meeting to present on the survey and allowed for questions to be addressed or comments to be discussed.

The researchers decided to use a purposive sample because it was important to reach the

targeted sample. Additionally, since the student veteran and military-affiliated population is a homogeneous purposive sample, the researchers wanted to understand the significance of only their experiences on campus. Survey questions most relevant to this analysis focus on participants' perceived programming needs, preferred communication methods, and interest in mentorship programming. For example, along with survey questions about which communication methods are preferred when receiving information from the Student Veteran Resource Center, individuals were asked questions such as, "how often, if at all, would you prefer to receive a newsletter from Student Veteran Services with events and information?" They were also asked to elaborate specifically on their communication preferences in receiving information. Next, student veterans and military-affiliated students were asked, "what other services would you like the Student Veterans Services to provide that it doesn't already?" to ascertain general programming needs. The qualitative portion of our survey was analyzed for themes. A complete list of survey questions may be found in Appendix A.

The survey was hosted on the Qualtrics website, which allowed data to be analyzed in a concise and thorough manner. Using the report feature on Qualtrics, quantitative data was automatically counted and put into percentages and other easy to read data sets, such as charts and graphs. This allowed the researchers more time to analyze qualitative data for themes. The researchers utilized the text feature in Qualtrics, which allowed the researchers to search and categorize textual responses into topics, which was helpful in organizing data and keeping it stored in an online format with the rest of the quantitative data. Having all data categorized and stored in one central location was helpful for the purposes of interpreting data for discussion. Data was recorded by the researchers at the end of each week and was transcribed verbatim to enable reflection and to analyze key themes as accurately as possible for a thick description and a

reliable representation of the data. Analyzing qualitative data provided a thick description and allowed the researchers to determine accurate patterns of cultural and social relationships and put them in context. During the analysis process the researchers independently reviewed the notes up to five times to accurately draw comparisons between several themes using standard coding procedures for qualitative data (Patton, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Results

The Qualtrics survey resulted in 106 responses, with 84 usable responses for a response rate of 28%. The 84 responding student veterans represented a wide range of demographic and military characteristics. Ages ranged from 18 to 59, 82% were white, and 73% were male. Respondents had served in the Air Force, Army, Marines, Navy, and Coast Guard and included company grade officers (2%), junior enlisted (49%), and senior enlisted (33%). 65% had separated from the military prior to taking the survey. Three overarching themes were uncovered and are elaborated on below: importance of support networks, direct communication, and mentorship programing.

Discussion

Importance of Support Networks

Most of the responses were consolidated into a theme we called “Importance of Support Networks.” Student veterans and other military affiliated students self-reported difficulty connecting socially with traditional students. This may be because traditional students are less likely to have established vocational, social, and family roles. Additionally, there was a perception among participants that traditional students are just “kids.” One participant shared:

“It is hard to relate to people who were graduating from high school last year when I was serving in Afghanistan.”

The military has been a way of life for participants, and the less structured role as a student is not as familiar to them. Difficult social connections may be due in part to unpleasant or intrusive interactions with civilian peers, who may convey little knowledge or concern about the current conflicts overseas, ask inappropriate questions, or express a lack of military appreciation (e.g., lack of observance of Veterans Day). This is a theme that came up frequently in our research.

“It's hard for a university to do, but having more of an appreciation for our country would help. I didn't hear a single word about 9/11, and Veterans Day is not celebrated/acknowledged at App State.”

In self-reported perceived stereotypes about service members from other students, participants stated that it was often uncomfortable or unappealing to integrate into the typical student lifestyle because of what their classmates thought about them. They believe that civilian students have significant misperceptions about Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), and Operation New Dawn (OND). They also believe that there are misperceptions about U.S. foreign policy and as a result it makes it hard for student veterans to want to engage with those around them. These issues appear to lead to a form of identity challenge for some student veterans and military affiliated students, who may perceive themselves as at a different stage in their lives than the typical student and may prefer to spend time with other veterans. Participants also discussed how they may downplay their role as veterans when interacting with non-veteran members of the campus community. In doing so, they experience the push and pull of two identities—one as a veteran with unique experiences and a skill set different than that of the traditional student, the other as a student trying to integrate and adapt in the college. As one participant shared their feelings about this struggle:

“I don't really tell anyone [about my service] because I don't want the attention”

This struggle between wanting to be accepted (and recognized) as a veteran versus wanting to assimilate and develop an identity as a “typical” college student may be an important issue for veterans and college communities to address. During the course of the research, it appeared that there were occasional negative connotations with support networks and the perception that they were only for veterans. Participants discussed how it was hard to connect with different groups of students on campus, whether it was related to military background or just general student clubs and organizations. One of the participants mentioned the desire to want to put themselves out there more in an effort to make more friends.

“Doesn't really have anything to do with being a military-affiliated student in particular, but I really think I need to socialize more and put myself out there with making friends. But it would probably be even more difficult as a transfer student who is affiliated with the military.”

Despite the fact that many of the participants mentioned social support networks as an important part of their transition to higher education, there was little agreement on what the most beneficial social support networks looked like, as it varied between participants. Through taking advantage of the Student Veteran Resource Center and the Student Veteran Association social support networks within this population of students, are taking the form of networks that focus on the collective military background. According to our research, Student Veteran Associations are often a good starting point for making social support connections with other military members (Summerlot, Green, and Parker, 2009). However, as some participants discuss they are beginning to seek out other forms of social support on campus. This process will look different for each student based off of their wants and needs. For example, the student above who mentioned being a transfer student might decide to get involved with the Transfer Student

Organization in an effort to meet similar students without the military background. Student veterans with families may want to become involved in areas that provide activities for all ages, such as the Trick-Or-Treat for Tots program. This finding was common in the literature as well, which discussed how students who are involved in support networks tend to do better academically (Chaleunphonh, 2015). It's important to note that social support networks with other student veterans and military-affiliated students are important, but this population also wants to seek out connections with other populations in the campus community.

Direct Communication

E-mail was indicated as the most preferred method of communicating for most academic purposes. Facebook was important as well, particularly for socializing and learning about campus events. The researchers found that the perception of importance or preference in communication method changed depending on context or information that was being disseminated. Respondents stated that they did not want to be contacted via a personal email account or text message. Students indicated that they rarely use phone conversations to communicate with professors or even with other students—a surprising result to the authors, given the rampant use of cellphones in society. The latter result has implications for the Coordinator of Student Veteran Services. Although phone calls are sometimes more efficient for answering detailed questions about military benefits, students prefer the less personal, more indirect method of emailing questions to professionals across campus. Though one might argue that emailing about these topics are both less effective and efficient. In another finding, students were reasonably comfortable with Facebook as a means of finding out about Student Veteran Association events and as a means of communication. Therefore, utilizing online information

delivery could potentially benefit the Student Veteran Resource Center if they put increased emphasis on these types of communication.

The leadership of an organization, division or group, creates the environment, and can have an influences all of the other variables in communication selection. It is the leadership that projects a heavy influence on the attitudes, emotions, and decisions of the organization. Most participants understood the value of being able to communicate with the Coordinator of Student Veteran Services and executive board of the Student Veteran Association via multiple mediums of communication. An interesting finding related to the use of email as a default related to etiquette. Some participants felt that using email could be uncomfortable, because in the military there is a chain of command for communication. Etiquette and politeness are concepts that are globally understood, but not universally defined. Etiquette is an area where leadership can provide a definition as well as influence part of the organization's communication culture. If the leader(s) of student veteran and other military affiliated student services show that using email is an effective and appropriate way to communicate, members of this population may be more likely to participate in that communication channel.

Communication is a very complex process based on the participating individual's emotions, experiences, and effectiveness. Although it was evident from the participants that individuals grow into specific patterns of communication based on availability, what was not clear was what is required to change their current preferences. The general implications of this survey suggest that student veterans all communicate using various levels of technology, although most utilize Facebook and their university email accounts. The channel that each organization embraces, is based on the organization's culture, available technology, familiarity, and leadership. With this understanding, leaders within the student veteran population can better

understand what is required to increase communication effectiveness. Still, even with this information, individuals will make their own choices on how to communicate thus; an awareness campaign could be embraced at a level that is required to modify an organization's methods of communication. Letting this population know that you will be sharing all information related to social programming via Facebook and seeing how they respond serves as a good example. If the Student Veteran Resource Center is getting zero engagement with their posts and events, it would be evident that a communication shift is necessary. Additionally, if this population wants to start learning more about programming related to specific areas, it may be beneficial to quickly poll the students about the best way to communicate. As practitioners, one of the biggest mistakes we can make is assuming what our students want. Thus, it is important to understand what type of communication this population of students wants to utilize.

Mentorship Programming

When asked if it would be helpful or beneficial to have a mentor program when transitioning from the military to Appalachian State University, a majority of the respondents said yes. Some felt more strongly towards a mentor program and even said it “should be required for all transitioning from the military for at least a semester” while others who did not see it beneficial, felt it would benefit others. Usually, respondents who did not see a mentor program benefiting them, saw it benefiting “young service members only.”

“I think it would be helpful, especially for younger more traditional students. Old guys like me just want to go to class and go home.”

The thought process behind saying only the younger service members would benefit could be because the older service members self-identified that they want to just go home and have been out of the military for a while. Newer students who have recently left the military

mention the transitions to the civilian life and school can be very difficult. However, other respondents recognized that not every student is the same and that some will benefit from a mentor and others will not. A majority of the respondents do recognize the many issues that military students face when transitioning. Below are just a few of the testimonials provided by our respondents on how a mentor program can address the issues that military students face.

“It would be nice to talk to someone who’s made the transition from military life to student life.”

“Military is an entirely different world. Mindset of military members is different from the traditional student and age can be an issue.”

“In the military, we are often not encouraged to make decisions or think on our own, so transitioning can be confusing, as we are used to just showing up and stuff gets done as we are told”

“Transferring up to the mountains is a challenge in itself, adding a military background with limited resources is hard. Especially medical resources for medically retired students.”

“Getting out of military can be a daunting task and major transition in itself. A mentor would be help to fill in the blanks and decrease stress from unknown pitfalls.”

While the majority of respondents said a mentor program would be beneficial, there were varying opinions on surveyed features that make up a part of a mentor program, such as mentor identities, communication frequency, and mentor expectations. When asked what sort of mentor they would prefer to be paired up with, many responded with being a military student with a similar major or in the same branch. Each major in higher education has different curriculum and perspectives, and it can be beneficial for students to talk to others who have already been through the curriculum to be able to ask advice about professors, courses, and how best to succeed. There is also a lot of comradery within a branch, being able to keep that one connection could allow a

student to have a familiar feeling with someone who closely identifies with them. While a small amount of the respondents were females, across the board, a majority of the respondents did not have a gender preference for a mentor. The few who wanted the same gender self-identified as males. Lastly, the requirement of mentor status at a university varied across the board, but overall, respondents would prefer a mentor to have completed at least two semesters of classes or they do not have a preference on time spent at Appalachian State University.

Limitations

This study began to examine the needs of student veterans and other military-affiliated students at Appalachian State University. Although the research has reached its aims, there were some unavoidable limitations and there is still much to be learned about the topic. First of all, given that the sample required was a specialized, purposive one, student veterans and military-affiliated students, a small sample size is likely to be a given. However, the sample size was likely further reduced with the time restriction of the survey being open for one month. Also, since the total number of veterans surveyed does not include graduate students because the Graduate School does not code this population in Banner, the researchers were not able to survey as many participants as desired. In addition, military service appears to be a field dominated by men and because of this, as well as the fact that Appalachian's student veteran population is predominantly male, a smaller number of those surveyed were female. Therefore, to generalize the results to student veteran needs as a whole the study should have involved more participants from multiple schools and had a more even distribution of gender; given the breadth of research on this topic, this issue may be remedied in future work.

Furthermore, to better understand how student veterans perceive stereotypes about their population, future research should also include focus groups or individual interviews.

Additionally, due to the fact that the findings are individualized to a specific collegiate campus this information is not generalizable to the larger population of student veterans and military-affiliated students across higher education.

Since Appalachian State University's campus has had a Student Veteran Resource Center for a year, this is the first step in the research and assessment piece for this specific campus. As the SVRC becomes more established on campus, develops more, and implements new programming and initiatives, the literature review should be updated. While many of the sources are still relevant, as the G.I. Bill continues to change and more benefits are introduced, more timely sources will be able to shed light on the current state of transition issues and financial needs of student veterans. Future research should also explore the continued role of stereotypes of student veterans in higher education, programming and academic needs of student veterans and military-affiliated students, and the impact of Student Veteran Resource Centers in higher education.

Conclusion

From the preliminary findings, the researchers found that the programming and communication needs for student veterans and military-affiliated students possess some different characteristics than the programming and communication needs of the general student population. For instance, an online technological medium such as Facebook allows student veterans to have more control over their levels of participation in learning about social events while traditional email provides them with more time to develop thoughtful communication responses with faculty and staff. However, the lack of visual and tonal clues and context information leads some student veterans to believe that there is a lack of individualization in the communication, a situation that can lead both faculty and student veterans to some potential

conflicts. Facing similar difficulties and sharing common interests were the initial factors that encouraged this population of students to engage with military related support networks, such as the Student Veteran Association. Being supportive of and engaging in meaningful conversations with other students, both in person and via technology (such as Facebook), makes it possible for good relationships to develop. The social interaction that occurs in the Student Veteran Resource Center does help to break down the barriers due to the hours and central location of the space on campus. It provides mutual support and offers a frame of reference for student veterans' reflections, thus contributing to the overall support networks for this population at Appalachian.

This exploration of the perceived needs of student veterans and military-affiliated students provides some insights to programming desires and ideas about mentorship from veterans' and other military-affiliated students' perspectives. The results indicate that student affairs administrators should continue to utilize technology in their communication with this population, while also attempting to provide a wide range of programming that meets the needs of nontraditional students, many of which have families. A positive relationship with student veterans comes with the Coordinator of Student Veteran Services' ability to adjust their style of communication/programming to whichever fits the needs of the current cohort of students. However, student veteran interaction is a multi-faceted dynamic process that is impacted by many factors, such as students' personality characteristics, subject content, veteran support services programming strategies, and technological interface.

Future Research

There are many subpopulations within the military-affiliated student populations on campuses and even subpopulations within those already defined smaller populations. It would be beneficial to look further into the results and go more into detail about the different

subpopulations and analyzing answers based on these groups such as: different branches, enlisted vs. officers, women veterans, disabled veterans, National Guard and Reserves, and even combat vs. non-combat veterans. Limited by the sample size and specific conditions of the student veteran experience, the findings from this study are subject to variance from other studies based on different sizes of institutions of higher education and samples. Moreover, this study raises additional questions related to the research topic. For example, what is the relationship between combat service and need for a mentorship program? How does the communication interaction change depending on branch of service? To what extent does the interaction in the Student Veteran Resource Center affect the students' satisfaction with viewing the campus as military friendly? These are all significant questions that call for further study. It is hoped that future researchers can reference the findings from this study and investigate these questions on the topic of needs assessments for student veterans and military-affiliated populations. These investigations can eventually contribute to the improvement of the quality of student veteran support services, as well as faculty/staff's use of technology in communicating with this population.

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Appendix



INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Office of Research Protections
ASU Box 32068
Boone, NC 28608
828.262.2692
Web site: <http://researchprotections.appstate.edu>
Email: irb@appstate.edu
Federalwide Assurance (FWA) #00001076

To: Kaitlyn Thruston
Human Development & Psychological Counseling, HPC
CAMPUS EMAIL

From: IRB Administrator
Date: 5/09/2017
RE: Notice of IRB Exemption

STUDY # 17-0291
STUDY TITLE: Tactical Transitions: Examining Military-Affiliate Needs at Appalachian State University

Exemption Category: (2) Anonymous Educational Tests, Surveys, Interviews or Observations

This study involves minimal risk and meets the exemption category cited above. In accordance with 45 CFR 46.101(b) and University policy and procedures, the research activities described in the study materials are exempt from further IRB review.

All approved documents for this study, including consent forms, can be accessed by logging into IRBIS. Use the following directions to access approved study documents.

1. Log into IRBIS
2. Click "Home" on the top toolbar
3. Click "My Studies" under the heading "All My Studies"
4. Click on the IRB number for the study you wish to access
5. Click on the reference ID for your submission
6. Click "Attachments" on the left-hand side toolbar
7. Click on the appropriate documents you wish to download

Study Change: Proposed changes to the study require further IRB review when the change involves:

- an external funding source,
- the potential for a conflict of interest,
- a change in location of the research (i.e., country, school system, off site location),
- the contact information for the Principal Investigator,
- the addition of non-Appalachian State University faculty, staff, or students to the research team, or
- the basis for the determination of exemption. Standard Operating Procedure #9 cites examples of changes which affect the basis of the determination of exemption on page 3.

Investigator Responsibilities: All individuals engaged in research with human participants are responsible for compliance with University policies and procedures, and IRB determinations. The Principal Investigator (PI), or Faculty Advisor if the PI is a student, is ultimately responsible for ensuring the protection of research participants; conducting sound ethical research that complies with federal regulations, University policy and procedures; and maintaining study records. The PI should review the IRB's list of PI responsibilities.

To Close the Study: When research procedures with human participants are completed, please send the Request for Closure of IRB Review form to irb@appstate.edu.

If you have any questions, please contact the Research Protections Office at (828) 262-2692 (Robin).

Best wishes with your research.

Websites for Information Cited Above

Note: If the link does not work, please copy and paste into your browser, or visit <https://researchprotections.appstate.edu/human-subjects>.

1. Standard Operating Procedure #9:

<http://researchprotections.appstate.edu/sites/researchprotections.appstate.edu/files/IRB20SOP920Exempt%20Review%20Determination.pdf>

2. PI responsibilities: <http://researchprotections.appstate.edu/sites/researchprotections.appstate.edu/files/PI20Responsibilities.pdf>

3. IRB forms: <http://researchprotections.appstate.edu/human-subjects/irb-forms>

CC:

Angelina Donohue, Human Development & Psychological Counseling, HPC

Diane Waryold, Human Dev & Psych Counsel



Tactical Transitions: Student Veterans Needs Assessment

AWARENESS

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements

I am aware that the Student Veteran Resource Center provides the following services:

	Strongly Agree	Moderately Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Career Counseling	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tutoring	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I am aware of the specific military-affiliated contacts in the following offices:

	Strongly Agree	Moderately Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Financial Aid - General Financial Aid & GI Bill: Jennifer Coffey	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Financial Aid - Tuition Assistance (through National Guard/Reserves): Jennette Reece	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Career Development Center: Geralyn Mitchell	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Student Veteran Services: Eric Gormly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I am aware of:

	Strongly Agree	Moderately Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Strongly Disagree
the Student Veteran Association on campus	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
other student support groups on campus	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
various social and academic support groups on campus	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
services and programs available to specific military-affiliated students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
the option of priority registration	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I feel welcomed on Appalachian State University's Campus

	Strongly Agree	Moderately Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Strongly Disagree
by faculty/staff	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
by other military-affiliated students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
by other students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
overall	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I have a faculty or staff member I am comfortable contacting when I am struggling in:

	Strongly Agree	Moderately Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Strongly Disagree
academics	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
my personal life	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I feel Appalachian State University was a good choice for me.

	Strongly Agree	Moderately Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



SATISFACTION

Please rate your level of satisfaction with the services offered by the following Appalachian State University individuals and departments.

	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	OK	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Never Utilized this Service
Admissions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
VA Benefits Certifying Official in Financial Aid Office	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Financial Aid	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Orientation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My Academic Advisor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Writing Center	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Career Development Center	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Student Veteran Resource Center	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Student Veteran Services in the Student Veteran Resource Center	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
University Tutorial Services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tuition Assistance Representative in the Financial Aid Office	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Office of the Dean of Students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Counseling Center	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Office of Disability Services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Health Services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Office of Transfer Services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

MENTOR PROGRAM

As a Mentor (if you were participating in a mentor program...)

Would you be interested in being a mentor to an incoming military-affiliated student?

- Yes
- Maybe
- No

As a Mentee (if you were participating in a mentor program...)

Who would you prefer as a mentor?

- Non-military-affiliated student of the same age
- Military-affiliated student with experience in the same branch
- Military-affiliated student with same military job experience
- Military-affiliated student with a similar major
- Other

Would you prefer a mentor who identifies as the same gender?

- Prefer same gender
- Prefer different gender
- Does NOT matter

Would you prefer a mentor who has been at Appalachian State University

- For a semester
- For 2 semesters
- For 4 semesters
- Time at Appalachian State University does NOT matter

How often would you want a mentor to reach out to you?

What expectations would you have of a mentor?

General Mentor Program

Do you believe a mentor program would be helpful and or beneficial when transitioning from the military to Appalachian State University?

APPALACHIAN STATE UNIVERSITY

What roadblocks, if any, have you experienced pursuing higher education at Appalachian State University?

How did the following groups of people at AppState respond when they learned that you currently serve, have served, or are in the military:

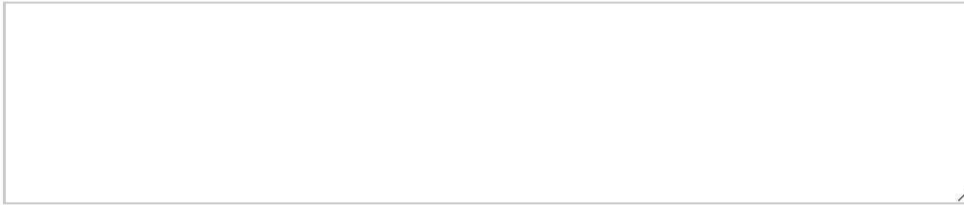
Students

Faculty/Staff

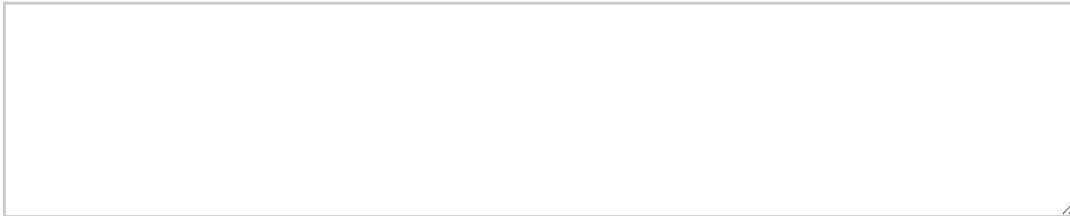
What stereotypes, if any, do you feel members of the AppState campus community have about military service?

Has AppState been a good choice for you? Why or why not?

Please provide any other information or feedback that could help us to enrich the quality of life for student veterans and service members at AppState.

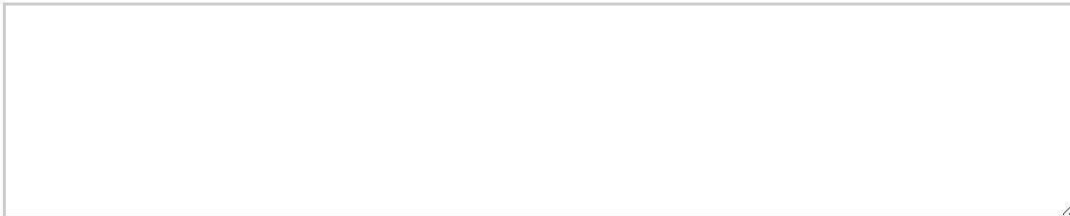


As a military-affiliated student, what would have made it easier to feel connected and part of AppState's community?

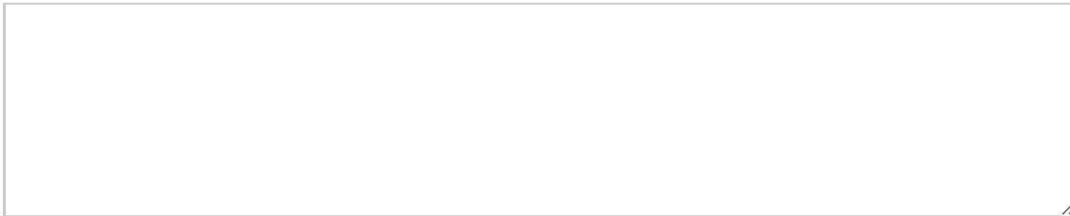


STUDENT VETERANS SERVICES

What type of programs/services (events, workshops, socials, information sessions, etc.), if any, would you like to see provided by the Student Veterans Services, that are not already provided?



What type of programs (events, workshops, socials, information sessions, etc.), if any, would you like to see provided by the Student Veterans Association, that are not already provided?



COMMUNICATION

What is the best method to contact you about information and events related to Student Veteran Services?

- Flyer
- Snail Mail (aka "normal" mail)
- Phone call
- Text message
- Email to AppState account
- Email to personal account
- Facebook: Messages, Events, SVS Facebook Post
- Twitter
- Other Social Media

- Other

How often, if at all, would you prefer to receive a newsletter from Student Veteran Services with events and information? It is currently sent out on the first day of each month.

- I do not want a newsletter to be sent to me
- 2 times a semester
- Once a month
- Twice a month
- Once a week

What kind of information would you like included in a newsletter?

DEMOGRAPHIC**Military**

What is your current military status?

- Active Duty
- Reserve/National Guard
- Separated
- Retired
- Other

In what branch of the military did you serve?

- Air Force
- Army
- Marines
- Navy
- Coast Guard

What is/was your rank?

- Junior Enlisted (E1-E4)
- Senior Enlisted (E5-E9)
- Warrant Officer (W1-W4)
- Company Grade Officer (O1-O3)
- Field Grade Officer (O4-O6)
- General/Flag Officer (O7-O10)

Have you ever had to leave school or had your schooling disrupted by your military service?

- Yes
- No

Education

Your student status

- Full-Time Graduate Student
- Part-Time Graduate Student
- Full-Time Undergraduate Student
- Part-Time Undergraduate Student
- Non-Degree Seeking Student

What college is your major affiliated with (select all that apply if a double or trip major).

- Beaver College of Health Sciences
- College of Arts and Sciences
- College of Fine and Applied Arts
- Hayes School of Music
- Honors College
- Reich College of Education
- University College
- Walker College of Business

Following discharge from military service, how long was it before you began attending a higher education institution.

- Within 30 days
- Within 60 days
- Within 1 year
- Within 2 years
- More than 2 years

- N/A

How many online courses have you completed?

- None
- 1-3 Courses
- 4-5 Courses
- 6+ Courses

Which education benefits are you currently receiving (please select all that apply)?

- Post-9/11 GI Bill (Chapter 33)
- Montgomery GI Bill-Active Duty (MGIB-AD, Chapter 30)
- Montgomery GI Bill-Selected Reserve (MGIB-SR, Chapter 1606)
- Reserve Education Assistance Program (REAP, Chapter 1607)
- Veterans Education assistance Program (VEAP)
- Vocational Rehabilitation (Chapter 31)
- Federal Tuition Assistance (through National Guard/Reserves)
- North Carolina Tuition Assistance (through National Guard/Reserves)
- None
- I don't know

Did you transfer from a different higher education institution?

- No
- Yes, from a community college
- Yes, from another 4-year institution
- Other

How many semesters have you been at Appalachian State University INCLUDING this semester and Summer (Summer I Session and Summer II Session from the same year

count as one semester)?

- 1 Semester
- 2 Semesters
- 3 Semesters
- 4 Semesters
- 5 Semesters
- 6+ Semesters

How many summer semesters have you enrolled in (Summer 1 Session and Summer II Session from the same year count as one semester)?

- 1 Summer Semester
- 2 Summer Semesters
- 3 Summer Semesters
- 4+ Summer Semesters

Personal

Your age:

- 18-23
- 24-29
- 30-35
- 36-41
- 42-47
- 48-53
- 54-59
- 60+

What gender do you identify as?

- Male

Female

Other

Your Race/Ethnicity:

Native American

Asian American

Bi-Racial/Multi-Racial

Black/African American

Hawaiian/Pacific Islander

Latino/Hispanic American

White/Caucasian

Other

What is your relationship status?

Single, never married

Married

Living with partner

Divorced

Separated

Widowed

Do you have a child or children that live with you while you attend school

I do not have children


Yes

No

Your employment status

- Not employed
- <10 hours/week
- 11-20 hours/week
- 21-30 hours/week
- 31-40 hours/week
- >40 hours/week

Survey Powered By [Qualtrics](#)



Thank You!

Thank you for your participation. Please encourage your friends to complete this survey to help better address and tackle Veteran needs, here at Appalachian State University.

Shareable Link: https://appstate.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5dIQP8zH3OZAQVT

If you would like to enter the drawing for prizes from local companies, please provide your name and email below. After the survey closes we will select winners by random draw. You will be contacted and able to pick up your gifts in the Student Veteran Resource Center starting Monday, October 2nd.

Note that your email and name will NOT be attached to your response in the survey. Responses will remain anonymous!

Name

Your answer

Email

Your answer

SUBMIT

Never submit passwords through Google Forms.

This form was created inside of Appalachian State University. [Report Abuse](#) - [Terms of Service](#) - [Additional Terms](#)

