

2014

Integrated Academic and Social Support for Military Veteran Students: Imagining a New Horizon in Education

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University of San Francisco

INTEGRATED ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL SUPPORT
FOR MILITARY VETERAN STUDENTS: IMAGINING A
NEW HORIZON IN EDUCATION

A Dissertation Presented
to
The Faculty of the School of Education
Leadership Studies Department
Organization and Leadership Program

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirement for the Degree
of Doctor of Education

By
Gerardo Ureno
May 2014

THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO
DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

**Integrated Academic and Social Support for Military Veteran
Students: Imagining a New Horizon in Education**

Combat and war veterans are enrolling at institutions of higher education hoping to complete their academic degrees. Veteran students' changing identities from soldiers to students and their diverse academic experiences present unique and significant challenges for university support personnel hoping to assist these students in their transition to the academic community. As such, there is a need for college and university officials to better understand military veteran students' academic and social needs. The successful academic transition of this growing student population depends on the initiatives that educational institutions, faculty, and administrators take to support veteran students in achieving their academic goals.

I employed critical hermeneutic theory within a framework of participatory research to conduct this study. Herda (1999:82) writes, "the purpose of participatory research is to create conditions whereby people can engage in discourse so that truth can be recognized and new realities can be brought into the being." By engaging in guided conversations addressing educational experiences and academic expectations, both veteran students and I had the opportunity to expand our understanding of the social and academic factors influencing their college experience. Participatory research provides the researcher and participants avenues to co-create new understandings of past experiences by envisioning a new future. I applied the theories of identity (Ricoeur 1992), fusion of

horizon (Gadamer 2000), and imagination (Kearney 1998) as the theoretical foundation to conduct the research conversation.

Findings from this research therefore relate to the research categories of identity, fusion of horizon, and imagination. Findings from this research include the following: 1) veteran students' military identity influences campus involvement and student relationships with faculty and non-military classmates; 2) military training and veteran students' narratives and experiences are a source of knowledge and an influential factor for campus interactions and academic development; 3) military experiences influence veteran students' imagined future as college graduates.

Veteran students' military training and active service experiences provide them an understanding of a command and control culture that is discordant to the relaxed and informal college student environment. To effectively adapt to their new college student identity, it is important for veteran student to engage in conversation with professors and classmates in order to expand their horizon and understanding of college norms, and ultimately navigate their own unique success in their academic course of study.

This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

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April 29, 2014

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to my research participants, as well as acknowledge the brave men and women who have and are currently serving in the United States armed forces. Thank you for your service and dedication.

I would also like to thank my dissertation committee members, Dr. Christopher Thomas, Dr. Paul Raccanello, and Dr. Dan McPherson for believing in my research and for their guidance through the completion of this research. I specially would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Paul Raccanello for sharing his knowledge and valuable insights. His patience and guidance made a world of difference in completing this research. To Dr. Ellen Herda for introducing me to the world of critical hermeneutics and for inspiring me to reinterpret and find new meaning in my horizon. Thank you to the School of Education faculty and staff for their caring service and student support.

To my good friend Darrell, thank you for your constant help and support in all my personal and professional endeavors. I am eternally grateful to have you in my life.

Y finalmente mi eterna gratitud para mi familia, mi mama Margarita, mi papa Antonio, y todos mis hermanos. Gracias por inculcarme el valor de la educacion y el respeto. Su apoyo y dedication me han inspirado a concluir este proyecto. Estoy eternamente agradecido por todo su apoyo. Los quiero mucho.

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CHAPTER ONE: STATEMENT OF THE ISSUE

Introduction

Following the September 11, 2001 (9/11) terrorist attacks, the United States increased military operations in various parts of the world. Beginning with the initial military interventions and continuing with Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), the United States military presence in Afghanistan and Iraq have increased the number of veteran students with war and combat experience (Ryan et al 2012). In 2010 the United States Census Bureau reported that 12.7 million American residents were veterans.

It is estimated that two million war veterans are attending or intend to enroll at an institution of higher education in order to pursue vocational training or a college degree (Sargent 2009). Furthermore, in April of 2012, the President of the United States signed an Executive Order enacting the Principles of Excellence (PE) for academic institutions serving veteran students (ACE 2012). Under this federal mandate, educational institutions are required to provide veteran students accurate evaluation of military transfer credit; dedicated academic advising staff; information about tuition cost; personalized degree completion planners; and Veteran Affairs (VA) counseling and financial references. This executive order establishing principles of excellence brings to the forefront the value of college and university student support services in helping veteran students pursuing a higher education degree. The PE mandate provides educational institutions with the responsibility and reference to create a welcoming and supporting educational environment for returning combat veteran students.

Statement of Issue

Veteran students attending colleges and universities are often older than their student peers and they can have a more diverse academic background than the traditional college student. Unlike traditional college students, veteran students' receive college transfer credit for their military training and active service. Accredited by the American Council on Education (ACE) military training courses and active service are transferable as credits with community colleges and many higher education institutions. Because of veterans' background and the experiential credit they receive for military training, colleges and universities typically classify veteran students under the category of the non-traditional transfer student population (Radford 2011, ACE 2010). As with the traditional transfer student population, veterans enrolling at higher education institutions may experience difficulties in adjusting to, and becoming part of, a new university community. In addition, it is important to note that veteran students are doubly challenged as they transition from life as soldiers and to adopting to a new life as college students (McBain 2008, Cook 2009, Radford 2011).

To help students cope with these transitional steps, institutions of higher education in the United States have developed and implemented academic support services and advising departments to support their student population. However, the increased enrollment of military veteran students presents colleges and universities with the specific task of developing strong support services and advising programs dedicated to addressing veteran students' needs (DiRamio et al 2008). Research conducted with veteran students suggests that because of the challenges these students may experience in transitioning into the university culture, universities should consider developing effective

veteran student services in order to best serve this student population (Brown et al 2011, Blose 2009, Sargent 2009).

The purpose of this study was to reach a new understanding about the academic and social factors influencing the educational experience of military veteran students pursuing a bachelor's degree at a private four-year institution. I conducted my research through critical hermeneutic participatory inquiry, using Ricoeur's concept of identity, Gadamer's concept of fusion of horizon, and Kearney's concept of imagination. Exploring veteran students' educational challenges as they work toward a transition from a military career to the classroom experience may provide a foundation to support the increasing veteran student population as they successfully transition into the college or university environment.

Background of the Issue

The United States military actions OEF and OIF have contributed to a significant increase in U.S. military operations in foreign territories where soldiers experience active combat (Ryan et al 2012). The result of these ongoing military actions has been an increase in the number of war veterans who, once discharged from active service, return to civilian lives and explore options other than the military (Ryan et al 2012, DiRamio et al 2008). Sargent's study among university veteran students suggests "there is an increased need to improve counseling services in the academic population on the nation's colleges and universities" (2009:17). Furthermore, findings from this research (Sargent 2009) address the importance of college counselors who have familiarized themselves with the conditions and challenges that veteran students face in their daily lives. Sargent (2009) also declares that in order to help veteran students transition to a supportive

academic environment, university counselors and related student service personnel should expand their knowledge and understanding of the psychological and physical challenges that veteran students might bring with them into the classroom environment. Although the psychological challenges and struggles of veteran students may not be apparent to faculty and school administrators, research conducted to evaluate the mental health of Iraq and Afghan veterans reports that 20% of returning members may experience symptoms of depression or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Science Daily 2008).

My professional experience over the past ten years as an academic advisor working with veteran students has shown me that traditional student advising programs do not effectively address the many specific issues and challenges faced by military veteran students. On multiple instances, veteran students have expressed to me their frustration and disappointment about the limited academic support and campus resources dedicated to them. As veteran students transition into the college or university environment, they seek student resources to help them complete their academic requirements (Perky and Oliver 2011). The college or university experience can present a stressful, unfamiliar, and lengthy process that requires the completion of multiple steps. The process of attending a four-year college or university can be more difficult for veteran students as they may face academic and social challenges in completing a bachelor's degree (McBain 2008, Burnam et al 2009). The physical and mental conditions resulting from combat and war experiences can make the academic transition process an overwhelming experience for veteran students (Pueschel 2012, ACE 2010). The academic requirements and the transition to a campus culture combined with the

PTSD and issues of anxiety are elements that can negatively influence veteran students' learning and social skills (Sargent 2009).

Significance of the Issue

I explored the academic and social factors influencing veteran students enrolled at a private four-year institution; more specifically, how student support personnel at colleges and universities might reconsider the types of services provided to students and the ways in which these services are delivered. Cook and Kim (2009) suggest that more than two million veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan are expected to return to the United States. As the government discusses plans to reduce U.S. military presence in foreign countries, veteran students will continue to enroll at colleges and universities across the country. Previous research focused on veteran students' academic performance suggests that higher education institutions are not adequately prepared to welcome and support veteran students' academic transition (Brown et al 2011, Cook et al 2009). In my professional experience working as a university adviser, I am familiar with institutional programs focused on underrepresented student groups that promote effective college transition and academic success. However, the projected number of veteran students, when considered as an emerging underrepresented student group, may require colleges and universities to develop new programs and dedicated services designed to address veterans' unique academic and social needs (Perky and Oliver 2011, Branker 2009, DiRamio et al 2008). Working with veteran students enrolled at the University of San Francisco, I feel the responsibility to understand better veteran students' academic and social needs so that I can provide effective guidance in helping them achieve their educational goals. This study provides non-military members of the university

community with an in-depth exposition and analysis of individual transitional experiences and challenges that veteran students face when enrolling at a four year educational institution Furthermore, this study provides insight, shared through the narratives of veteran students, as to how faculty, staff, and student peers might consider new and different ways of supporting veteran students in their integration into the university culture and campus community.

Summary

Combat and war veterans are returning home as the United States government reduces military interventions in foreign countries. Once discharged from military service combat veterans enrolled at institutions of higher education hope to complete an academic degree in order to start a new career outside of the military (Cate 2011, Summerlot et al 2009, DiRamio et al 2008). Veteran students' changing identities from soldiers to students and their diverse academic experiences present unique and significant challenges for university support personnel hoping to assist these students in their transition to the academic community. (Blose 2009). As such, there is a need for college and university officials to understand better military veteran students' academic and social needs. The successful academic transition of this increasing student population depends on the initiatives that educational institutions, faculty, and administrators take to support veteran students in achieving their academic goals (Moon 2011). Similar to the programs and services that have been developed for other underrepresented college student groups, military students need formal educational support processes and procedures to guide them in their academic and social adjustment to the university community.

In the following Chapters, I seek increased understanding of the educational challenges and needs of the emerging veteran student population. Chapter Two introduces literature discussing college student group norms and social interactions as well as academic support and services available for college veteran students. In Chapter Three, I present detailed information about the participatory research theory and protocol that guided this study. I also introduce the critical hermeneutic research categories of identity, fusion of horizon, and imagination. Chapters Four and Five present and analyze the data that emerged during research conversations with undergraduate veteran students enrolled at the University of San Francisco. The concluding Chapter provides a summary of this research, including findings related to the collected data and the Implications and Actions based on the findings.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The university student life and campus cultures are informal components of the learning environment that influence students' academic success (ACE 2010). Similar to underrepresented students populations, veteran students bring to campus their own unique group culture and characteristics that distinguish them from other students (Brown and Gross 2011). Beyond the military training and combat experiences, veteran students' learning and social interactions are influenced by their association with other members of their particular cultural group (Forsyth 2010). The academic success of veteran students is greatly influenced by the social and academic support services available on campus (ACE 2010). For veteran students, the close identification to an on-campus military group culture and military symbols provide a unique cultural identity that helps them connect to other military veteran students (DiRamio et al 2008).

The early anthropological research included in this literature review explores the social norms and traits that connect individuals into a cohesive cultural group (Forsyth 2010). Veteran students attending colleges and universities share certain norms and social values that provide them a distinct group identity that is different from other non-veteran college students (Nichols-Casebolt 2012). In addition, research studies focused on veteran students suggest the importance of addressing veteran students' issues in all aspects of academic and social experiences (Cate 2011, Ford et al 2009, Rumann & Hamrick 2009, Sargent 2009). The parts of this review of literature explore anthropological theory associated with group culture and group norms and how group principles can provide information to understand veteran students' transition into the college or university environment.

Part One: Anthropological Theory

Ruth Benedict: Group Culture

The anthropological research conducted by Benedict provides the foundation for an understanding of the cultural and social norms that influence college students today. In relation to veteran students, her research provides the foundation to comprehend military student culture as well as the social and academic needs of this emerging student group. Benedict (1959) suggests that all cultures have unique systems of beliefs that allow internal coherence among members of a social group. In addition, she concludes that individuals are linked to the ideas, emotions and values that define the cultural identity of the group to which they belong.

Defining the relationship among individuals sharing cultural values, Benedict (1959:16) explains that "what really binds men together is their culture – the ideas and the standards they have in common." The identification of individual's values and customs based on their military cultural association provides college veteran students with a set of shared values that unite them as a collective unit. Furthermore, this identification also provides the grounds for social interaction, interpretation of college norms, and pre-understanding of academic policies and procedures.

Group cultures are uniquely identified by individuals' behaviors, values, and beliefs. According to Benedict (1959:254), "to understand the behavior of the individual...it is necessary also to relate his congenial responses to the behavior that is singled out in the institutions of his culture." Following this definition, we can understand how veteran students' social interaction and expression of common interests are a reflection of shared military influences that determine their academic actions and college decisions. More so, Benedict's group culture explanation helps to understand how

veteran students' interactions and academic behaviors are highly influenced by their military background and association with other veterans on and off campus.

Victor Turner: Symbols and Social Groups

Turner's anthropological approach explores the interpretation and influence of symbols in relation to social processes and group interactions. Turner (1967:36) explains that symbols "instigate social action" and operate as "determinable influences inclining persons and groups to action." An on-campus veteran student organization or veteran student center may represent the symbolic bridge that connects veteran students as a group while also representing them within the university community. Turner's (1967) theory of symbols points to the interpretation of national and patriotic symbols as sensitive aspects of the academic experience of veteran students. Furthermore, he suggests that "symbols are essentially involved in social process...whereby groups became adjusted to internal changes and adapted to their external environment" (Turner 1967:20). In an academic environment, symbols provide the possibility to tie college students to the social norms that define groups' interactions and social actions.

The interpretation and application of symbols in a social environment needs to be observed in relation to a complete social context that provides the full symbolic meaning. The university student services observed as a symbol represents the place for students to find guidance and support to achieve their educational goals. Turner (1967:51) suggests that "the positional meaning of a symbol derives from its relationship to other symbols in a totality." In doing so Turner introduces the role of interpretation to social symbols and actions. For veteran students, the identification of supportive educational symbols such as an advising center or student organization may represent the required institutional actions

to achieve academic success. Jerry Moore (2004:253) explains Turner's approach, stating that "symbols may speak to different people in different ways; the construction and reconstruction of meaning occurs with specific dynamic context of social process." The interpretation of symbols as the drivers for social interactions and group norms may provide the basis for interpreting and understanding the social factors that influence veteran students' culture on the university or college campus. As an emerging student group, veteran students have a unique set of military like norms that sets them apart from other student groups. The group norms and social interactions that veteran students bring to the campus can be a valuable contribution to the various diverse student populations enrolling at colleges and universities across the nation.

Clifford Geertz: College Campus Culture

Geertz (1973:89) defines culture as "an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and their attitudes toward life." Each individual's relation to symbols and social norms influences his or her actions and understanding of other cultures. In the university environment, students are able to join groups and organizations based on their visual interpretation of symbols such as flags, acronyms, banners, etc. The close hereditary relation to their social customs and traditions provides individuals a mental blueprint for the interpretation of cultural symbols and group interactions. It is the pre-understanding of symbols and interpretation of group culture that influences college students' interactions in the university campus environment. For veteran students, the successful transition to the college or university campus depends on their individual connection and

understanding of the student culture. Geertz (1973:17) explains that “it is through the flow of behavior -or more precisely, social action- that cultural forms find interpretations.” All aspects of students’ actions and interpretation of cultural information are a testament to their inherited culture. For college veteran students, their military training provides the foundation to interpret academic regulations and campus social norms.

Geertz (1973:5) states that culture is a “web of significance” where the interpretation of symbols and social norms takes on different meanings according to the individuals’ knowledge and understanding of the events. Furthermore, he declares that the interpretation and understanding of “culture is public because meaning is” (Geertz 1973:12). However, we cannot think of culture as an overly simplified affair of our history, social customs, and traditions. Geertz (1973:15) states that “culture is not something to which social events, behaviors, institutions, or processes can be casually attributed.” Rather, he explains culture as a context in which individuals live out their lives and adapt to their collective social norms and cultural environment. Adapting the new college culture is an important aspect of veteran students transitioning into college campus environment. The incorporation of all aspects of student support services may serve as a bridge to guide veteran students through the process of adapting to university norms and college student culture. Veteran students enrolling at colleges and universities have acquired a military learning style that dictates their social interactions and interpretation of norms. Those valuable skills may serve as the primary source to transition successfully to the academic environment.

These anthropological theories discussed the group culture, interpretation of symbols, and college campus culture influencing veteran students. I now will present the university student resources that may serve as the symbolic modern supporting veteran students' college transition.

Part Two: Military Veteran Students

The Serviceman's Readjustment Act passed in 1944 was designed to help military veterans with financial assistance for the everyday expenses incurred with their return to civilian life. This act, known more commonly as the GI Bill, enables former service members to pursue a higher education. The financial benefits granted by the GI bill award valuable educational resources to combat veterans for their attendance at vocational training schools or higher education institutions to pursue a college degree (Cate 2011, Moon et al 2011). Educational institutions of all levels are experiencing a significant enrollment increase of veteran students (Nichols-Casebolt 2012, Radford 2011, Sargent 2009). Veterans enroll at educational institutions as a mean to develop new skills to help them transition into civilian life. Making a successful transition into a new student culture is thus the first step that veteran students need to complete to achieve their academic goals. As the number of veteran students continues to grow, creating a supportive learning environment and a culture of inclusion on campus is an important initiative that academic institutions are encouraged to take in order to welcome the returning service men and women (Brown and Gross 2011, Summerlot et al 2009).

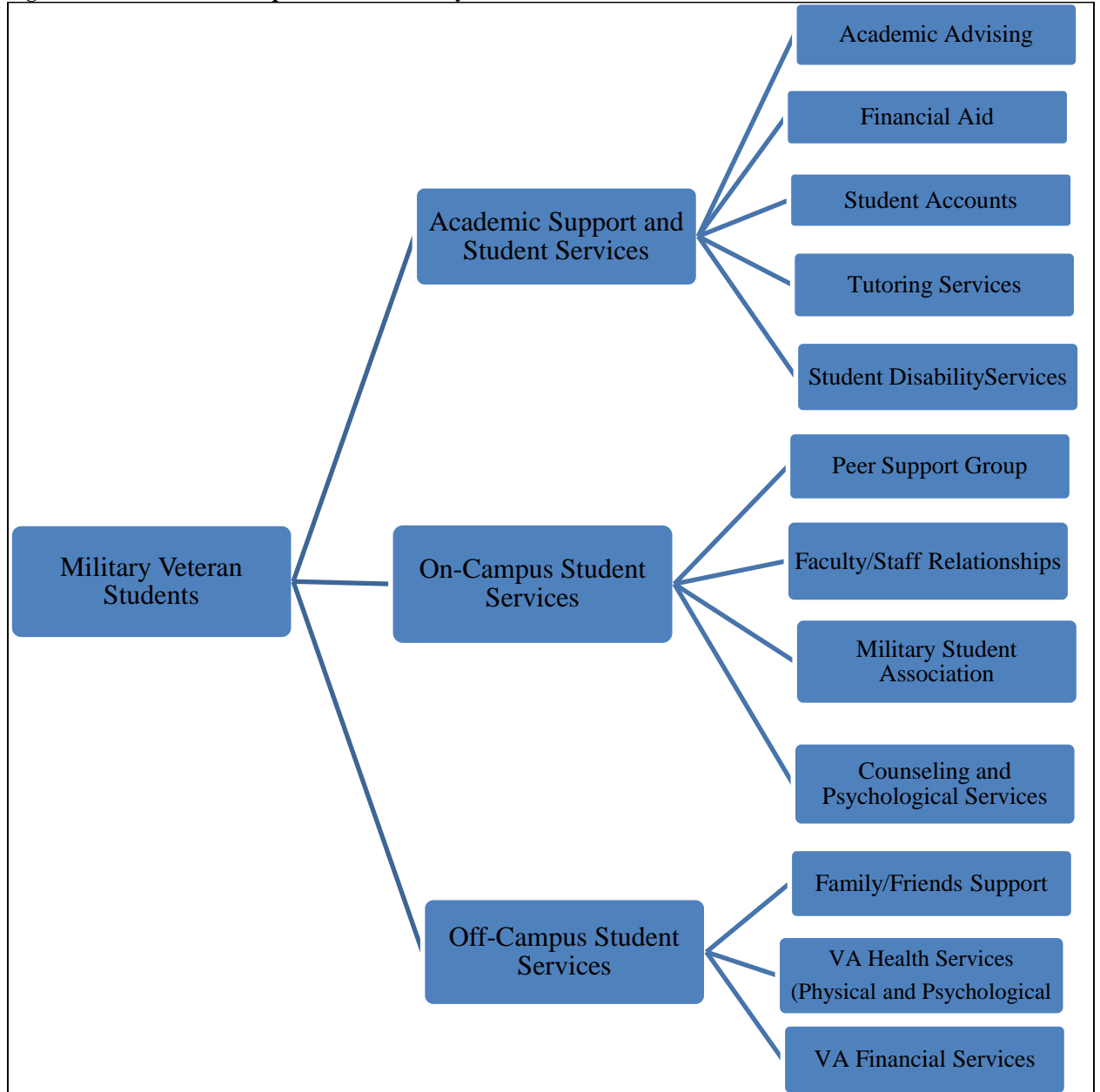
As with other minority college student groups, veteran students bring to their learning environment a set of social and academic needs (Cook and Kim 2009, DiRamio et al 2008). In discussing veteran students' health, Pueschel (2012) reports that 60% of

veteran students from Iraq and Afghanistan had direct exposure to combat and hostile war situations. Pueschel (2012:2) also explains that 46% of surveyed students reported “having significant symptoms of PTSD,” with 8% of participants acknowledging having “attempted suicide in the past.” Considering the psychological and behavioral challenges of adapting to a new life after their military career, it is important to comprehend the struggles of military veteran students as they try to adjust to a new way of being in the college and university campus environment and student culture (Rudd et al 2011, Branker 2009).

The research on veteran students done by Nichols-Casebolt (2012) and Ryan et al (2012) explain that creating a supporting learning environment requires the active involvement and collaboration of faculty, staff, and school administrators. Building collaborative partnerships with external Veteran Affairs (VA) organizations and professional associations is a valuable educational element that colleges and universities can incorporate to better serve their veteran students (Ford et al 2009).

In order to understand and attend veteran students’ academic and social needs, it is important to closely examine college and university resources available for veteran students. The following diagram (Figure 1: Student Services Departments Utilized by Veteran Students) shows the various departments with which veteran and traditional college students interact and depend on during their university experience. These departments include academic support services, on-campus student services, and off-campus student services. Each has the potential for unique contributions to the support of veteran students.

Figure 1: Student Services Departments Utilized by Veteran Students



Although most university campuses support various departments that strive to serve the needs of all students, Rios (2010) suggests that non-traditional or transfer students experience difficulties adjusting to their new academic environment. For college admission and institutional reporting purposes, veteran students are classified as non-traditional transfer students because of their college credit military training. The findings

of Rios (2010) on transfer students provide a reference point to understand the additional challenges that veteran students may encounter when enrolling at a private college or university. By exploring the academic support services available for veteran students, university officials, faculty, and staff may be able to create a new understanding of the veteran students' academic and social adjustments at a four-year institution. Designed as the primary point of contact for all students, the academic support services department serves as an information center that connects students, faculty, and staff to university resources. This research specifically looks at how institutional departments of student support services provide information and refer veteran students to academic programs and on and off-campus student services.

Academic Support and Student Services

Military veteran students transitioning into a four-year academic institution depend heavily on on-campus academic services and supporting resources (Ford et al 2009). The department of student services represents the primary source of information for the educational resources available for college students (ACE 2010). For veteran students in particular, the student services department is responsible for the accurate application and interpretation of VA educational benefits and procedures (Perky and Oliver 2011). Student services staff with knowledge of VA educational benefits and regulations can represent the difference as to whether or not veteran student will be able to complete their academic career (McBain 2008). The role of academic support services is to provide a holistic learning environment to enhance students' strengths while promoting successful student development. To effectively assist veteran students' educational transition, colleges and universities should create dedicated student services

and advising resources familiar with veteran students' social and academic needs (Perky and Oliver 2011).

On-Campus Student Services

An important component of veteran students' academic success is the development of on-campus student support services (McBain 2008, Ryan et al 2012). Brown and Gross (2011:46) explain that, "veterans returning to civilian life are often challenged by the adjustment in moving from a command and control environment to the openness of a college campus." This research examines the institutional resources that have played an influential role supporting veteran students' college transition. On-campus student organizations are commonly recognized as a safe and supportive place for students to find information, express their concerns, and connect with other students that share common interests (Moon 2011, Ford et al 2009). These on-campus student organizations represent an important avenue to connect with fellow military veterans at the institution (DiRamio 2008). A well-structured on-campus veteran student organization also provides a visible point of connection for faculty, school administrators and other student groups. A veteran student organization can provide peer group support giving voice to the needs of the veteran student population (Summerlot et al 2009).

A holistic veteran student supportive campus needs to incorporate peer support groups from non-military classmates; faculty and professional staff; professional on-campus counseling and psychological services; and an on-campus military student association (DiRamio et al 2008). Ryan et al (2012:61) state that academic "advisors who interact with student-veteran on a frequent basis should have a solid foundation of knowledge regarding the specific aspects of their transition from the military to college."

Creating a student organization and military student awareness programs to bridge the gap between veteran students, traditional college students, faculty, and professional staff is an important initial step that needs to be incorporated into the military friendly campus initiatives (Cook and Kim 2009).

Off-Campus Student Services

Previous research studies focusing on military veterans students identified some of the physical and psychological challenges that war and combat veterans experience when they return home to their families (Sargent 2009, Persky & Oliver 2011, Ryan et al 2012). However, limited research examines how war and combat experiences affect veteran students' academic performance and social adjustment to university settings, specifically when they live and work off-campus. Typically, the "off-campus" designation refers to students who are not residing in on-campus housing facilities. In addition to addressing the challenge of the physical and psychological burdens that military veteran students may confront, student support personnel additionally face the difficult task of finding appropriate resources to serve the unique social, life, and family needs of veteran students who are living off campus. Radford's (2011) statistical study on veteran students reports that 47% of military veterans attending college or university are married and are the main providers for their families.

Establishing collaborative relationships with off-campus military organizations may be an effective way to connect veteran students with VA benefits providers that can fulfill the special needs that colleges and universities are not able to provide (Nichols-Casebolt 2012, Ford et al 2009). Cate's (2011) research study explains that veteran students' mental health plays a significant influence in the overall college experience. For

colleges and universities that do not have professional staff to serve veteran students' physical and mental needs, finding appropriate VA resources and establishing relationships with VA representatives is necessary to achieve proper care for their veteran students.

Military Friendly Campus

Military friendly campuses are most commonly found in colleges and universities that have strong ties to the military or are geographically located near a military service base (Summerlot et al 2009). As returning military veterans search for veteran friendly colleges and universities, they hope to find the appropriate educational institution and academic program that will guide them through the successful completion of their college degree goals (Persky and Oliver 2011, Branker 2009, Summerlot et al 2009). For educational institutions, this suggests having supportive academic policies, degree completion procedures, and resources necessary to help students navigate through the higher education system (Persky and Oliver 2011, Summerlot et al 2009). To create a military friendly campus, colleges and universities can incorporate veteran student awareness programs to educate non-veteran students, faculty, and school administrators about the academic and social needs of the increasing veteran student population (Moon and Schma 2011). Training the campus community on how to respond to the needs of military veteran students may represent the first step to create a veteran friendly college campus environment (Brown and Gross 2011).

Faculty and Staff Awareness

For college faculty and administrators who have no firsthand experience with military culture, understanding the issues that veteran students face on a daily basis is the leading step to creating a supportive learning environment (Rumann & Hamrick

2009:30). Training faculty and staff about veteran students' needs may be the initial step to promote a better understanding of the military student educational culture and social norms (Bloese 2009). Informing school administrators and staff about the university veteran students' services and external VA organizations will help create a well-informed support system for veteran students. Building trusting relationships with veteran students and guiding them through the college resources and VA benefits can have a significant influence on veteran students' ability to adapt to their new college campus life (Nichols-Casebolt 2012).

The integration of veteran students into a college environment is a challenging process that influences every aspect of their educational experience (Rumann and Hamrick 2010, Summerlot et al 2009). A college orientation program for veteran students should be designed as a continuous process that connects veteran students with campus resources, advising staff, student organizations, and external VA representatives (Branker 2009). Welcome events for veteran students and orientation programs can also serve as an informational forum for faculty, staff, and non-veteran students. These events provide an opportunity to educate faculty and staff about campus services for veteran students and promote awareness about the cultural contributions that veteran students bring to the campus community (Nichols-Casebolt 2012).

Considering that colleges and universities across the country have limited resources to develop new programs and processes to support veteran students, building on current institutional resources dedicated for their diversity student groups may be the best option to serve the growing veteran student population. Persky and Oliver suggest that colleges "examine programs and services that currently support minority groups and

draw from them to design templates for addressing the needs of veterans” (2011:118). An ACE (2010) article on returning veterans explains that colleges and universities need to create veteran students services and adopt a campus wide culture based on the needs of their individual veteran student population. Programs that may be effective at one institution do not necessarily meet the needs of all veteran students. The institutional creative imagination may be the optional tool to maximize its resources, develop supportive programs, and educate the campus community about veteran students’ culture (Hassan et al 2010).

Summary

In additional to meeting their academic requirements, veteran students enrolling at four year colleges or universities have the difficult task of transitioning from the military environment to a campus student culture. Branker (2009) explains that veteran students returning from active combat have a high probability of experiencing difficulties adjusting to their new social and educational surrounding. Veteran students’ military training combined with the physical and psychological war scars become an influential piece of their individual identity. Furthermore, veteran students often have the difficult task of caring and providing for their families while attending to their academic responsibilities (Ryan et al 2012). The transitional challenges that veteran students are likely to face when enrolling at a college campus can negatively influence their academic performance and social interactions. Connecting students with the appropriate advising departments and student services at an early stage can provide veteran students the necessary tools to effectively navigate their academic requirements.

Developing and implementing student programs to serve veteran students is a challenging process for student services departments. It is also a pricey investment for college and university administrators involved in academic student support and social services. However, the reward for “welcoming and providing services to ensure the success of this most deserving group will come not only in dollars, but also in the satisfaction and pride in knowing the University’s employees did the right thing” (Moon and Schma 2011:59). Considering that colleges and universities are experiencing or will soon experience an increased enrollment of military veteran students, responding to their individual needs by creating effective programs and services is an ethical responsibility to serve those who have served the country.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH THEORY AND PROTOCOL

Introduction

I employed critical hermeneutic theory as a framework to conduct my research. Herda (1999:86) explains, “in field-based hermeneutic research, the object is to create collaboratively a text that allows us to carry out the integrative act of reading, interpreting and critiquing our understanding.” This participatory research framework allowed me as the research participant to reach a new understanding of the social and academic experiences influencing veteran students. Herda (1999:82) declares, “the purpose of participatory research is to create conditions whereby people can engage in discourse so that truth can be recognized and new realities can be brought into the being.” By engaging in guided conversations addressing educational experiences and academic expectations, both veteran students and I had the opportunity to expand our understanding of the social and academic factors influencing their college experience. Kearney (1998:394) writes “that the remembrance of things past may become a ‘motive power in the struggle for changing the world’: a reminder that the horizons of history are still open, that other modes of social and aesthetic experience are possible.” Participatory research provides the researcher and participants avenues to co-create new understandings of past experiences by envisioning a new future. In the following section I address the theoretical foundation for this study beginning with the research categories of identity, fusion of horizon, and imagination.

Research Protocol

The use of participatory research protocol is the foundation to conduct this study. The participatory research inquiry allows the participants and researcher to remember and critique past experiences, challenge pre-understandings, and “envision, new possible

worlds” (Herda 1999:86). To understand better the academic and social factors influencing veteran students, it is important to explore the participants’ past military career and academic goals. I applied the theories of identity (Ricoeur 1992), fusion of horizon (Gadamer 2000), and imagination (Kearney 1998) as the theoretical foundation to conduct the research conversation.

Research Categories

The categories developed for this research were chosen based on a combination of critical hermeneutic theory, existing literature surrounding veteran students, and my professional experiences in working with veteran students on a university campus.

I selected Ricoeur’s (1992) theory of identity to explore veteran students’ perceptions and understanding about how individual past experiences shape identity and influence their relationship with non-veteran students, faculty, and staff. Identity formation is an important part of students’ growth and development, and in the case of veterans transitioning from soldier to student, it is critical that they are aware of and understand the significance of this changing identity.

Gadamer’s (2000) theory of fusion of horizon permits both the research participants and me the possibility to expand the understanding of veteran students’ expectations when they enter a four-year degree program. This theory suggests that we fuse our past actions and experiences together with the future world of what is possible in an attempt to come to a new and different understanding of present challenges and ways in which they might be refigured.

Lastly, Kearney’s (1998) theory of imagination provides understanding of possibilities for a new identity and new ways of being. Imagination offers a glimpse as to

how educational programs and student resources might better serve and support the academic aspirations of veteran students.

Research Category One: Identity

The concept of personal identity explained by Ricoeur (1992) responds to the question of connectivity and the relation between an individual's past experiences, narratives, actions, and interactions with others. Ricoeur (1992:116) explains that personal identity is a place of confrontation between two concepts of identity; sameness (*idem*) and selfhood (*ipse*). The sameness of an individual is made by the unique traits and distinctive signs by which the person is recognized and identified. Those distinctive traits and signs define an individual's character and permanent identification in the social community. Ricoeur (1992:119) defines the character of an individual as "the set of distinctive marks which permit the re-identification of a human individual as being the same... uninterrupted continuity and permanent in time." The permanence in time is acquired by the continuity of an individual's habits and actions. Habits formed by history and settled traditions become the permanent disposition that constitutes the distinctive character traits and signs by which an individual is recognized by himself and others (Ricoeur 1992:119).

Ricoeur (1992:121) explains that the concept of selfhood (*ipse*) identity of an individual is defined by the "set of acquired identifications by which the other enters into the composition of the *same (idem)*." The selfhood identity of an individual changes over time as narratives and influences from community members, or others, enter into an individual's life experiences. The personal identity of an individual cannot be composed simply by looking at the inborn permanent traits that identify the character or the person.

Personal identity is the stage where sameness (*idem*) and selfhood (*ipse*) overlap and interconnect to create an individual's distinctive character and traits. Ricoeur (1992:121) states that, "one cannot think the *idem* of the person through without considering the *ipse*." The relationship between these two poles is interconnected in an endless play that defines an individual's unique traits, character, and actions. It also determines the individual's response and interpretation of the external world reflected by social interactions and community involvement.

The identity of college students plays a significant influence in their transitional experience to a new college or university campus. Student social interaction and successful academic adjustments depend on abilities to connect past experiences and narratives to the new educational environment. Ricoeur (1992:148) explains that, "it is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character." Perhaps more so than non-military students, veteran students face a difficult challenge of finding and understanding their new college student identity. Their past military training experiences, as well as war and combat stories, provide military students a unique identity that may contribute to difficulties in adapting to a non-military environment.

Research Category Two: Fusion of Horizon

Gadamer (2000:301) explains that a "horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular standpoint." The narratives and past experiences of military transfer students provide a pre-understanding of the world around them that may influence their educational horizon. As they assess their horizon in relation to the new academic environment, their military training and past combat experiences provide the foundation for understanding their new college environment. People's

prejudices and pre-understanding of the world around them are influenced by their cultural background, history, shared narratives and life experiences (Gadamer 2000:306). Two individuals cannot perceive the world in the same manner as they do not share identical traits and past experiences. Individuals from a similar background may share a pre-understanding in regards to a culture, historical event or academic program. However, each individual's traits, educational experiences, and past narratives shape his or her horizon and understanding of the world.

In order to understand and become contributing members of the academic environment around them, it is important for veteran students to engage in conversation with faculty, university officials and other students. Herda (1999:63) explains that, "understanding consists of a fusion of horizons in language that is the universal character of understanding." Through active conversations, veteran students have the opportunity to expand their horizons and to reach new understandings of the educational requirements and student support systems available. Active conversations also provide veteran students the possibility to revisit past experiences and with pre-understanding of the educational system as they discuss and envision their future goals.

Communicating and conversing about these newly imagined goals are dependent upon language, which represents the action to generate linguistic images of thoughts and ideas. Gadamer (2000:389) states that, "understanding is interpretation, and all interpretation takes place in the medium of a language that allows the object to come into words and yet is at the same time the interpreter's own language." Language is not just the medium to establish a conversation, it is the element that allows

individuals to connect and learn from each other. It is the avenue that provides conversation participants the possibility of a fusion of horizon.

Gadamer (2000:305) states, “one learns to look beyond what is close at hand – not in order to look away from it but to see it better, with-in a larger whole and in truer proportion.” Every transitional process and new life experience influences our narratives and understanding of our horizon. The significant life changing experiences of veteran students play an important role in the students’ social interactions and academic performance. Every stage of their military career including combat training and war experiences have the possibility of influencing their narrative, which in turn, may change the perception and comprehension of their educational horizon.

Gadamer (2000:203) declares that, “the historical movement of human life consists in the fact that it is never absolutely bound to any one standpoint, and hence can never have a truly close horizon. The horizon is, rather, something into which we move and that moves with us.” As veteran students move through the completion of their academic requirements, their horizon may change, which in turn opens up a new perspective and understanding of the future ahead of them. By envisioning a new horizon supported by their higher education degree, veteran students may possibly imagine an accessible new world for themselves and their family.

Research Category Three: Imagination

Kearney (1998:52) states that “imagination is the foundationless foundation of our knowledge of all things.” Imagination is the source that provides individuals the opportunity to visualize a non-existing world where opportunities and possibilities of actions find meaning in the present. Throughout our history, imagination has been the

driving force helping individuals to create new meanings and new understanding of our existing world and it has shaped and motivated individuals' actions toward the achievement of the prefigured world. Imagination provides individuals "the ability to transform the time and space of our world into a specifically human mode of existence" (Kearney 1998:52). Herda (1999:88) writes, "the mode of being opened up by the world of the text... resides in one's imagination." The understanding and interpretation of a new text is possible by the use of imagination. Imagination, in this essence, leads to actions that help individuals connect to their new world. Kearney (1998:149) explains that imagination is not limited solely to the reinterpretation of text and images. It provides individuals the ability to refigure a new world where the possibility of a new understanding leads to action and change. Veteran students enrolling at the university to complete their academic degree take the initial step toward creating new possibilities in a new imagined world.

Kearney (1998:161) declares that "imagination at work in a text is one which augments my power of being-in-the-world." For veteran students, the power of imagination serves as the core foundation for the dreams and goals that motivate them to pursue a bachelor's degree. Integrated in the natural process of imagination rests the outline that provides veteran students directions for actions and steps that must be completed in order to earn their college degree. Ricoeur (1991:174) describes imagination as the "play of possibilities in a state of noninvolvement with respect to the world of perception or of actions." This state of noninvolvement provides veteran students endless opportunities to imagine a new life as college graduates, testing "new ideas, new values, [and] new ways of being in the world" (Ricoeur 1991:174). The

imaginative ability to refigure new ideas and possibilities gives veteran students opportunities for new actions that may lead to new ways of being in their current educational world.

Research Categories Conclusion

Veteran students are returning home from combat hoping for opportunities to start new lives (Blose 2009, McBain 2008). As they enroll at colleges and universities across the country, they bring into the classroom war and combat experiences that are unique to their military identity (Nichols-Casebolt 2012, Ryan et al 2012, Sargent 2009). Colleges and Universities across the nation are enrolling veteran students unaware of the academic and social needs that this student population brings with them. The increased number of veteran student has created the need for college advising departments and school administrators to design student services dedicated to attend veteran students' educational challenges. Implementing innovative advising programs as well as veteran student friendly policies and procedures should be considered an ethical responsibility that educational institutions in the United States can incorporate into academic practices.

Research Guidelines

In this section, I provide information and guidelines for this specific research. Interpretive participatory research requires that the researcher create the guidelines as informed by critical hermeneutic theory (Herda 1999). Herda (1999:86) also states that the objective is to "create collaboratively a text that allows us to carry out the integrative act of reading, interpreting, and critiquing our understandings." The following sections provide information about the research site, my entrée to the site, and information about the research conversation partners who participated in this study.

Research Site Information

Since it was founded in 1855, the University of San Francisco (USF) has been recognized for its commitment to the city and for serving the needs of a diverse student body. The University's mission is to promote learning in the Jesuit Catholic tradition, providing "students the knowledge and skills needed to succeed as persons and professionals" (<http://www.usfca.edu>). This mission serves as a foundation to conduct this research. Valuing and supporting the diverse student population has been a distinctive trait that aligns with the university's Jesuit academic tradition. It is that supporting academic environment and the Jesuit educational values that drive military veteran students to apply and enroll at USF.

Undergraduate Student Population

In fall 2011, USF enrolled 1,190 first time freshmen students. During the same admission term 450 transfer students enrolled at USF. The admitted transfer class for fall 2011 had a 3.21 average GPA, with 61% transferring from a two year institution and 30% transferring from a four year university (www.usfca.edu). Veteran students attending USF constitute a small percentage of its enrolled class. According to the Registrar's Office VA enrollment report for spring 2013, there are 58 undergraduate veteran students attending USF. Veteran students transferring to USF are evaluated under transfer admission guidelines and procedures. As previously mentioned, ACE accredited military training programs provides veteran students college transfer credit.

Entrée to Research Site

I have been part of the USF community since 2004, first as a full time employee and starting in 2006 as a graduate student. I selected USF for my research site because my work as a university adviser has provided me valuable opportunities to play an

informative role in the students' academic transitions and graduation goals. In this role, I have been able to work with undergraduate students, providing them guidance and reference to fulfill their degree requirements. Helping students transition into a supporting and caring academic environment is an important component of my advising goals. This is also an integral part of the university's mission and commitment to create a thriving learning environment for its student body.

Research Conversation Participants

My work as a university adviser affords me the opportunity to know the military veteran students enrolled at USF who were the participants in this research. I sought out seven students to participate in this research. The Office of the Registrar assisted in identifying research participants by providing me a report of all enrolled veteran students. Participants who were asked to be part of, and who participated in this research study were 18 years of age or older. Veterans from all branches of the military were invited to participate in this research.

Whereas the conversation participants were representatives of all four branches of the military, each of the participants was male. Although both men and women were invited to participate, only male veteran students responded. This imbalance may be due to the fact that a strong majority of veteran students at USF are men. In the following table, I provide a complete listing of all research participants including their names, class level, academic major, and military branch.

Table 1: Chart of Research Conversation Participants

<i>Student Name</i>	<i>Grade</i>	<i>Major</i>	<i>Military Branch</i>
Rylan Albright	Senior	B.A. History	Air Force
Bradley Bennett	Junior	B.A. Fine Arts	Navy
Manuel DeMayo	Junior	B.B.A. Organization and Leadership	Army
William Glazer	Junior	B.S. Biology	Army
Carson Keyes	Senior	B.B.A. Entrepreneurship and Innovation	Navy
Nick Oeffinger	Junior	B.S. Environmental Science	Navy
Austin Schuchart	Junior	B.B.A. Management	Marine Corps

(B.A Bachelors of Arts; B.S Bachelors of Science; B.B.A Bachelors of Business Administration)

The primary identifying characteristic of participants was that they served in a combat military position, that they were honorably discharged, and that they were interested and willing to participate in this study. Service members must be honorably discharged to be eligible for VA benefits and services. Dishonorably discharged veterans are not eligible to receive VA educational benefits from colleges or universities in the United States.

Data Collection

The data for this research project emerged from one-on-one conversations with research participants. These conversations were recorded and then transcribed by the researcher, generating a text that became the data for this research project. Herda (1997:97) explains that “the transcription is a text – the fixation of our conversation in writing.” Formal letters of invitation were sent to veteran students enrolled at the University of San Francisco (USF). Please see Appendix A for a sample letter of

invitation. My position within the university allowed me to access the Registrar Office VA enrollment report and I used this report to identify veteran students who might be interested in sharing their educational experiences. Permission to record, transcribe, and analyze the data was obtained from the participants. I provided a transcribed copy of the conversation to each participant, at which point they had the opportunity to review and reflect on the text. As Herda (1999:98) states, “any changes that the participants wants to make to the text needs to be honored.” A thank you letter was send to each participant at the conclusion of the research conversation (See Appendix B).

As recommended by Herda (1999) I kept a research journal documenting my experiences, observations, and questions that arose during the data collection and text creation process. Herda (1999:98) states that in the research process “an important source of data is the personal log or journal.” The researcher’s personal journal “is the life-source of the data collection process for in it goes the hopes, fears, questions, ideas, humor, observation and comments of the researcher” (Herda 1999:98). The research journal served as an additional data collection tool that helped me reflect on the conversations for the data analysis process.

Timeline

I conducted my research conversations at the end of the spring 2013 academic term; most of the conversations concluded before the end of this academic period. However, due to the academic requirements and time constraints at the end of the semester, some of these conversations took place during the summer 2013 academic period. I transcribed each conversation, analyzed, and reflected on the data at the conclusion of each. A first draft of the research conversation was concluded by the end of the fall 2013 semester.

Data Analysis

The process of data analysis in participatory research is “a creative and imaginative act” (Herda 1999:98). Herda (1999:98) also explains that “in data analysis the researcher appropriates a proposed world from the text.” By creating a text, the researcher analyzes and reflects on the collected data and then immerses him or herself in the interpretative process. As a result, the “researcher sees the world differently than before the research, and implication are manifest for looking at the everyday problems differently” (Herda 1999:98). According to Herda (1999:98-99) the researcher engages the collected data for analysis in the following stages:

- Transcribe the conversation.
- Identify significant statements, develop themes, and place them within categories.
- Demonstrate important themes and ideas with quotes from the conversation transcript.
- Examine the themes and quotes as they relate to the critical hermeneutic theoretical framework. Data collected through the personal journal, observations, and outside document study are also considered during this stage.
- Provide participants the opportunity for continued discussion and conversations in evaluating the text. Honor participants’ petitions if changes are requested.
- Set the context for the written discussion.
- Address themes and sub-themes within research categories in relation to Critical Hermeneutic theory.
- Determine implications that may provide new direction for and comprehension of the research issue.
- Provide examples of both researcher and research participants’ learning experiences and new understanding of the research topic.

Through the data collection, presentation, and analysis process, the researcher reflects and analyzes the text, thereby opening the possibility of reaching a new understanding of the research issue. This new interpretation and understanding of the research topic may lead to implementation of ethical action and change.

Research Questions

The research procedures followed participatory critical hermeneutic research protocol, using the research categories of identity, fusion of horizon, and imagination.

The research questions guided the research conversations and generated the data for this study. The research questions that guided the conversation are as follows:

Category: Identity

1. What motivated you to join the military service?
2. How do you identify as a military veteran student with your professors and classmates?
3. Prior to your military service, had you considered attending college? Please explain.
4. What military experiences have influenced you as a student at USF?

Category: Fusion of Horizon

1. How would you describe your interaction with your fellow veteran students and non-veteran classmates?
2. How is your family or your support network involved in your academic career at USF? What discussions about your academic experiences have you had with them?
3. Tell me about your experiences with the student services and organizations on campus.

Category: Imagination

1. If you could envision the ideal advising and support model for veteran students, what would that look like?
2. How do you feel about USF?
3. How do you see your life changing after you graduate from USF?

These questions were designed as the guiding instrument to create open conversations between the researcher and the participants. The research conversation did not necessarily follow the order of these questions. The discussion of the research questions and categories was determined by the natural course of the participants' conversation. Depending on the information that the participants provided, I chose to

deviate from the guiding questions to ask different questions when clarification or further information was needed to understand better the participant's narratives. The nature of the participatory critical hermeneutic theory allows the researcher to be an active participant in the research conversations. By taking a participatory role, the researcher is able to create collaborative relationships with the participants, promoting information sharing and a better understanding of the research topic.

The Research Pilot Project

In order to become more familiar with the process of conducting a research study, in fall 2012 I conducted a research pilot study that served as a field testing project for research questions, data collection, and data analysis. In the following section I describe my experience conducting the pilot study as well as information about my conversation participant, sample of the collected data, and an assessment of the collected data as it relates to the research categories of identity, fusion of horizon, and imagination.

Background of Conversation Participant

Kurt W. started his academic career at USF in spring 2012. Kurt is currently enrolled in the Business Administration major in the School of Management. He was born and raised in Fremont, California where he graduated from high school. Being an academically strong and active student athlete in high school he was accepted to attend San Jose State University (SJSU). However, instead of attending SJSU, Kurt decided to enlist in the U.S. Armed Forces. After his honorable discharge from the military, Kurt attended San Francisco City College (SFCC) where he continued developing his academic and leadership skills. While attending SFCC he worked in the Veteran Resource Center where he displayed his commitment to serve fellow military veteran students. Kurt is currently married and the father of two young children. He expects to

graduate from USF in May 2013 and hopes to attend law school to continue his academic and professional career.

During the time he was working at SFCC's Veteran Resource Center, Kurt was able to serve as a leader and mentor for military veteran students. His caring and compassionate spirit is still a big part of Kurt's commitment to assist other veteran students. His positive response to participate in the pilot conversation is a testament to his desire to support veteran students' academic success. As a USF student, Kurt maintains active communication and close relationships with other veteran students on campus. As he continues to create new stories as USF student and military veteran, new narratives will also emerge from his academic experience at USF. Those new narratives may provide Kurt the avenue to reach a new understanding about his military career as he imagines his future career as a USF graduate.

Data Presentation

After exchanging several emails and attempting to find a good date for both of us, Kurt and I agreed to meet on a Friday morning. We decided to meet in my office, as it was a convenient and comfortable place for both of us. Kurt's course schedule for the fall 2012 semester required him to be on campus attending class on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Having a family and a part time job in addition to his school responsibilities, this schedule seems to accommodate Kurt's needs well. This schedule also allows Kurt to reduce his school expenses, as he has to commute to San Francisco to attend school. During these three days Kurt begins his school day early in the morning and finishes with his last course in the late afternoon. There are breaks in between courses that give Kurt

time to each lunch, read, and prepare for his classes. We decided to take advantage of one of those breaks to have our conversation.

Since I first met Kurt in spring 2012 at the new student orientation, I have been working closely with him. In our first advising meeting we discussed his transfer credits from San Francisco City College, military training transfer credits, and his outstanding requirements to fulfill his business major requirements. During that meeting we also developed his degree completion planner outlining all the courses that he would need to complete in the terms leading up to his graduation. Having limited financial aid funding from his VA benefits, the degree completion planner was of primary importance for Kurt because he could not afford to pay for any additional courses at USF. Starting from that initial advising meeting, Kurt has continued to schedule advising meetings with me to ensure he is on track to graduate by the term originally planned.

Consistent with Kurt's disciplined training, he showed up ten minutes before our scheduled meeting. As is required for all students, he was asked to check in at the office front desk to fill out the student appointment sheet. When he got into my office we started our meeting with casual conversation. We discussed his schoolwork and I asked him about his family. Having met with Kurt a few times before, he felt comfortable asking me some questions about his course schedule for next semester. We were both so engaged in our conversation that without either of us realizing it the topic seamlessly transitioned into discussing his academic experience at USF. A few minutes into the topic I realized that the information we were casually discussing was relevant to my research and part of the conversation guiding questions I had prepared. Interrupting the

conversation, we made a light joke about the fact that I was missing out on good information. From that moment on I started recording our conversation.

Working as an academic adviser I have the opportunity to interact with undergraduate students on a regular basis. Meeting the newly admitted transfer students to develop a degree completion planner is one of the initial interactions that I have with the military veteran students. As a result of this experience I have developed a pre-understanding of their academic needs and preferred communication styles. My prejudgment of military veteran students contributed to my idea that Kurt, like many other veteran students, chose to enroll in the military because of limited options for academic opportunities or as a response to a moral calling to serve his country. Through my conversation with Kurt I discovered my error; he advised me that for many high school students, pursuing a military career after graduation is an alternative option and one that appeals to those who seek new experiences and adventures. In regards to his motivation to enroll in the military and his academic performance in high school Kurt said “I was 3.8, 4.0 usually student... it was not that I had a duty to do it, it was nothing that dramatic or romantic you know, I just wanted something else that I didn’t know what was going to happen. That’s why I joined. I wanted an adventure, I just wanted to leave.” It was surprising for me to learn that Kurt, being such a talented student and having all the support from his family to go to college, had decided instead to enroll in the military in search of adventure.

Kurt explained that meeting the physical demands of the military training was not a challenging transition for him, “I was an athlete. I was a wrestler, and I played football, so I was used to the kind of physical stress.” However, the mental stress that the military

training infuses into the new recruits is something for which there are no psychological preparedness tips to minimize the shocking experience.

“But the Army, it is just a feeling, right when you get off and go to the MEPS center and you get the buzz and you just go man. There’s no one here to help me, it’s just me. All I got is myself to depend on and really trust. But you know, And then you go to this faraway place that you have never been to and you’re thrown into this stress, walk like a stress machine you know. Mentally you reach above anything that I never been to. So it only gets harder throughout your career. The military career it got only harder for me.”

Learning about Kurt’s experience in the military training program gave me a better understanding of his discipline, respectfulness, and commitment to serve others. These valuable skills have contributed to Kurt’s excellent academic performance at USF and his commitment to do well in order to serve the people around him “everything I do is for my family to be comfortable...my fun time is over so it is time to get to work.” From being the high school graduate in search of adventure away from home, Kurt’s new identity of service and commitment to his family opens up the possibility to reach new understandings and an expanded horizon.

Kurt’s comments about his academic experience at SFCC and the supportive relationships that he developed with other military veteran students at that institution inspired me to ask about his transitional experience to USF. Describing his transition to the university he said, “I was kind of scared about it at first. I thought I was going, you know. I was going to get a lot of people aggravating me about, you know, asking me questions. So most of the time I just kept to myself.” It was surprising to me to hear him admit to being scared about transferring to USF. When I think about military veterans I typically think about courageous young men and women facing dangerous situations serving and protecting this country. Being scared about transferring into a new school is a

feeling that I have never associated with veteran students. However, Kurt's description of his experience transitioning to USF made me realize that just like any other undergraduate student attending USF, veteran students are also in an unpredictable learning stage that requires genuine care and support from faculty and staff.

Half way through the completion of his degree requirements, Kurt has expanded his horizon sharing his knowledge and experience with his USF classmates, "I just took my Marketing group class down there (SFCC Veteran Research Center). We were doing like a primary research for a frat like house for Veterans, so. We went down there I showed them the VRC, talked to the guys for little bit." In spite of Kurt's limited time for socializing and befriending with other students, describing his connections with fellow USF military veteran students and a military veteran professor was a topic that brightened his facial expression.

Referring to his military veteran professor Kurt said: "Griffis, he's the first professor I really; you know trust enough to talk to. Just be friends with you know, kind of on a friendly basis." Discussing his move from a military career to a new academic environment it was apparent that Kurt's understanding of his future had acquired a new horizon. In regards to his time serving in the military Kurt stated "If I had a family then it would have been impossible for me personally. I don't know how other guys did it you know...That's the reason I got out, I was staff sergeant, fast tracking, I was about to be a drill sergeant." Kurt's maturity and professional demeanor have been apparent to me since the first time I advised him. His focus and dedication to his academic career is exemplary. Kurt's knowledge and understanding of the steps that need to be completed in order to achieve professional success came through in our conversation and his

commitment to school. Kurt's goal to provide a better future for his family motivates him to work hard and to imagine the rewards at the end of his academic road.

Through the conversation it became clear to me that Kurt's disposition to complete his business degree while raising a family and working a part time job was powered by his desire to provide a better future for his family. When I asked him how he envisions his life after he graduates from USF he stated, "I think I would get a full time position there [at his current company] and then get my way through law school and be a lawyer. And I know that's not possible unless you get a degree from a good school." Discussing the sacrifice that he is currently making by not spending a lot of time with his family, he explained that it is a sacrifice that takes a significant purpose in Kurt's imagination as he envisions the possibilities of a better future. "They don't like me not being around them all the time. But I say it is not going to be like that forever, you know. The goal is not just about me anymore. Everything I do is for them to be comfortable you know... My wife is supportive; she understands what's going on." Kurt's hope for a better future provides the incentive to fulfill his educational requirements to the best of his abilities.

Through Kurt's account about his Marketing class project at the SFCC Veterans Resource Center, I discovered that Kurt's imagined future extended beyond his individual professional career. Expressing his hope and ideas for future military veteran students Kurt stated, "it is such a simple move and USF can say, hey we offer veterans preference registration they will get more veterans that way." Envisioning a Veteran Student Center at USF, Kurt said that he would staff it with "someone that is familiar with the GI bill that keeps track of all the changes to the GI bill so they can advise these guys and make

the process so much easier. Because it is a battle...and it is hard.” The services that a possible USF veteran student center may be able to provide represent an improvement in facilitating veteran students’ academic transition.

Talking about his imagined future, Kurt has recognized and accepted the academic challenges ahead of him. “I want my degree, I want to go to work, I want to make money, I want to be happy, you know what I mean that’s what it is about. It is not about trying to make it as easy as possible for me to graduate. I am willing to do the work.” As Kurt transitions through his academic experiences at USF, his hope for a brighter future provides a meaningful value to the sacrifices he is making today. Following directions and completing all the necessary steps to meet a goal is a valuable military training lesson that serves Kurt as the roadmap to fulfill his graduation requirements at USF.

Through the process of transcribing the conversation I had the opportunity to reflect upon and analyze Kurt’s academic experience at USF. As I pondered the conversation and the transcribed data it became apparent to me how Kurt’s military training and previous academic experience had affected his personal identity and refigured future. For most individuals, navigating the passing stages of life is an intimidating task that can cloud the vision of a better future. In Kurt’s experience, the transitional process from military service to the academic environment provided him new narratives that expanded his horizon and understanding of his future.

Data Analysis

The research conversation with Kurt provided me with new information about the various factors that affect military veteran students’ academic experience. Not having

military training myself, my understanding of the camaraderie and the strong bonds that connect military veterans was limited to my professional interaction with USF's veteran students. Kurt's previous academic narratives provided me a new understanding about the importance of having a military veterans' student network and dedicated support services on campus to serve and assist this student population. In my conversation with Kurt, he shared his personal history and academic experience as a military veteran student at USF. In the following sections I analyze the data collected from our conversation under the three themes that guided my research: identity, fusion of horizon, and imagination. The first section addresses Kurt's identity relating to his role and responsibilities as student and head of his family.

Veteran Student Identity

Kurt's military veteran identity was apparent from my initial interaction with him during new student orientation in spring 2012. His (*Ipse*) identity was even more pronounced when describing his academic experiences at SFCC and USF. The social and academic interaction with his professors and classmates were primarily dictated by the need to complete class assignments or group projects. Ricoeur (1992:121) explains that the selfhood (*Ipse*) identity of an individual is continuously changing as external forces or other community members enter into his or her life. Kurt's decision to share his military veteran student identity with classmates and faculty is influenced by the relationship and the level of trust developed with other students.

The conversation with Kurt helped me understand how the shared military training and combat experiences of military veteran students provides a special affinity that allows vets to identify and connect to each other in a very unique way. Ricoeur

(1992:143) states that it is “in the story recounted with its qualities of unity, internal structure, and completeness which are conferred by emplotment, that the character preserves throughout the story an identity correlative to that of the story itself.” The character that military veteran students develop as a result of their training and life experiences is a trait that permanently stays with them.

Ricoeur (1992) explains that the character of an individual is determined by life experiences and shared stories. Kurt’s narratives about the students’ interaction at the SFCC veteran student center are examples of how his military identity and character played a significant role identifying and establishing connections with fellow military veterans. Kurt’s self-constancy and permanent identity (*Idem*) as a provider plays an important role when determining his academic career and future goals. Self-constancy is explained by Ricoeur (1992:165) as “the manner of conducting himself or herself so that others can count on that person.” Recognizing his horizon and role as a husband, father of two young children, and the first-born child, Kurt’s identity motivates his goal to go to law school in order to carry on his fathers’ law firm and to provide a stable financial future for his own family. Kurt’s identity as the main provider and responsibility for a young family determines his relationships with other USF students as he limits his social interactions to school assignments and group projects. His military identity and head of a household also provides him the ability to look into his horizon imagining a successful future. Gadamer (2000:302) explains that, “to have a horizon means not being limited to what is nearby but being able to see beyond it.” Kurt’s capacity to look towards a new horizon and imagine new possibilities speaks to Gadamer’s (2000) concept of fusion of horizon and new understandings.

Reaching a New Understanding

Gadamer (2000:302) explains that an individual's horizon is constituted by "everything that can be seen from a particular standpoint." Kurt's horizon is his perspective of life during his active military service. After our conversation, I reached the understanding that it is not uncommon for active military members to have multiple deployments during their military career. Kurt had the experience of serving in a Hurricane Katrina search and rescue unit and in brigade combat teams in Afghanistan. During that time, Kurt's horizon was restricted to his military service. Gadamer (2000:304) indicates that, "everything contained in historical consciousness is in fact embraced by a single historical horizon." Kurt explained that when he was a single person, there were no other elements shaping his historical horizon. At that time, Kurt's horizon was limited to fulfilling his military responsibility on a rotational basis.

Engaging in a higher education career and married life has expanded Kurt's horizon to encompass new life experiences and educational expectations. Gadamer (2000:305) states that "to acquire a horizon means that one learns to look beyond what is close at hand." Kurt's understanding of the academic services and learning programs offered at the higher education public system lead him to enroll at USF. His pre-understanding of the course availability and his close relationship to former students were primary factors that motivated him to enroll at USF. Kurt's experience at SFCC exposed him to new educational horizons. At that campus, military veteran students have a dedicated resource center where they can gather to expand their learning and social support. Gadamer (2000:305) suggests that "we must always already have a horizon in order to be able to transport ourselves into a situation."

Every stage of a military career, including combat training and war experiences, influences the narrative of military personnel, changing the perception and comprehension of their horizon. Gadamer (2000:304) declares that, “the historical movement of human life consists in the fact that it is never absolutely bound to any one standpoint and hence can never have a truly closed horizon.” Transitioning through the academic requirements at USF, Kurt is acquiring new educational narratives, which in turn expand his horizon. His new story and acquired knowledge support his capability to imagine a new life as a college graduate working towards a better future for his family.

Envisioning New Experiences

Kurt explained that his motivation to enroll in military service was primarily determined by his desire to search for something new. His imagination freed him to envision new experiences and, in turn, refigure a different career outside the traditional educational path of attending college after high school. Kearney (1998:149) explains that “imagination provides individuals the ability to refigure a new world where the possibilities of a new world lead to action and change.” The uncertainty of what he would potentially find in the military was not something that distracted Kurt’s desire to pursue his military career. Kurt’s imagination incited his capability to create a new future for his life beyond the customary college career. Kurt’s creative imagination was also the motivator that led him to the action of enrolling in the military service.

In his current role as a husband and father of two young children, Kurt envisions a better future for his family and works hard in order to fulfill the responsibilities that will award him that goal. Kearny (1998:53) declares that “imagination is the foundationless foundation of our knowledge of all things.” Kurt’s ability to create images of his future

enables him to meet his academic requirements and maintain a professional career. Being a full time student at USF as well as working a part time job takes a lot of Kurt's time. The sacrifice that he is making by not spending a lot of time with his family can only have significant meaning when he envisions the possibility of a better life for his family. Kearny (1998:142) states that, "imagination is assessed as an indispensable agent in the creation of meaning." Kurt's motivation to stretch time to the limit to attend classes and perform his career obligations is shaped by his ability to imagine completing his academic degree and providing a better future for his family.

Conclusion

Working in the higher education field my understanding of students' academic needs is primarily based on institutional research and educational theories. During our conversation, I began to understand differently when I realized that Kurt's motivation to complete his academic career was his commitment to provide for his family. Learning from his experience assisting military veteran students at SFCC and being a military veteran himself, Kurt had a good understanding of the factors that influence military veteran students' academic success. I am grateful for the opportunity he has given me to expand my awareness of the factors that contribute to military veterans' effective college transition and successful educational experience.

Implications

As the federal government discusses its plan of reducing the United States military intervention in foreign countries, now is the opportune time to think about the number of young military men and women returning home to continue their personal and professional careers. The GI bill and the VA educational benefits provide a great opportunity for the veterans to envision a new future by enrolling at a community college

or a four-year university. With an accurate knowledge and better understanding of the possible academic and social needs of veteran students, colleges and universities can consider appropriate programs and procedures to support and graduate this particular student population.

To understand the educational barriers faced by military veteran students pursuing a bachelor's degree at USF, it is important to incorporate critical hermeneutic theory into this study. Herda (1999:55) explains that, "in field-based hermeneutic research, the traditions and understandings of both the researcher and the members of the research population come into consideration." As a researcher, my professional experience advising undergraduate students provides a starting point to incorporate military veteran students' needs into USF's student services and academic resources. Through conversations and personal narratives, military veteran students who participate in my research have the opportunity to reflect on their past academic and military experiences, find meaning in their present educational goals, and open the opportunity to imagine a future as college graduates.

The data collection process set forth by Herda (1999) and guided by Critical Hermeneutic-theory allows engagement and conversation fluidity. Herda's research protocol sets the stage for the researcher and the participants to expand their knowledge and understanding of the challenging educational issues affecting veteran students. Addressing the meaningful use of this research theory, Herda states that "the purpose of the participatory research is to create conditions whereby people can engage in discourse so that truth can be recognized and new realities can be brought into being" (1999:82). The open conversations linking students' military identity to their future expectations can

provide the vision of a brighter horizon, as we expand our understanding the veteran students' academic experiences.

Reflection on Pilot Project

Through the development of this pilot study, I had the opportunity to conduct a research conversation with Kurt to explore his past military and educational experiences, discuss his current academic expectations, and his future aims as a college graduate. I also implemented a literature review of past research studies addressing military veteran students' educational needs. By incorporating these two elements of the pilot study I was able to expand my understanding of the educational elements that affect veteran students.

Creating conversation guiding questions to address the student's military identity, understanding of the educational system, and future goals provided me with a greater understanding of the factors that influence veteran students' academic accomplishments. The guiding questions that brought forth academic narratives and past military experience provided Kurt the opportunity to expand his knowledge and understanding of his identity as a military veteran student and head of a household. The guided conversation discussing USF's educational services and resources allowed Kurt to widen his understanding of the required steps to navigate and complete USF's graduation requirements.

The dialogue with Kurt helped me to understand better some of the challenges faced by veteran students. These students must adjust to a new environment within the university campus while also struggling with a new sense of self as they refigure their identities from soldier to student and try to imagine new and different ways of being. The categories of identity, fusion of horizon, and imagination served me well in

understanding veterans and their unique situations. Based on the data that emerged from the conversation with Kurt, I was pleased with the pilot project and plan to use these same categories and questions for the research study.

Background of the Researcher

I began my higher education career at the University of San Francisco in 2004. During my first year at USF I worked in the Graduation Center within the Office of the Registrar, evaluating degree completion requirements for students enrolled in professional evening programs. In 2005 I was offered a position in the Office of Transfer Admission as a University Evaluator and Transfer Admission Counselor. My responsibilities at that department included recruiting and admitting transfer students. My job duties also involved evaluating transfer credits from community colleges, four year institutions and non-traditional educational sources to fulfill USF's graduation requirements. For four years I performed those admission assignments before transitioning to my current academic advising role.

Serving as an academic adviser in the Center for Academic and Student Achievement, my function and service to the undergraduate students includes providing guidance and support to fulfill degree requirements. It is my strong belief that providing a welcoming and warm advising environment makes a great difference in whether or not students will seek the necessary tools to achieve their academic goals. As an adviser I play a valuable role assisting students in developing a degree completion planner from their first term of enrollment until graduation. This process helps them visualize the required steps they need to graduate from USF by facilitating their transitioning educational experience.

My academic advising position at USF has an influential role that encourages me to expand my knowledge and professional experience by actively participating in academic development workshops, diversity seminars, and policy programs. Providing USF's students a holistic academic advising experience that will carry them through their college career is my educational commitment. Working at USF I have learned that there is not a "one-size fits all" approach when it comes to advising college students. USF's diverse student population has given me the valuable opportunity to work with students from different backgrounds, nationalities, and socioeconomic statuses. The students' interactions and professional experiences have taught me that in order to guide student through their academic journey it is important to listen and learn from their narratives. The unique values and experiences that students bring with them inspire my interest to learn from the veteran students currently enrolled at USF. As such, my interest in exploring the educational factors affecting military veteran students derives from my desire to provide a supportive and welcoming educational environment to those who have served the United States.

Summary

Developing the appropriate student support system to create veteran student friendly policies and procedures is a step educational institutions may consider in order to respond effectively to the increasing veteran student population. Among the new academic policies and procedures, colleges and universities can consider a holistic academic advising approach that includes faculty mentoring programs, peer support groups, and veteran student organizations. In order to support better veteran students' academic development, it is important to incorporate all academic, social, and student

support levels of the higher education system. Having a diverse student population, colleges and universities in the United States are prepared to develop academic initiatives and support programs that serve special student groups. It is now the appropriate time to listen to veteran students in order to assess current programs and policies, and investigate potentially new systems of support for their success.

College administrators, faculty and advising staff are continually challenged to learn and understand students' needs in order to guide them in the completion of their academic goals. Veteran students are an emerging student population that is still in the process of being both understood and effectively served by many colleges and universities across the country. Institutions concerned with successfully serving veteran students' needs are motivated to understand the challenges that influence veteran students' academic development and social interactions. Herda (1999:13) declares, "the critical point is to change relationship among members in organizations and communities. This change does not begin by changing the other, but by changing oneself." By engaging in meaningful conversations with veteran students, colleges and universities may acquire the knowledge to consider new and different ways to serve the increasing veteran student population.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA PRESENTATION

Introduction

In an effort to understand how college and university student services and resources might better support veteran students' academic progress and success, I engaged in conversations with veteran students currently enrolled at the University of San Francisco (USF). I transcribed the students' conversations into a text, thereby allowing for distanciation and reinterpretation of the written document. Herda (1999:127) declares that in the process of distanciation, "the meaning of what is said surpasses the event of saying," which in turn allowed me to appropriate students' narratives and to create new meaning of their educational experiences at USF.

The veteran students with whom I conversed served in different branches of the military. All of the veterans shared with me, through conversation, their challenges and struggles in transitioning from the military to the academic community. As a researcher and university adviser working with undergraduate veteran students, my understanding about the effective use of student services is determined by my experience referring students to such services. Herda (1999:127) declares that the research conversation "provides the opportunity for new learning." From these conversations, I acquired a new understanding about the challenges that veterans face when enrolling at a four-year institution.

In the following section I present a summary of the data collected from the research conversations with veteran students. This chapter includes the students' narratives of their military careers and educational experiences at USF in the form of a "text that tells a story...[so as] to configure a totality out of scattered events" (Herda 1999:127). The student's narratives are delivered in the data presentation section through

the research categories of identity, fusion of horizon, and imagination. Researcher observations and notes from my personal journal are also included in this section.

Identity

The identity of an individual is his or her life story adapting to new experiences and life changing events. Kearney (2004:108) explains that “the story told tells about the actions of the ‘who’ and the identity of this ‘who’ is a narrative identity.” The veteran students who participated in my research shared personal life changing events that, once shared through story, became a part of their narrative identity. As the veteran students continue in their academic career at USF and imagine a new life as college graduates, they will have new experiences. Kearny (2004:108) states that an individual’s narrative identity is constantly changing and adapting with new narratives and life events:

“The narrative self involves an ongoing process of self-constancy and self-rectification that requires imagination to synthesize the different horizons of the past, present and future. The narrative concept of self thus offers a dynamic notion of identity (ipse) that includes mutability and change within the cohesion of one lifetime. This means, for instance, that the identity of human subjects is deemed a constant task of reinterpretation in the light of new and old stories we tell about ourselves.”

As the veteran students continue to progress through their academic programs, their narrative identities will likely change to become more reflective of these transitions from soldiers to college students.

Reflecting on the research conversations, I encountered similar life stories that influenced a shared narrative identity among all of the veteran students. These former military personnel all spoke of their aspiration and motivation to earn a college degree. At the initial stages of the data collection process, I noted in my personal journal that “they [veteran students] are very respectful and very enthusiastic about USF. It seems

like they have been waiting for an educational opportunity for a long time. They want to graduate, they want to help and be a positive influence to their community.” The military training, combat experiences, and tight relationships within the military culture influenced participants’ desire to pursue a college education, to become leaders, and to serve others.

The veteran students shared with me their narratives that included their experiences in the military and as USF students. Ricoeur (1988:249) states that narrative identity is “not a stable and seamless identity... it is always possible to weave different, even opposed plots about our lives.” Sharing their narrative identity with me allowed for reflection on a new understanding of their identity as college students. Some participants expressed that having open conversations and disclosing their military experiences with other college students was not an important element of their student identity. However, reviewing and reflecting on their individual conversation transcript provided me the opportunity for reinterpretation and new understating of their narrative identity.

Fusion of Horizon

By introducing the guiding question, “how do you describe your interaction with your fellow veteran students and non-veteran students,” I wanted to learn about the participants pre-understanding of the college student culture and the ways in which veterans interact with others. Gadamer, in discussing Fusion of Horizon, (2004:306) explains that “the horizon of the present is continually in the process of being formed because we continually have to test all our prejudices...this testing occurs in encountering the past and in understanding the traditions from which we come.” I was interested in learning from the participants what new stories and types of relationships

with other students had emerged through the integration of fusion of horizons. Some participants expressed that their interactions with non-veteran students were limited to class activities and group projects. Nick said, “I haven’t really been involved with anything [student activities], I kind of just come to class, do my work and go home.” Other participants noted that using class presentation forums to share their narratives and military experience provided them a better understanding and a greater sense of belonging to the college community.

Some participants expressed concern about how other students would perceive them since they did not fit the traditional college student profile. They recognized that the identity developed through their military career provided them excellent organizational and leadership skills, but their military identity also influenced their pre-understandings of acceptable norms and behaviors generating conflicting reactions when observing non-veteran students’ classroom conduct. In short, veteran students, in an attempt to feel more connected with their campus communities and to relate better to peers, want to share their own past experiences while also observing and trying to understand the college student culture. However, veterans seem to be encountering some challenges in fusing their past identities and military-influenced traditions with the present culture and norms within the university campus community.

Imagination

Ricoeur (2004:53) defines imagination as “an incantation destined to produce the object of one’s thought, the things one desires, in a manner that one can take possession of it.” Discussing their dreams and goals for what might happen once they finish school, veteran students emplotted, through imagination, their future lives as college graduates. I

observed a positive change in the facial expressions as they discussed their hopes and dreams after graduation. The power to create a future image of what their life could be provided significant meaning to the current academic experiences.

Reflecting on the past experiences within the military and how they influenced veteran students' narratives and identities, all of the participants expressed their desire to continue working in a field that would allow them to serve their community and to provide the best for their families. The desire to help others was a common theme that emerged from discussing their imagined future. Some participants' hopes for the future included providing health services in third world countries; implementation of environment sustainable farming initiatives; and providing guidance and support to fellow veteran students transitioning into a civilian life outside of the military.

I conducted my conversations in my personal office in the Center for Academic and Students Achievement. This location was important to the research in that the students associate the center with the support services necessary for them to succeed and achieve their academic goals. In addition, the advising environment associated with the center provided the participants a preconceived understanding of what information I might be looking for as an adviser and researcher. For instance, when meeting with one of the participants, he immediately started discussing his academic experience at USF. When I redirected the conversation to discuss his imagined future, he seemed surprised about my interest in his goals and aspirations after USF – but then he opened up and did share his personal vision and expectations for the future. In my experience working with undergraduate students, most conversations take place around academic inquires and

application of policies and procedures. It was understandable to me why some veteran students were happy to share their imagined future with me.

The previous sections presented data from all conversations as related to the theoretical concepts of identity, fusion of horizon, and imagination. In the following section I present a summary of the data generated from the individual conversations with veteran students. As each participant described his personal military and academic experience, specific points of data are presented in order to understand better the unique challenges that each participant had to overcome in adapting to a new culture as a USF student. The stories that each veteran student shared with me highlight the variety of educational assets and the valuable narratives that military veteran students bring into a college campus. The individual narratives shared in this section aim to present participants' transitional identity from the military career through their college student experiences, imagined future, and personal and professional learned experiences.

Conversations with Research Participants

Rylan Albright – B.A. History

Rylan spent his military career serving in the United States Air Force from 2006 to 2011. Including various military missions throughout the United States, Rylan also served in the armed conflicts in Kuwait, Iraq and Afghanistan. Discussing his decision to join the military, Rylan expressed that in addition to being influenced by his grandfather who was a veteran of World War II, he also had a desire to find direction in life after high school. Rylan also recognized the terrorist attack of 9/11 as being an influential event on his decision to serve in the military.

Transitioning from high school to the military service was not a difficult step for Rylan. Rylan's grandfather's experience as a WW II veteran provided him with a pre-understanding of the physical and psychological requirements of a military career. Talking about his decision to leave the military, he discussed how he did not imagine his future serving in the military for a long time. He said, "a big reason why I decided to get out of the military in general was...I have seen a lot of individuals who have stayed in the armed forces for, you know, 20 years, and it just didn't seem like the life I wanted. I had already had three deployments overseas in four years and I didn't want to continue that." Not having the goal of making a military career, Rylan decided to leave the military after five years of service and three deployments to conflict areas overseas. Discussing his decision to enroll at USF Rylan said the main reasons to come to San Francisco were that his girlfriend was a USF student and that he wanted to be close to his family in Chico, CA. Because Rylan knew students attending USF, his transition to the college campus was not difficult for him. However, during his first year at USF, getting his VA educational benefits and receiving appropriate information regarding tuition, registration, and major requirements was a difficult step. Rylan explained,

"My experience with USF and financial aid and the whole financial aspect of going to USF as a veteran has been either really good or really bad. My first year, I was told that I would basically receive full benefits if I was a student in the school of management. So, I switched my major from History to Business, in order receive these benefits. Two weeks before school started, I was told that that wasn't the case."

The procedural challenges aside, Rylan did admit to being a little concerned about how students would react towards him when they found out his veteran student identity, and if he would feel a part of the student community.

Rylan is currently pursuing a BA in History. Growing up in a family of educators, Rylan imagines continuing his education and becoming a teacher. He said “I’m looking pretty much at teaching programs. Like I said, I come from a family of educators, so being a teacher is definitely something that I want to do. And, of course, grad school would be a part of that.” Rylan wants to take all the talents and skills learned in the military and at USF to continue his academic goal. He expressed his desire to see procedural changes at USF to support better future veteran students. He recommends creating a center for veteran students to meet and receive orientation and information. Having a full time VA certifying official is also part of Rylan’s imagined future for USF veteran students.

William Glazer – B.S. Biology

William served in a special forces Ranger battalion. William explained that because of the special military missions, his training was longer than traditional military training. After completing his basic military training, he had to complete a year and a half of training to serve in the Special Forces. William had two deployments during his service; the first deployment was to Iraq, and the second deployment was to Afghanistan. Growing up in a financially comfortable family environment, William stated that his motivation to join the military was primarily to serve others with limited opportunities. He said, “I felt kind of guilty that I was not doing anything, like my buddy...he didn’t have as many opportunities as I did, because his family wasn’t as well off as my family was and I felt kind of guilty about that.” Before enrolling in the military William had developed experience and interest in health services. His knowledge and experience helping others influenced his decision to serve in the army medical unit.

Talking about his transition into the military training, William explained that adjusting to the physical demands was the most difficult part for him. He said, “I was prepared mentally, because I was really motivated. Like I wasn’t going to quit or anything like that. Physically it was harder; I didn’t do sports or anything like that in high school, so I had to work hard to keep up.” Williams’ motivations to enlist in the military help him overcome his physical disadvantages going into the military training.

Before enrolling in the military William had an understanding of the challenges of military training. William acknowledged that although he felt mentally prepared to complete the military training, the physical demands presented a significant challenge for him. He said, “I never questioned my decision going into the military. I questioned whether or not I could do it.” William’s pre-understanding of the military training and his desire to care for others were motivational factors through the basic training. At no point during the training did he question his decision to join the military. The imagined future created in his mind provided meaning and purpose to complete the rigorous training tasks. William said, “I really wanted to be there and I felt like my motivation to do the training was better than a lot of the other guys I was with.” Not having military family members nor needing the financial military benefits, William’s decision to join the military was surprising for his family. However, William was happy to report that all his family members were very supportive of his decision to enlist.

William discussed that whereas the physical demands made adjusting to life as soldier difficult, his transition to the academic setting at USF was fairly smooth. William said, “I don’t think it was particularly difficult. It seemed to go pretty smooth. The veteran coordinator...was really helpful. Once I got that paperwork to her, she took care

of all that pretty well.” He explained that a significant reason for the positive experience had to do with receiving support and information about his military educational benefits from the Registrar’s Office VA coordinator. In regards to his motivation to enroll at USF, he mentioned that the primary reason he applied to USF was to be close to his older sister, currently attending U.C. Berkeley. Before enrolling at USF, William had visited San Francisco and the Bay Area on several occasions. Williams’ familiarity with the city’s unique culture and diverse population also contributed to his successful transition to the university environment. “I really like the small class sizes. Whenever I have any questions, there are always opportunities to meet one on one with the professors. I mean, that’s a huge help.” The close and supportive learning environment allows William to feel comfortable sharing his military narratives and identity with professors and classmates.

William is pursuing a B.S. Biology degree. He is also a member of the USF Emergency Medical Response (EMR) group, which is a student organization promoting health services and emergency response preparedness. William’s active service medical experience is a valuable asset for this organization. William also participates as an EMT volunteer in festivals and special events around the city. He wants to continue his education and attend medical school. He hopes to become a doctor and practice medicine overseas. He particularly would like to go back to the Middle East and continue helping the community he had worked with during his active military service.

Bradley Bennett – B.A. Fine Arts

Bradley spent his military career serving in the U.S. Navy. Even though he did not talk about his deployment and military experience overseas, he shared his experience

servicing in the Tsunami rescue mission in Indonesia. Despite the fact that Bradley's grandfather served in the U.S. Navy, he admitted that at no point in his life did he intend to enlist in the military. He said, "I got into a little trouble, so it was my Dad who gave me an ultimatum: either work for him or join the military...I had to." He acknowledged that at that specific time of his life, enlisting in the U.S Navy was the better option for him.

Before his military enrollment, Bradley attended Campbellsville University and Western Kentucky University. He recognized that before starting his military career, he lacked discipline and focus in terms of completing his academic responsibilities. He talked about not having a clear direction about his educational future. He said, "I was a troublemaker when I was young, so I kept getting in trouble...I messed up school, and the military taught me discipline." Bradley understood that he was supposed to go to college because that was what his parents had taught him from a young age. However, he was unsure about what direction to take in completing his college degree. "I didn't know what I wanted to do, I just knew I needed to go to college. That's how I was raised – that's what my parents always told me, you go to go college." In the conversation Bradley discussed how his military training and active service experience provided the discipline, motivation, and financial means to pursue his academic career at USF.

Discussing his transition to USF, Bradley explained that it was not a challenging process for him. He said, "I was ready for a change and I was ready for California and I was ready to go back to school...it was time, I was ready." After the completion of his military service, Bradley spent a few years adapting to his new life as a civilian. After his honorary discharge he attended the University of Kentucky (UK) hoping to finish his

college degree. Describing his transition from the military to civilian life and attending the UK, Bradley said that it was a very difficult process for him. He said, “I got out in ’06 and I didn’t get here [USF] until 2011. There was a long gap just not knowing what I was going to do. The transition to the University of Kentucky was horrible. And then, the transition from the military to civilian was horrible. But I mean, you know, it made me grow and taught me a lot.” His desire to attend a school with small class sizes and to live in California motivated his decision to transfer to USF to finish his college education.

Bradley had the experience of traveling the world during his military service. He wants to continue traveling and visiting other countries. At this point in his educational career he is excited about the art he is creating and all the art skills he is learning at USF. He dreams of one day opening his own gallery and continue painting. He said, “I’m obsessed with art...Hopefully I’ll have a gallery, hopefully just do art the rest of my life. That’s what I want.” In regards to future veteran students attending USF, he imagines the benefits of having a center for veteran students to gather and receive guidance and information. He said, “that [veteran center] would be pretty cool, just be able to stop by the VA office and meet veterans here.” Bradley keeps a personal journal to record his experiences at USF. He also uses the journal to create a textual image of his future as a USF graduate and art studio owner.

Nick Oeffinger – B.S. Environmental Science

Nick served in the U.S. Navy in Okinawa, Japan. During the conversation Nick talked about his desire to travel the world as a motivation to join the United States Navy. An interesting detail about Nick’s military service is the fact that contrary to his motivation to travel, Nick spent all his active service stationed at the same Navy base in

Okinawa. He explained that before his military service, he was unclear about the career he wanted to follow. “I was just a lost 18-year old man...I was just hanging out and kind of being a bum for the most part.” He was also unsure about the possibility of attending college to earn a Bachelors’ degree. As he was getting close to the completion of his military service Nick learned about the G.I. bill educational benefits and started to explore the option of attending college once discharge from service.

Nick’s family was supportive about his decision to join the United States Navy. Nick explained that in some way he thinks they were happy to see him being responsible and taking a positive direction in his life. He talked about how completing the military training provided a new perspective regarding his future. Nick said, “I had no discipline whatsoever. I was a boy you know...the whole lifestyle was radically different. I feel like it got my head on straight, but I didn’t...I don’t think I needed four years of that. I was good to go after about two years.” The learned life experiences and skills provided him discipline, direction, and motivation to pursue higher academic and professional goals. Nick’s military service was a learning experience that resulted in a new understanding about his desire to go to college and serve others.

Before enrolling in the Navy Nick had no motivation or a clear direction on how pursue a college degree. The military disciplined culture and the infused mentality to always complete your tasks were valuable lessons that helped him in transitioning to the civilian life and to the college requirements. Nick described his college transition as a positive experience. He explained, “after I got out, like I said, I took like a sabbatical, I was in France with my wife. During that time I was really mentally preparing. Like, I’m going to come here [USF]...I’m not going to slack, you know. I was pretty motivated and

got really good grades and all.” Upon completion of his service in the Navy, Nick admitted feeling mentally prepared to take on the next step of his academic career attending USF.

After his military discharge, Nick spent time traveling and noted that having the time to relax and adapt to civilian life was a very valuable experience that helped him transition into his academic career. He said, “after I got out of the military....I didn’t go directly to school, I was actually traveling with my fiancée, my wife now.” Nick explained that his decision to enroll at USF was motivated by his father’s relationship with USF alumni. Currently at USF, Nick’s responsibilities outside of school do not leave him much time to be involved in student activities on campus. Nick’s military experiences provided him with a new understanding of the work ethic he needs to invest to fulfill his academic and personal responsibilities. He said, “I haven’t really been involved with anything, I kind of just come to class. Do my thing and go home. I kind of got my eyes set on a goal, here, you know, and I’m just chugging away, I really want my degree and...really enjoy studying.” Attending USF, Nick is open to share his military narrative and experience with professors and classmates. The learned military discipline now serves Nick as a motivation to complete his academic goals while providing the confidence to imagine his professional career as a USF college graduate.

Discussing his dream after he graduates from USF, Nick hopes to find a good paying job that will allow him to provide a good home for his family. He said, “hopefully, I will end up getting a decent paying job. Have my wife and kids and a house. A traditional family....that’s kind of corny, but that’s what I want.” Nick’s imagined future includes having a traditional family with his wife and kids. His service in the

United States Navy is providing the financial means and the educational skills to earn his college degree. Being a veteran student, Nick admitted that the possibility of working in a resource center for veterans could be a good alternative for his future professional career.

Manuel DeMayo – B.B.A. Organization and Leadership

Manuel has been in the United States Army reserves for a total of twelve years. His father served in the army for twenty years and from that experience Manuel understood at a young age that a military career was a strong possibility for his future. Manuel had originally planned to enroll in the military after completing his high school requirements. However, as with many young adults, Manuel explained that at the age of 17 he did not feel prepared to physically and mentally pursue a military career. He said, “when I was 17 years old I signed a contract, I was supposed to go right away. But I chose not to...I don’t think I was ready at that time.” Uncertain about what he wanted to do with his future, Manuel tried out several jobs after high school as a form of searching for alternative careers outside of the military. Not finding any of those jobs fulfilling, he decided to follow his father’s military example and enlisted in the United States Army when he was 22 years old.

Having learned discipline and valuable leadership skills in the corporate world, Manuel explained that the military training did not represent a difficult task for him. He said, “I think I was 22 years old at the time and it was my last resort. I needed a foundation and I went into the military and actually I was really good at it, so I started staying there. The training was great. It’s not for everyone but once I got through, it was a game changer for me.” He described his military training as a learning experience that

provided a new understanding about the importance of attending college and earning a college degree.

Manuel's positive military experience and the knowledge about the financial benefits available to military veterans provided him a new perspective about pursuing career opportunities in the military. During his active service, Manuel learned that a college degree provides great opportunities to advance your military career. He envisioned himself as a high-ranking officer, and this newly imagined future motivated him to search for the appropriate educational program that would enable him to earn a four-year college degree. He said, "I came off active duty looking to do school right away....and I stumbled upon USF's degree completion program. I went into one of their presentations. And I thought this could be something for me." Based on Manuel's work and family responsibilities, USF's evening adult degree completion program was the most appropriate educational path to fulfilling his goals. This educational program allows students to attend school on a weekly basis while continuing their work and personal commitments. The degree completion program provides time for Manuel to maintain his fulltime job, to serve in the Army reserves, and to attend to his family obligations.

Transitioning to the academic environment was not a difficult step for Manuel. The student demographics and the class size in the adult program allow students to develop close relationships with classmates, faculty, and staff at the University. In regards to his military identity, Manuel noted that he feels comfortable sharing his military narrative identity with others in the classroom setting. He said, "there's always a positive reaction. I have yet to encounter anything negative and if they did, I guess that, they either keep that to themselves, or they don't say anything, from my classmates, it's

generally positive.” As he is still enrolled in the Army reserves he understands that there is always the possibility of being called for deployment.

Being open about his military identity has helped him to incorporate narratives and experiences into his academic work. He explained, “we do introductions...I acknowledge or say that right away, that I’m still in the military, and a veteran. I’ve been that for 12 years, my experiences with that and I just let them know.” Manuel explains that he has now developed a new understand about the value of adding a college degree into his possible future military career.

When asked about his imagined future, Manuel expressed his desire to become a higher-ranking military officer. He said, “one of my goals in life was to get a degree and that’s why I came back to school. In the military, you need, in order to go to that next level, that officer level, they need to have at least a four-year bachelor’s degree.” If for personal or family reasons Manuel is not able to continue in the military, a professional career in a government agency is also something that he aspires for his future.

As a married man, Manuel understands that the decisions about his future do not only pertain to him; he also must consider his wife’s hopes and dreams as they imagine a shared future as a family. He said, “I hope to get into either State or Federal Government, even...maybe even looking back into active duty, as an officer. But...I have to talk to the Boss, which is my wife, now, since we’re a team.” Furthermore, Manuel noted that the possibility of starting a family may somewhat influence or significantly alter his dream of going back to the military full-time to pursue a high rank officer position.

Carson Keyes - B.B.A. Entrepreneurship and Innovation

Carson served in the United States Naval Air Base in Japan. As a plane Captain, Carson's responsibilities included the fueling, preparation, and launching of aircraft, and also working with the pilots and crew to ensure all aircraft were safe to fly. Growing up, Carson noted that he always wanted to fly planes. He said, "Top Gun was a great inspiration for me, I always wanted to fly planes, I always wanted to be around jets." While the movie Top Gun was motivational in Carson's desire to enroll in the U.S Navy, the terrorist events of 9/11 had the most significant influence on his decision to enlist before completing his high school junior year. Attending college to pursue a college degree was something that Carson had considered since his early school years. Understanding his financial limitations to support his college education, Carson saw the Navy as an opportunity to receive educational benefits to pay for college after completing his service.

During the conversation Carson explained how he was not a disciplined student during his high school career. He commented, "I struggled in high school, I wasn't a good student...I dropped out, I had bad grades and it wasn't until I moved out to Tampa, Florida – that was when I became successful in high school, I started actually focusing on my schooling." Because of his lack of academic effort, he graduated high school at an older age compared to other students.

Growing up in a social environment where strong academic performance and pursuing a college education were not encouraged on a regular basis, Carson understood that if he wanted to achieve his educational goals and professional success he would need to move out of his hometown. He said, "nobody cared about school...And I realized...I

don't want to go down this road. I want to graduate high school, I want to go to college, and I want to be successful. I want to make more out of my life, I want to do something big. If I stay in this town, where I'm at, I'm not going to be anybody." Once he moved away, he was able to focus on his academics and the completion of his high school graduation requirements. At that point, he noted that he felt prepared to transition into the military life and the U.S. Navy.

Going into the Navy training was a positive experience for Carson, but he recognized that the many transitional experiences of his childhood provided him with the resilience that helped him adjust to military requirements and expectations. He explained, "when I joined the Navy...when I did make that transition, from high school to the military, it wasn't that difficult. I was ready for it. I had made that big change before, so now I'm going to go do this one...I had this hard headedness that was driving me...I could do anything if I put my mind to it." Having the unconditional support from his family also helped him with his transition and ultimately completion of his training.

Before enlisting in the military, Carson realized that achieving his professional goals required self-resilience and self-motivation. He understood that his career in the Navy was a transitional stage that would provide him with both the experiences and financial means necessary to pursue a college degree. He said, "the best thing I'd ever did, was join the military...It was really good...I became an I.T...I knew that I was going to get out, so I wanted to do something that I could actually relate to the civilian sector and get good job." With that goal in mind, Carson started taking college courses through the Navy academic program. These academic courses helped him to become an Information Technician and work in administrative support while in the Navy.

In our conversation, Carson commented that transitioning from the Navy to the college environment was not a difficult step. He said, “when I went to the Navy, it was cake to me. That boot camp was a cake walk to me. I enjoyed it. A lot, actually...I did enjoy it.” Before enrolling at USF, he attended a community college in Florida and also San Jose City College in California. Carson shared that having a family member graduate from Georgetown University influenced his decision to enroll at a Jesuit institution.

Carson noted that once he was situated at USF, he felt comfortable in sharing his military experiences with professors and classmates. He said, “I built so many relationships with so many of my classmates. And they all really respected me...I’ve been very successful here. I think the School of Management has been an unbelievable experience for me. What’s really good is that all my professors know me as a veteran, and...they respected me.” However, his admission process was a very complicated experience that required him much effort and time spent visiting campus in order to get information and to understand better what would be required. Understanding how such negative experiences in the admissions process can easily discourage veteran students from applying and enrolling at USF, Carson was motivated to create the USF veteran student organization to help faculty and staff better understand veteran students’ educational needs.

Discussing his imagined future as a USF graduate, Carson shared having a clear plan for his professional career and personal goals. He explained, “I have a plan, I have plan A, B, C, D...hopefully, five years from now, I will already have my master’s degree from Stanford. I’m trying to get in to Stanford. Hopefully, I can get my MBA there. Opening my own business...maybe starting something military-connected.” Carson also

wants to start a consulting business helping veteran students attend college as well as promoting their professional skills. In regards to his business goal he said, “I’ve been working on right now, it’s a social-networking website for military that allows them to promote their military career, kind of like a ‘link-in’ website, like a resume that they can put on line and shows their military career.” He wants to continue the mission he started at USF of being a strong advocate for military veterans. Furthermore, in discussing his imagined future for USF veteran students, Carson hopes for the university to provide more financial and advising resources to the veteran student population.

Austin Schuchart – B.B.A. Management

Austin served in the United States Marine Corps from 2007 to 2011. As a Marine Sergeant, Austin was responsible for keeping a detailed inventory and controlling the processing of all weapons and other military assets. Austin shared that while growing up he always had the desire to join the military and that the leadership skills and experiences learned as a Boy Scout were further motivation to pursue a military career. He said, “I am a former Boy Scout and always displayed a flag as I was growing up. Going into the military was a way for me to become independent, get money for school.” In addition to imagining a military career as a child, he also admitted that another reason for enlisting was to become independent and to receive financial benefits to go to school.

Austin’s decision to join the military was an unexpected surprise for his family. Austin explained, “I grew up with my mom and my sister and I talked about it a little bit. And I guess she didn’t believe me. I came home and then told her I signed the contract.” He explained that at some point during high school he expressed to his family interest in pursuing a military career, but that he was not taken very seriously at the that time.

Austin's transition to training camp was not a pleasant experience for him. He explained how it eventually became easier once he understood the effort that was necessary to complete the required assignments. He said, "Boot Camp wasn't really what I would call a fun experience... Boot Camp was a challenge. Next was combat training and it was a little more interesting but that may be because I had become use to the work." After his military training, Austin was assigned to serve in the Infantry School managing the inventory and administrative work; responsibilities that meant he was not eligible for deployment to a combat region. Finding meaning in the duties assigned to him, Austin explained that the lessons learned as a Boy Scout combined with his military training expanded his understanding of his valuable role supporting the troops in combat.

Upon completion of his military contract, Austin attended Sierra Community College in the Sacramento area. He admitted having a difficult time adjusting to the college environment and student culture at Sierra, but noted that the discipline and leadership skills he learned in the military provided him with the maturity to adapt and accept his social and academic surroundings. He said, "I noticed that my lifestyle and values had drastically changed over the course of my enlistment and were noticeably different from friends I have known for around 15 years." Having a clear understanding of his education goals, and once he completed 60 transferable credits, Austin started searching for an institution where that he felt would better suit him in continuing his academic career. Hoping to earn his degree at a well-established university, Austin found USF's degree completion program in Sacramento to be the right place to earn his bachelors' degree.

In addition to attending USF, Austin is currently working at a non-profit organization in Sacramento dedicated to helping military veterans find financial funding to start their own business. Austin hopes to continue being involved in nonprofit organizations and helping military veterans transition into civilian life. He said, "I do what I can to forward information about veteran programs, for veterans wanting to do internships or if they're having trouble finding it...I encourage everyone to get a degree. It doesn't just help someone get a job. A degree can help them become a better-rounded and educated person." His imagined future for USF is to have a certified VA official to help incoming veteran students transition to the university. Finding the right college information was an important element of Austin's successful transition to USF. As a USF graduate Austin imagined future includes supporting military veteran transition into civilian life helping them achieve their academic and professional dreams.

Summary

The research conversations included in this Chapter presented veteran students' narratives and understanding of the social and academic factors influencing their educational transition to USF. In addition to the students' stories, my personal observations and research notes were taken into consideration introducing and developing the analysis of the collected data. Working in the field of academic advising, my responsibilities include helping college students achieve their educational goals.

The purpose in completing this research was to expand my own understating of the educational experiences of veteran students attending a four-year private university. The information collected and data gathered from the conversations suggest that providing appropriate resources regarding major requirements, financial benefits, and

academic advising creates the foundation to help veteran students achieve their academic goals. Furthermore, participants' narratives identified military training and combat experiences as a transitional stage in their individual journey of self-discovery, personal growth, and professional development. In the following Chapter, the data collected from the veteran students' conversations is evaluated using the critical hermeneutic concepts of narrative identity, fusion of horizon, and imagination.

CHAPTER FIVE: DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

In the previous Chapter, I introduced the data collected from my conversation participants describing their personal experiences both in the military and at USF as veteran students. In this Chapter, I analyze the conversation data using the critical hermeneutic concepts of narrative identity, fusion of horizon, and imagination. The application of these participatory research categories allowed me as a researcher to create a new narrative, which in turn, created a deeper understanding of the educational factors influencing veteran students' academic experiences (Herda 1999). Herda (1999:137) states that the "event of conversation lends itself to understanding...learning is the creative act that takes place in the relationship between an event and understanding." Reflecting on the research conversations, I was able to obtain a new understanding about the social and educational issues influencing veteran students' academic experiences.

In the personal research journal that I used to reflect upon my conversations with the participants, I commented, "all the students have a unique story that describes their motivation to go to college. However, they all seemed to agree on the daunting steps needed to complete in order to receive their VA educational benefits and financial aid information." It was the interpretation of their imagined futures as college graduates that served as the motivation to overcome the lengthy process to enroll at USF. My reflection on the research conversations and my professional experience working with veteran students provided me with the knowledge to interpret and analyze the collected data. The purpose of this data analysis is to understand the factors influencing veteran students' academic experiences at a private four-year institution.

In following participatory research protocol, my role as a researcher takes a new meaning in that I become the narrator of the stories shared with me by the veteran students who served as conversation partners. My identity and personal narratives influence the interpretation and analysis of the collected data, thereby creating a new text rich in data and meaning. Herda (1999:128) contends that “[t]he researcher is repeating a story that includes parts of the lives of the participants and the researcher.” In retelling the participants’ narratives, I encounter different plots extracted from the conversation transcripts. Through this narrative, I am creating a new story with limitless possibilities for a new understanding of veteran students’ college learning experiences. Herda (1999:128) suggests, “the researcher is more of a narrator than an analyst.” As narrator of this new story, I imagine different experiences and new possibilities for supporting veteran students’ educational experience at a four-year institution.

Identity

The identity of veteran students attending college is an important element of their academic learning and effective transition into the college environment. Through retelling their stories, participants were able to reflect on their past life events, thereby opening the opportunity for reinterpretation and new understanding of their student identity. Ricoeur (1984:74) explains that the “narrative interpretation implies that a life story proceeds from untold and repressed stories in the direction of actual stories the subject can take up and hold as constitutive of his personal identity.” Austin attested to the untold stories of veteran students when he commented, “everyone has their own reason for joining [choosing a military career] and most of the time the reason is very complex.” Austin, in sharing his personal motivation for becoming a Marine, said “some

of the main reasons I joined include[d]; it was a way for me to become independent, get money for school, allow me to get work experience, and I believed it was something I could be proud of.” Austin’s interpretation of veteran students’ identity encompasses his individual narrative and experience serving in the U.S Marine Corps. Like many other veteran students, Austin’s narrative is a testimony of how the potential for educational benefits to fund schooling after military service may play a significant role for enlisting in the U.S. Armed forces.

Veteran students’ interpretation and understanding of their military identity influences their assimilation into the academic culture on a college campus, as well as their interactions with other college students. Their narrative identity is shaped by their military experiences and, as such, may include some repressed stories that influence veteran students’ social interaction and learning. Shahideh (2004:vii), in discussing the significance of story in shaping identity, writes, "to tell a story is to both remember and create who one is...story mediates our understanding of identity." In addressing the times when he shares his identity as a member of the military with others in the academic community, Austin said, “I am proud that I was able to serve but I really only mention it if asked. Other veterans may have more conservative views though.” Nick expressed a similar sentiment, declaring, “whenever I talk about it to anyone [classmates], I can see this kind of like, glaze goes over their eyes...it is hard for people who haven’t been in the military to comprehend what goes on in the military. But I understand clearly.” The participants’ understanding of their military identity involves the notion that their respective narratives and life stories are different from, and as such may not be understood by, the traditional college student. Herda (1999:57) declares that “human

understanding is circular. It is comprehended in terms of the temporal structure of being-in-the-world...understanding is that mode through which possibilities and potential of a person are disclosed.” As the participants retell their stories they developed a new understanding of their narrative identity as college veteran students.

Ricoeur (1988:247) states, “the story of a life comes to be constituted through a series of rectifications applied to previous narratives...subjects recognize themselves in the stories they tell about themselves.” Ricoeur’s theory is evidenced in the students’ understanding of their military identity. From an early age, Manuel learned to recognize how his identity and personal narrative influence his academic experience and association with classmates and faculty. In speaking of this relationship between narrative and identity, Manuel stated, “we do introductions at the first day of class, and when they ask everyone to tell me about yourself, I acknowledge that I am in the military, a veteran, and my background.” Manuel’s openness to share his veteran identity attests to his reflection and understanding of stories that have long been a part of his narrative. Growing up with his father who served in the military, Manuel learned to incorporate the military culture into his narrative and understood that it was influential to his personal identity.

Ricoeur posits that personal identity is a narrative identity influenced by individual experiences and involvement with others. Ricoeur (1988:246) declares, “narrative identity...can include change, mutability, within the cohesion of one lifetime. Ricoeur’s theory of personal identity connects with veterans’ narratives describing their personal influences to pursue a military career. In discussing his motivation to enroll in the U.S Air Force, Rylan (RA) shared with me (GU) his decision to enlist.

RA: There are a lot of different reasons. I think the biggest one is I didn’t know what direction I wanted to go to in life after high school... I saw a lot of

people who were older than me that had taken that path [military career] and they really made much out of themselves with it, so I, kind of, had to go an alternative route and, like my grandfather had served in World War II, so I think, from a young age, I kind of...it was always in the back of my head of, you know, the sacrifices my grandfather had made, and of course, growing up in a post- 9/11 world. You mix that sense of growing up with those ideals and those thoughts, mixed with, not knowing what you want to do in life and two weeks before high school graduation, I talked to the Air Force recruiter and signed up and I shipped off six months later.

GU: You mentioned the 9/11 – do you think, in a way that influenced your decision to enroll?

RA: Absolutely. At the time, being an 18-year old, and, like I said, kind of, growing up with these ideals and how I perceived my grandfather... and that kind of World War II generation, there's almost like there's this heroism, with what they did. And I think that from my own perception at the time, I thought that, I can maybe be a part of something, similar to that, kind of like, World War II generation had Japanese and the Germans to fight and maybe this generation will be...you know, the Middle East. Or, whatever, so, from my perspective, I definitely think that post-9/11 mentality of good versus bad, or whatever you want to call it....

GU: 9/11 is an event that has definitely influenced and changed our lives, completely.

RA: I definitely...I don't think I would have joined the Armed Forces had it not been for 9/11. I mean, who knows? But I would argue probably not.

In learning of his grandfather's story, Rylan formed a pre-understanding of how the military might influence his personal identity, which in turn led to his decision to serve in the U.S Air Force. Like his grandfather, who was likely influenced by events that led to WWII.

In contrast to Rylan's narrative, William was not influenced by family members with military experience. When sharing his reasoning for enlisting in the U.S, Army, William said, "I was starting to get into the healthcare field. I was looking into nursing

and stuff. I had a buddy who was in the service - I grew up with him, he was a really good friend of mine - so I felt like I should be helping guys like him. I decided to join the army and become a medic.”

These stories provide examples of how some veteran student develop an interest to serve based on the relationships and understanding of other people around them. Ricoeur (1988:247) declares, “individual[s]...are constituted in their identity by taking up narratives that become for them their actual history.” In the cases of Rylan, Manuel, and William their motivation to serve in the military was influenced by the narratives of people close to them.

Identity in Relation to Others

In discussing the concept of identity, Ricoeur (1992:3) states, “the selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other, that instead one passes into the other.” Essentially, the military experiences that have influenced veteran student identities can be understood only because of the sense of otherness – or differences – that exist between veterans and their non-veteran student peers. The analysis of the conversations revealed that veteran students understand the importance of connecting with other students and developing relationships in order to assimilate better into the university culture. This effort toward assimilation is both personal, in that it is an attempt to feel a sense of belonging within a community, and also pragmatic in that better partnerships with other students help veterans to achieve common academic goals.

Referencing his military identity in relation to others, Carson explained, “after the first week you end up building relationships...it’s not about you anymore, it’s about your

team. That's what they teach you in boot camp." Carrying that valuable lesson into the classroom, Carson was able to relate with classmates in order to meet his academic goals. Carson commented "I build so many relationships with so many of my classmates and they all really respected me. I showed that I cared, I showed my identity...when we had group projects, I would take leadership or take responsibility for all of our actions. I was able to relate to them, because I might be a veteran, but since I am a student, I'm just like you." Carson's openness to share his identity provided the means to connect with others as he transitioned into the college environment. Ricoeur (1984:97) states, "understanding – even the understanding of another person in everyday life – is never a direct intuition but always a reconstruction." Carson's approach to share his narrative allowed him to engage in conversation with classmates and consequently expanded his knowledge and understanding of non-military college student culture.

In discussing identity and otherness, Ricoeur (1992:355) writes of "the need to maintain a certain equivocalness of the status of the other," emphasizing the importance of remaining open to understanding and interpretation of the other. This concept is applicable to veteran students when considering their transitional experiences from a military hierarchy and command culture into an open-thinking and diverse college environment. Carson declared, "you go from having a full time job, food, shelter, you are working, you have a structure and you knew what you were doing every day...." As such, veteran students attending college encounter new interactions and norms that influence their educational experience.

Veteran students' military identities provide them with a character that sets them apart from traditional college students. Veteran students must contend with moving away

from the military environment of following orders and being told what to do and how to complete tasks, to an academic culture where inquiry and critical thinking are both embraced and encouraged. Nick said, “most people quickly realize I am [a veteran]. I’m a little bit older – I’m not eighteen...and, I probably talk to my professors differently than most of the 18-year old freshmen.” Nick’s observation articulates the distinctive qualities that separate him and other veterans from traditionally aged students on a college campus. By acknowledging such differences, Nick demonstrates understanding about how his identity and character influence his capacity to understand others and assimilate into the university setting. Gadamer (2000:304) suggests that “if we put ourselves in someone else's shoes...then we will understand him – i.e., become aware of the otherness, the indissoluble individuality of the other person – by putting ourselves in his position.” The past experiences of veterans must be understood, both by the veterans themselves and others within the campus community, so that there might be new understanding of how veterans’ military identities and past experiences influence their present horizons as college students.

Fusion of Horizon

Veteran students understand that their military background is different from those of traditional college students, and as such their pre-understandings of the campus environment may also be different because of their military experiences. According to Gadamer (2000:306), “the horizon of the present is continually in the process of being formed because we are continually having to test all our prejudices....part of the testing occurs in encountering the past and in understanding the tradition from which we come.” Veteran students’ prejudices and their comprehension of the campus culture are

continually tested when engaging in academic and social interactions. As they move through their time in college, veterans develop new knowledge, thereby exposing new horizons and new understandings of the veteran student experience. Rylan expressed, “for me, it’s a struggle every day to try and figure out how I can be the best student I can with what experiences I have. And a lot of the time, those experiences don’t translate. I mean, being in Afghanistan and looking over somebody’s well-being and their livelihood or their actual lives are in your hands, is a little bit different than interacting in a classroom.” Rylan’s reflection on his past experiences and this understanding of the differences between his military and student narratives suggests a fusion of horizon.

Austin’s military discipline provided him with the pre-understanding of existing student norms. Discussing his pre-understanding of acceptable student behavior he declared, “the transition can be a little hard. It’s not just a change in work; it’s a change in culture. I noticed that when I got back. Everything was completely different. I noticed that a lot of students would show up to class looking like they were still in their pajamas or in extremely wrinkled clothes. It always seemed to bother me that it was allowed.” The participants were able to connect their personal histories with new experiences in order to better understand their current academic environment. Gadamer (2004:305) writes, “we are always affected...by what is nearest to us, and hence we approach the testimony of the past under its influence.” With the expectation to learn from their current academic environment, Rylan and Austin reflect on their past military experiences in order to understand better their present educational horizon.

Participants' Academic Horizon at USF

The process of reflecting on their past military traditions to expand their present academic horizons was a common theme that emerged from the research conversations. Gadamer (2000:290) attests, “understanding is not to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of tradition, a process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated.” Furthermore, Gadamer (2000:290) explains that “[understanding] will always involve more than merely historical reconstructing the past ‘world’ to which [we] belong. Our understanding will always retain the consciousness that we too belong to that world.” Describing how military traditions influenced his transition into the academic community at USF, Rylan said, “I think I was going in a little too defensively, because I think my perceptions of not having students accept me, kind of led me to alienate myself. But after the first semester or two, I started to learn from other students at USF and it’s been generally positive.” Moreover, explaining his interpretation and understanding of non-veteran college students and their adjustment to the campus community, Rylan said, “I don’t know if it’s my perception on things or if it’s others’ perceptions or a little bit of both, but there is just something in the way. I think it is because of my experiences versus what your typical 18 or 19 year old might be going through. So, I think, right off the bat, there is going to be differences in perspective when approaching life and school,” Referencing other students’ perceptions as an influential part of his college experience, Rylan adopted an effective way to incorporate and mediate past military tradition to his USF educational experience.

Enrolling at a four-year college or university is a significant transition for veteran students as they leave the familiarity of the military and enter into the unknown territory

of a college campus and its student culture. Geertz (1973, 49) declares, “[w]e are ...incomplete or unfinished animal[s] who complete or finish ourselves through culture...To supply the additional information necessary to be able to act, we were...to rely more and more heavily on cultural sources.” The college campus environment provides veteran students the information and resources to transition and to adapt to their new college student culture. Veteran students’ understanding of college student culture and norms takes a new meaning as they interpret new information expanding their academic horizon.

Herda (1999:64) writes, “we can never rid ourselves of prejudices because the recognition of some prejudices would entail the dissolving of others; if we had no prejudices, we would have no knowledge.” Talking about his college experience as a veteran student, Bradley declared, “I’m a little different solely because I’m going to school to learn. I want to graduate. But the most important thing is that I’m learning what I need to learn...It’s just, you know, the way we [veterans] hold ourselves, our experiences and stories. We are not, you know, I hate to say it, but we are not little punks.” Bradley’s negative prejudice of students’ culture influenced his interpretation that some of his classmates were not applying the effort and commitment to their academics as is to be expected from college students. In some cases this prejudice may prevent veteran students from fully communicating with peers and engaging in the college experience when they first arrive to campus.

Data analysis suggest that veteran students approach their academic horizons with the same attention to detail and team mission oriented mentality imbued in them by their military training. As such, their military identity may lead them to seek out other veteran

students because they can easily relate to shared narratives and interpretations of academic horizons. Austin said, “it seems to always be easier to communicate with other veterans. We communicated right off the bat and it seems to be whenever I see another veteran, I get along with them instantly. Whereas, someone else it may take a little longer.” The veteran students’ observations and comments underscore the importance of establishing open conversations as a source of acquiring new understanding among both veterans and traditional college students.

Military Service, Gateway to a New Horizon

Gadamer (2000), in discussing fusion of horizons, notes that there is always an opportunity for learning and to start something new. He observes, “at every moment something new can begin, something whose sole origin is the primary and common source of all human activity” (Gadamer 2000:204). The research participants described how the lessons learned from military service changed their mentality and influenced their perspective of their future horizon. For some students, those lessons represented pursuing a college education in hopes of a better life after the military. Carson declared, “I struggled in high school, I wasn’t a good student. I was hanging around with friends that were not really doing anything. They were into partying, dropping out of school, nobody cared about school. I definitely had a harder time and I knew that I wanted to be successful. I had just something in my heart that I wasn’t going to settle for just anything less ...I knew I had a purpose here.” He continued, stating, “I don’t want to live like this. I don’t want to go down this road. I want to graduate high school, I want to go to college, I want to be successful. And I told my family I wanted to join the military...I know you guys are not going to be able to pay for my college. I’m not going to get [Military]

scholarships, because I didn't do well in high school." Carson's understanding of the military educational opportunities provided the motivation to begin something new in his life with the hope of having a promising future.

Manuel explained that pursuing a college education through his veteran educational benefits represented an opportunity for a higher military career. He stated, "in the military, you need, in order to go to that next level, that officer level, [you] need to have a degree, at least a four -year bachelor's degree. When I graduate, I hope to get into either State or Federal Government, maybe even going back into service, as an officer." In addition to contemplating a future military career after college, Manuel shared with me how he valued the lessons learned in his military service that lead him to act in a new way:

"I didn't have a direction...was never home and stuff. I needed that sense of direction. I didn't like where I was going...I wanted to become a leader...I wanted to move up into some management field. I'd heard and researched that [the] military gives you [those] leadership opportunities. And the benefits - that's the other thing... one of the downsides is you don't see your family as often sometimes. But the benefits are great...so, I decided to jump on board."

Like several of the veteran students who participated in this study, Manuel understood that engaging in a new activity was necessary to achieve his future goals. Ricoeur (2004:53) posits, "the act of imagination...is an incantation destined to produce the objects of one's thought, the thing one desires, in a manner that one can take possession of it." Imagining a new horizon, the participants saw the military as the source for educational opportunities and as the provider of valuable life experiences. The military narratives that accompany them through their college education motivate them to imagine and dream of future horizons as college graduates.

Imagination

Similar to traditional college students, veteran students exercise their imaginative power to dream about career opportunities and personal development. Herda (1999:10) writes, “productive imagination rather than a reproductive imagination in prescribing a new reading of our lives sees that understanding one’s past is not an end in itself. An understanding can serve, however to mediate the past, which can be related to the development of a just social text.” Veteran students attending college experience the need to implement a productive imagination in order to understand how their past military experiences mediate to their current academic text.

The conversation participants attested to the mediation between past experiences and their productive imagination. When asked the questions about his imagined future, Bradley responded, “I have a journal and I have been doodling in it, all my experiences in the sea, at USF, just everybody I meet, like people write in it, like little things I hear, like things I learn and it’s just going to be my thing. And then I’ll have a studio where all my paintings be, all my work’s going to be up. I have a plan...it’s going to work.” Bradley’s imagined future as an artist and studio owner connect to his experiences in the U.S Navy. In the creation of his personal journal, Bradley is able to reflect on his past military experiences knowing that such experiences did not end with his Navy discharge. Furthermore, those experiences continue to be a source of motivation and inspiration to his art, Bradley declared, “as far as seeing military in it [paintings], you could see it because of the details.”

William described how his experience as a Ranger battalion medic serves as an influential part of his imagined future. He stated, “maybe there would be a way I could

get back over there to the Middle East...there's definitely a lot of poor people there that, you know, could benefit a lot from healthcare." William's imagination is helping him to create a meaningful future that may include a medical career outside the United States. Kearney (2004:39) declares, "the innovative power of imagination...to transform given meanings into new ones, enables one to construe the future as the possible theatre of one's liberty, as a horizon of hope." Inspired by his past experiences as an Army medical staff, William contemplates the possibility of going back to the Middle East to continue assisting the people he helped during his military service.

Imagined Future for College Veteran Students

The research participants shared their personal narratives of attending USF as veteran students. As they move through their educational experiences, they expanded their knowledge about college admission, registration, educational benefits, and the campus culture. Rylan stated, "my experience with USF and financial aid and the whole financial aspect of going to USF as a veteran has been either really good or really bad." He further explained, "I had to pay like \$3,000 out of pocket, and obviously, most veterans are financially independent, we pay our own rent, we pay for everything...it was pretty catastrophic for me financially, to be \$3,000 in the hole, for a semester, because then I couldn't pay for rent, over the summer." Experiences like Rylan's are not uncommon among many veteran students. Kearney (2004:40) writes, "imagination can be recognized accordingly as the act of responding to a demand for new meaning, the demand for emerging realities." This demand for new meaning took shape for these aforementioned veteran students when they used their shared needs to envision a better future for others, creating a veteran student support organization on the USF campus.

Reflecting on the creation of the organization, Carson said, “it was definitely difficult and very frustrating. And that’s when me and my buddy Robert were like, you know what, we need to form a veteran organization here at USF...we want to form a veterans organization, or a club here at this university, so veterans don’t have to go through this same process we went through.” With this purpose in mind, the United Veterans of USF (UVUSF) was created as a student organization on campus.

According to Kearney (1998:149), “narratives produced by imagination all provide us with ‘imaginative variations’ of the world, thereby offering us the freedom to conceive of the world in new ways and to undertake forms of action which might lead to its transformation.” When asked the question about their imagined future for veteran students at USF Rylan commented, “I do think that there needs to be some type...I wouldn’t say center, just an office on campus where you could house a certifying official, you can house the student veterans club, and that can basically be a one-stop shop for veterans. I think there also needs to be specifically, academic counseling for veterans.”

Rylan’s ideas were echoed by Carson:

“I think it needs to be a regular...office, I think the person that’s actually doing the advising should be really experienced in military, have the knowledge, to be able to relate to the member...That doesn’t disqualify anybody who’s not, you know [military veteran], if you’re obviously experienced or trained in counseling. I think the person should be able to counsel, find a career plan. Find out exactly what the veteran needs...his needs, what tools and resources can we provide for that veteran for them to be successful.”

Exercising imaginative variations, some research participants provided other personal recommendations in addition to supporting the idea of a veteran student center. Manuel commented, “it would be nice just to have a veterans center. And, from my standpoint best advice would be just talk to your teachers, talk to your classmates and get a little

communication going...communication with your teachers, communication with your classmates.” Discussing his imagined future for USF veteran students, Austin said, “it is hard set a course for someone because the situation will change but if a veteran knows how others have made everything work for them, then the veteran can tailor his own strategy.” Describing his personal strategy, Austin stated, “the best advice I would give them is to do what I did and call around. I asked multiple veterans that had got out attending school and I asked them what they managed to do to make everything work.” Carson stretched his imagination beyond students’ action to highlight the benefits that veteran students can provide to the USF community:

“We need to develop our veterans. I tell them it’s the school’s responsibility to make sure that every student that goes through this university is successful...and the school does that for a lot of students. But we need to include veterans into that group of students...And the benefits of doing this for veterans is that...what they can develop, like for someone like myself, a leader in the classroom, a leader outside of the classroom, a mentor to other students, an inspiration to others and a person that is going to give back to this university when they graduate.”

Explaining their hopes for future veteran students at USF, the research participants created a relationship between their personal narratives and an imagined future.

By reflecting on the educational needs of veteran students, participants’ military identity and understanding of USF’s academic support provided the necessary knowledge to imagine the benefits of having a veteran student office and dedicated advising staff.

Kearney (2004:54) posits, “[f]or human being-in-the-world in its most everyday sense....involves a process of temporalization which makes our present actions meaningful by interpreting them in terms of a recollected past and a projected future.”

The capacity of the research participants to think about options to improve veteran students’ academic experience is the result of the temporal interpretation of their

narrative identity and their transcendental imagination (Klemm 1983) constructing a better future for military veteran students

Summary

In Chapter five, I introduced the data collected during the research conversations analyzed through the categories of identity, fusion of horizon and imagination. Using critical hermeneutic theory, I interpreted participants' narratives about the factors influencing veteran students' educational experience at a private four year university. Attending a four-year institution, veteran students encounter new experiences and narratives with others as they meet non-military classmates, faculty, and staff on the university campus. For some of those who participated in this research, entering into the unknown campus environment represented exposure to a new culture and narratives that were different from their military stories.

At the beginning of the data collection process I realized that the conversation participants shared new narratives explored from a college student's perspective, which suggests that in trying to assimilate to their new educational environment, veteran students may turn to their untold stories hoping to find opportunities for new understanding and learning. Herda (1999:37) writes that "[l]anguage opens up a new dimension in learning." By reviewing and reflecting on the conversation transcripts, participants open up the possibility for new learning and interpretation of their military identity in relation to others. Ricoeur (1984:150) declares, "[t]o follow a story...is to understand the successive actions, thoughts and feelings in the story." The participants' narratives analyzed in this Chapter provide an understanding of the thoughts and feelings of veteran students attending USF.

CHAPTER SIX: SUMMARY, FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

As military veterans continue to enroll at colleges and universities in the United States, there is an increasing need to understand better the academic and social factors that influence veteran students' academic experience. The implementation of student programs and academic resources to serve the veteran student population differs from institution to institution. The purpose of my study was to explore the narratives and stories of veteran students attending the University of San Francisco as they explore their transitional experiences to the college environment and to discuss new and different ways to better – and more effectively – serve the needs of these students. In this final Chapter, I present a summary of the research. I discuss the findings as they relate to the collected data and implications from the data analysis. I also propose recommendations for future research and conclude with my personal statement and reflection of my dissertation experience.

Summary of Research

In this research study I explored the academic and social factors influencing veteran students' educational experience. Existing literature suggests that there is a significant increase in the number of military veterans enrolling at academic institutions across the country and that these veterans are seeking new career opportunities and professional development (Vacchi 2012, Barnard-Brak et al 2011, Summerlot et al 2009, DiRamio et al 2008). In conducting this research study, I sought to understand the veteran students' experiences as they transition from a military culture into a university learning community. My conversations with veteran students provided the data for this study. The research protocol is based on critical hermeneutic participatory inquiry (Herda 1999). The

research categories of identity (Ricoeur 1992), fusion of horizon (Gadamer 2000), and imagination (Kearney 1998) guided the development and implementation of this study, and the research conversations and shared stories created a text that provided the opportunity for interpretation and new understanding. Ricoeur (1981:111) posits, “the hermeneutical task is to discern the matter of the text and not the psychology of the author.” Therefore, it was essential to converse with veteran students so as to interpret their narratives and come to a new understanding of their educational experiences at the University of San Francisco. Veteran students enrolling at the university bring with them their military narratives, which can be significant in influencing their transition from their identities of soldiers to those of university students. Additionally, their military experiences determine how veteran students imagine a new life and new ways of being as college graduates.

The educational challenges of pursuing a bachelors’ degree can be an overwhelming experience for many college students. For veteran students, those same challenges take a larger dimension as they must learn to interpret a new set of social rules and norms while interacting in a non-military environment. The successful transition and assimilation into the college campus culture has a significant influence on veteran students’ successful academic development. Veteran students’ military training and active service experiences provide them an understanding of a command and control culture that is discordant to the relaxed and informal college student environment.

The desire to earn a bachelor’s degree encourages veteran students to enroll in colleges and universities across the United States. Although motivated by hopes and dreams of a professional career outside of the military, these students often struggle in

completing the necessary steps to be admitted to an institution of higher education and in persisting through to degree completion. These challenging procedures encountered at the beginning of their educational experience can make it difficult for veteran students, as they progress, to effectively engage with their peers and in their learning experiences. Moreover, unsuccessful assimilation into the campus community may inhibit the development of a new academic identity that will help them transition from soldier to students and eventually into successful working professionals.

Veteran students attending colleges and universities have experienced military training and active duty responsibilities that instill in them principles of leadership, followership, and self-reliance, all of which can help them in their transition into a college or university environment. However, the academic processes in place at many colleges and universities are incognizant to veterans who bring different – but equally valuable – skills to their college campus. As such, the lack of clear support and direction for these students coupled with their inability to rely on themselves to effectively solve their educational problems can further exacerbate veteran student’s college transitional challenges.

Findings, Implications and Proposed Actions

In the following section I present the findings from my research conversation addressing the academic and social factors influencing veteran students’ academic success. In these conversations, I explored veteran students’ experiences before enrolling at USF as a means to understand how the military identity and horizon influenced students’ decision to pursue higher education and how their service in the military influenced their experience in the university. In addition to discussing their social and

family influences, participants were encouraged to share their transitional experiences from military service to attending USF. Veteran students' academic and social interactions with faculty and non-military classmates are also discussed in the research findings. The hermeneutic research categories of identity, fusion of horizon, and imagination served as the framework for this research, and provide the structure for presentation of the findings, implications for future research, and proposed actions.

Identity

Veteran students' identity is an integral part of their social and academic interactions at the college or university community. Furthermore, veteran students rely on their military identity and pre-understanding of the college life to interpret their educational transitional experiences and academic challenges. Herda explains how identity is "both a tension and harmony in each of our selves and in relation to each other" (2010:114). The relationship that veteran students build with faculty, non-military classmates, and advising staff is an influential element in the development of their student identity. The stories and narratives that students share describe their developmental identity as they transition through the military and into attending USF. As they achieve their educational goals, new experiences as college graduates will come into place and with that the development of a new identity as working professionals will emerge.

Finding One: Veteran Students Value College Education

The veteran students indicated that attending college and earning a bachelor's degree was of significant value to them even before enlisting in the military. In discussing the factors that motivated them to enroll in the military, several participants indicated that the VA educational benefits played a significant role when deciding to join

the military. However, other participants also indicated that in addition to the VA educational benefits, the biggest motivation to enlist came from former military family members or close friends. For veteran students, earning a college degree represents opportunities for a new career both inside and outside of the military and also provides the professional skills necessary to find a good paying job to support their families and become positive contributing members of the community.

Finding Two: Military Identity Influences Campus Involvement and Student Relationships

Students expressed that finding a common interest to connect with their non-military classmates was a challenging process in their academic experience. The relationship building at a college campus is predominately initiated by associating with students sharing similar social interests or cultural backgrounds. Veteran students' military and combat experiences have a significant role developing their identity and personal goals that make it difficult to find common interest among their non-military peers.

When entering the college community, veteran students understand their identities and experiences set them apart from the traditional college students. This pre-understanding about college student culture can prevent veteran students from fully engaging in campus activities and from openly sharing their military identity with others. In essence, the veteran students feel that they exist only at the periphery of the campus community. The participants expressed that while they recognized that their military experiences do not necessarily relate with the traditional college student, sharing their narratives was a positive way of building relationships with classmates and a valuable

opportunity to expand their knowledge about, and become part of, the college student culture.

Implications

1. The benefits and resources available to veterans wishing to pursue higher education motivate students to enroll at colleges and universities that may not be fully prepared to welcome and support the specific needs associated with this student population.
2. Veteran students may experience challenges in adapting to the campus culture and in forming connections or relationships with non-military student peers.

Proposed Action: Develop Opportunities for Learning through Shared Narratives

As colleges and universities continue to increase veteran students' enrollment, providing opportunities for veteran students to share their stories and experiences through open conversation and educational seminars could be an institutional commitment.

Creating a trusting and caring college environment where veteran students can share their experiences can also assist them in better assimilating into the university student culture.

Through conversations sponsored and endorsed by the University, veteran students can build positive relationships with professors and classmates – thus influencing academic outcomes and the overall college experience. The open dialogue should motivate veteran students to share their narratives and at the same time challenge them to acquire a new understanding of their college student identities.

Fusion of Horizon

To acquire a fusion of horizon is to look beyond what is close to us in order to expand our knowledge and understanding (Gadamer 2000). When enrolling at a college

or university, veteran students have preconceived knowledge and biases in regards to college student culture and academic requirements. Herda (1999:60) declares that we all “have a set of prejudices that are a necessary condition for understanding.” In this sense, it is important for veteran students to look beyond their prejudices and engage in conversations with professors and non-military classmates in order to expand their horizon and understanding. Herda explains that, “[h]uman beings have an interpretative nature, and therefore, as they live out their lives, they understand.” Herda (1999:50). As veteran students attend classes and live out their lives as college students, their interpretative nature helps them to acquire the knowledge to navigate their academic requirements and acquire a better understanding of their educational horizon at USF.

Finding One: Military Training and Veteran Students’ Experiences are a Source of Knowledge and an Influential Factor for Campus Interactions

Military training and combat experiences fosters the development of close, trusting relationships among combat veterans. The unique experiences that veteran students shared with their training and combat comrades significantly influence how veteran students perceive their non-military classmates. In their military training, veteran students learn the value of teamwork, collaboration, self-sacrifice, and trust. For military personnel these concepts represent the core foundation of their military identity and serve as the basic tools to accomplish their goals. Veteran students draw upon the knowledge acquired during military training to serve as the benchmark to evaluate students’ interaction and social behaviors. From this perspective, military training can represent an influential factor preventing veteran students from fully relating to their non-military classmates, faculty, and staff who have not experienced similar military background.

Finding Two: Open Conversations Leads to Better Understanding of the College Student Culture

In order to assimilate better to the college student culture, it is important for veteran students to acknowledge that their military background and combat experiences provides them a unique perspective that sets them apart from the traditional college student. Whereas many colleges and universities across the country welcome diverse student populations, the unique combat experiences and educational backgrounds that veteran students bring to campus challenge campuses to fully understand and support these students' social and academic needs.

Having open conversations with non-veteran students, faculty, and staff veteran students may share their experiences allowing non-military classmates to expand their knowledge about veteran students' culture and academic contributions. At the same time, these conversations provide opportunities for veteran students to learn about faculty, staff, and non-military students' educational experiences.

Implications

1. Veteran students may be seeking to enhance the discipline and leadership skills learned in the military by enrolling at universities and trying to establish themselves as members of new communities and cultures.
2. Veteran students are seeking opportunities for education and self-understanding through communication with peers and by sharing their stories and lived experiences.

Proposed Action: Implement Campus Wide Initiatives to Promote Veteran Students' Culture, Challenges and Contributions to the Academic Community

Creating a college environment where veteran students feel welcome and comfortable to develop conversations and engage on campus activities is a complex task. Veteran students attending college campuses have personal prejudices that may prevent them from engaging in campus activities and finding connections with non-military classmates. To promote the conversation and understanding of veteran students' academic contribution and challenges, educational institutions can develop training workshops and seminars for the campus community. Creating a visible presence on campus in the form of a veteran student center or veteran student organization can also help veteran students feel acknowledged and supported by the university

Imagination

The power to imagine new ways of being in the world motivates veteran students to pursue a four-year college degree. Imagination encourages us to take action in order to achieve our dreams and goals (Ricoeur 1991). The experiences that veteran students encounter on the college campus become valuable in that they can inspire veterans to look toward an imagined future as college graduates. Some of those experiences may come by way of challenges in their transitional process, but ultimately the veterans' capacity to appropriate a new identity as students and to imagine new ways of being compel them to configure their academic experiences in such a way so as to move towards the completion of their degree.

Finding One: Military Experiences Influence Imagined Future as College Graduates

Veteran students attending college have the unique opportunity to imagine and refigure professional careers outside the military. However, the life experiences acquired through their military experiences plays an influential role in how they imagine the life they want to have after college graduation. Envisioning how their college degree would help to provide a better life for their families is a motivating factor for many of the research participants.

The military commitment to serve others motivates veteran students to apply their knowledge for the benefit of others. Regardless of the degree they are working toward, veteran students imagine new ways of serving their communities, applying their new professional skills.

Finding Two: Imagine a New Academic Support System for Future Veteran Students

Veteran students acknowledged the value of having a contact person or veteran student center on campus dedicated to assisting veteran students with the admission and enrollment process. Their unique academic background and personal experiences create a need for academic institutions to assign knowledgeable faculty and advising staff to serve this population.

Developing effective training programs covering VA financial benefits, military transfer credits, veteran students' health issues, and military student culture can be the initial step to develop the veteran student support services imagined by the research participants.

Implications

1. The military foundation of commitment and service to others motivates veteran students to enroll at colleges or universities in order to become the best they can be for their family and community.
2. Honoring the commitment of looking out for the well-being of their military comrades, veteran students imagine academic institutions implementing policies and procedures to better support the transitional and academic needs of future veteran students.

Proposed Action: Encourage Veterans to Think Creatively and Strategically about Educational Objectives and Opportunities

The literature review revealed that academic institutions in the United States are experiencing an increase in their veteran student population. This enrollment trend is most likely to continue as more troops return home to pursue their academic and professional goals. Helping them to imagine new ways to implement their military experiences and learned skills into an academic context is an important and necessary step in supporting veteran students' college transition.

The extensive diversity of the current college student population suggests that it is challenging for veteran students to find common interests and experiences that are helpful in connecting with traditional college students. Similar to how diversity centers were created to work with under-served student populations, educational institutions can assist veteran students in connecting with the campus community by developing transitional workshops and information seminars.

An essential component of military training is to teach effective teamwork and to value each member's contributions in the completion of a military mission. Transferring those military principles to academic requirements may help the college advising personnel to encourage veteran students to refigure their academic environment by imagining themselves as part of a team mission to earn a college degree. Moreover, veteran students can imagine their classmates, faculty, and university staff as trustworthy members of their team helping them complete their educational goals.

Suggestions for Future Research

The growing number of military veterans along with available VA educational benefits has motivated educational institutions to develop recruiting initiatives to enroll veteran students. The mental and physical scars that veteran students may bring with them can have a significant influence on their ability to successfully adapt to college student life and complete their academic goals. As such, I make the following suggestions for further research.

1. Veteran Student Support Services at Public Four Year Institutions

Public colleges and universities are an attractive option for veteran students to pursue their educational goals. The lower tuition cost and the multiple campus locations of these types of institutions make them accessible to a large number of college students. Whereas this research focused on veteran students at a private four-year institution, further participatory research can be conducted at a public university to explore how federal and state resources are implemented in supporting veteran students' academic performance and social interactions. As indicated by the participants' shared experiences

in this research, these two elements play a significant role influencing veteran students' educational experiences.

2. Military Friendly Institutions Located Close to a Military Base

This study found that veteran students' identity influenced their campus interactions and pre-understanding of traditional college students. Military friendly schools, especially those in close proximity to a military base, are traditionally known for enrolling large number of active military personnel and for developing student programs to support their military student populations.

Professional university staff, faculty and non-military students attending these types of institutions may have a better knowledge and understanding of veteran students' military experiences and educational challenges. For future research, this observation can be taken a step further to explore how military friendly institutions serve their veteran student population.

Exploring military friendly institution policies and procedures can provide other institutions seeking to bolster their military enrollment with a better understanding about processes and programs that faculty and professional staff might consider implementing to better serve the veteran student population.

3. Female Veteran Students and Veterans with Diverse Needs

Veteran students from all military branches were included in my research. However, it is important to note that within the veteran student population there are other students groups that need and require further research. Participants of my research were males with all of their physical abilities, leaving them free to navigate campus. Further participatory research to explore the educational experiences of female veteran students,

first generation veteran students, and veteran students with physical disabilities or mental health concerns (ex: PTSD) can provide a new understanding of the diverse educational needs of the veteran student population. Additional research can be implemented to explore how educational institutions are creating special accommodations to serve veteran students with physical disabilities and the psychological support available for female veteran students.

Personal Statement

My professional experience advising veteran students enrolled in the College of Business at USF motivated me to develop this participatory research. Working as an academic adviser, I have the opportunity to interact and assist undergraduate college students from diverse academic and cultural backgrounds achieve their academic goals. Within college student groups -freshman and transfer students- there are specific academic behaviors and motivations particular to current college students' educational needs. In working with veteran students, I was intrigued by the breadth and complexity of their educational backgrounds and personal experiences. As I was becoming more familiar with veteran students' academic challenges, I realized that critical hermeneutic research theories of identity, imagination, and fusion of horizon could contribute to the existing research on veteran students.

I started this research with the prejudgment that veteran students are equipped with the necessary skills to face the educational and transitional challenges enrolling at a college or university campus. In addition to the physical and mental strength developed in military training, the VA educational benefits provide the ideal elements to achieve college success. However, the conversations with veteran students provided me with the insight necessary to challenge my prejudices and existing understandings of the educational and social challenges encountered by veteran students attending a college or university campus. I am very grateful to my research participants for allowing me to expand my knowledge by sharing their narratives and educational experiences. I now have a clear understanding that whereas the physical and mental preparation involved in military training prepares veterans to face combat situations, the process of enrolling at a

university and persisting through their academic programs requires significant mental acuity, agility, and strong support from faculty, staff, and all members of the campus community.

This research brings an interpretative approach that integrates veteran students' narratives with my personal experience as an academic adviser. As such, I hope to continue expanding my knowledge of veteran students' needs by engaging in conversations with other students groups within the veteran student population. My research participants provided me new knowledge by sharing their military narratives and their academic experiences since attending USF. I want to continue my learning by listening to first generation veteran students, disabled veterans, and female veterans enrolled at four-year institutions.

Working at USF I have learned that there is not a 'one-size fits all' approach when it comes to advising college students. The University's diverse student population has given me the valuable opportunity to work with students from different backgrounds, nationalities, and socioeconomic statuses. The students' interactions and professional experiences have taught me that in order to guide students through their academic journeys it is important that I listen to their narratives and learn from their experiences. The unique values and experiences that students bring with them inspire my interest to learn from the veteran students currently enrolled at USF. As such, my interest in exploring the educational factors affecting military veteran students derives from my desire to provide a supportive and welcoming educational environment to those who have bravely served our country.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: SAMPLE LETTER OF INVITATION

Date:

Participant's Name:

Participant's Address:

Dear (Name of the Participant),

I am a doctoral student currently enrolled in Organization and Leadership program at the University of San Francisco. I am conducting my dissertation research exploring military veteran students' experiences in regards to the academic support and student services available at the University of San Francisco.

My role as an academic adviser in the Center for Academic and Student Achievement has motivated my interest to better understand the academic and social factors influencing veteran students attending a four year private institution. For this purpose, I would like to have a conversation with you in the next couple of days to discuss your educational experience at USF.

The nature of my research is participatory. I request your permission to record our conversation. I will provide you a transcribed copy of our conversation for your review. You are free to add, edit or delete any part of the conversation as you deem appropriate. After receiving your approval, I will analyze the data from our conversation. Please keep in mind that the collected data within this study is not confidential. Your name and the conversation transcript will be included in the study and dissertation proposal, and it may also appear in any other publication referring to this research.

To provide you an idea of the research conversation, I have included some questions that will serve as a reference for our discussion.

- What elements of your military experience do you think are important for your academic career at USF?
- What motivated you to join the military service?
- How do you see your life changing after you graduate from USF?

I know that your time is valuable and I appreciate your consideration of my request. I will contact you in the next few days to follow-up and to answer any questions you may have.

Best regards,

Gerardo Ureno
Research Doctoral Student
University of San Francisco
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W:(415)422-2085
C:(650)906-0797

APPENDIX B: SAMPLE THANK YOU LETTER

Date:

Participant's Name:

Participant's Address:

Dear (Name of the Participant),

Thank you for meeting with me on DATE, and for sharing your experiences and insight regarding your experiences as a university military veteran student. I value the opportunity to speak with you and thank you for your time.

Included in this letter is a hardcopy of our transcribed conversation for your review. The transcript is a very important part of my research. I ask that you please review the transcript for accuracy and make any notations regarding changes, deletions, or additions you deem appropriate. I will contact you in the coming weeks to discuss your comments and notations. Once the review and editing process of the transcript has been finished, and upon your approval, I will use the revised transcript for my data analysis.

Again thank you for participating in my research study. Your unique perspective about this topic is a valuable contribution to the research material I have collected. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at your convenience.

Best regards,

Gerardo Ureno
Research Doctoral Student
University of San Francisco
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C:(650)906-0797

APPENDIX C: CONVERSATION TRANSCRIPT

Kurt W.
San Francisco, Ca
Friday, October 19, 2012

GU: Were you always planning to enroll in the military

KW: No. Not at all. I was. When I was 18. It is kind of funny actually. My mom sat my down. Because I had good grades, I was 3.8, 4.0 usually student, so she sat me down she wanted me to apply to San Jose State, Chico State and I think the other one was like. Not San Jose and Chico State I applied guided whatever. And I remember thinking in my head, man this is boring because I know exactly what I was going to do you know, because they would pay for it. So I went and voted for Governor, voted for you know Schwarzenegger. I don't know why, I just did it. I voted for him and then I went and joined the army after, I just went into recruiting office, so It was kind of a (pause). It was not politically motivated, it was not that I had a duty to do it, it was nothing that dramatic or romantic you know, I just wanted something else that I didn't know what was going to happen that's why I joined. I wanted an adventure, I just wanted to leave.

GU: Okay

KW: There is nothing romantic about it you know. I went to the Marines recruiting office, it was closed. The army recruiter was outside the army office smoking cigarettes and he goes, there always closed, come down here and I was like oh shit alright, so I went down there so I joined.

GU: How was the military training, was that something you were expecting? Did you feel you were prepared?

KW: Well I was an athlete. I was a wrestler, and I played football, so I was used to the kind of physical stress. But the army, ahh, it is just a feeling, right when you get off and go to the MEPS center and you get the buzz and you just go man. There's no one here to help me, it's just me. All I got is myself to depend on and really trust. But you know, And then you go to this far away place that you have never been to and you're thrown into this stress, walk like a stress machine you know. Mentally you reach above anything that I never been to. So it only gets harder throughout your career. The military career it got only harder for me.

GU: How long were you deployed?

KW: My first deployment was a month to Katrina. Hurricane Katrina search and rescue. Then my second deployment to Iraq, that was 15 months, that was a long one, and then I have to do shorter one, 4 to 5 months.

GU: Is it common to do multiple deployments now.

KW: Yes. Yes ah. I would of... so we were going to go to Afghanistan, then Turkey and Katrina happened and George Bush had all the political pressure so he sent our

battalion down there. But normally you only get 12 months at home, it's all you're really guaranteed. It's kind of a rotation year, 15 months deployed, a year at home, 15 months deployed a year at home. And you rotate. Specially in my unit, I was second airborne, so we were brigade combat team. I'm just going to lay out the truth, it is easier to move us so we were going quite often.

GU: Was that draining you mentally, knowing that you're coming home for a year and then you have to go back.

KW: I was single at the time. I was just a single guy. I didn't care, you know. To be honest with you, I would come home, party for a little bit. I was a single guy I didn't have anything else pulling on me. But now that I have a family. If I have had a family then it would have been impossible for me personally. I don't know how other guys did it you know, the guys who had families. That's the reason I got out, I was staff sergeant, fast tracking, I was about to be a drill Sargent, I was just going through the steps. And then I got married, my wife got pregnant she said naha, no more, and I was like well, we may be broke for a while. She said "I don't care, you're done." And I got out, and that's why I am here. But ah, yeah, I was a single guy, I didn't care, they could have sent me anywhere.

GU: And you started your academic career at City College.

KW: City College, yes.

GU: Right after you were out?

KW: My last two years in the military I was a trainer at FT. Irwin national training center and I did do a couple of college courses there, just online, but I didn't have time so I didn't perform very well. It was just kind of a west of time. But yeah, City College was the first real school I have done since high school.

GU: And from there you transferred to USF

KW: Correct, my mom went here, she's alum. My cousin Michelle went here, they both have their bachelors and masters from here.

GU: How was your transitioning from the military environment to the classroom environment?

KW: Ahhh..(pause) so, I was kind of scared about it at first. I thought I was going, you know, specially going to a school in San Francisco. I was going to get a lot of people aggravating me about, you know, asking me questions. So most of the time I just kept to myself. But then at City College, there're so many other veterans, which I was, you know, that was great. They started the veterans resource center, they have a lounge, we have our own lounge, so essentially I just stayed in there. You know. I'll go to class then I go and sit in there and talk to my other veteran buddies. It wasn't an issue, I just breeze through it, that was great. That part about it was great.

GU: And that is one of the things that is missing from USF. We don't have that here.

KW: Yeah, I don't, I kept to myself. I just go to class and if go to study I'm usually by myself unless it is a group, you know. I don't have friends that I hang out, you know I'm family guy, I go to school then I go home.

GU: So you don't really identify yourself to your classmates or your professors as a veteran.

KW: No, not so much, a little bit more now that Griffis, he's the first professor I really, you know trust enough to talk to. Just be friends with you know. Kind of on a friendly basis, but it is never really an issue for me. I just go to class; I do my work and then go home.

GU: If you were to design a veteran center here at USF, what services or programs would you bring into that area?

KW: Well, the one thing, about veterans is that since they are out of the army, how can I say it. They are very hesitant to enlist again in another program and be committed to another program. They don't want to do that. They want to do their own thing. That's why the VRC and veteran program at City College is so successful because there are no obligations. You go, you do what you need to do and you can leave, there is no obligation. That's why that program is so successful, the veterans like it so they go. If you try to, you know, say you have to come two days a week, or you have to do this we have this program, no one is going to do it. No veteran is going to like it because they don't like that feeling. Because they are done with that so, a lounge is perfect, a VRC is perfect because you go there, you hang out, you have computers and that's the place where other veteran services would come and give talks about all the benefits that are available to them and they also have the counselor right next door to them that specialize in veterans' type of issues. I think that's the most effective program to have.

GU: So having a dedicated Veteran's advising team is something you would include?

KW: Absolutely, because it is extremely complicated, just advising. I worked at the VRC at City College, and the main issue is veterans don't know what to do. You have to go through a certain process. It is quite complicated. I mean anything that has to do with the government aid is complicated. But once you know what to do you can start knocking them out. You know what I mean, and that's what City College started to do. They got the hang of it you know. And you know, Angela (in the Registrar office) she does a great job. She educates herself in all the policies; you never have to worry about it, which is great. Because the first year at City College I was constantly calling, did you do it, did you do it. What they say, what they say? I am good, I am good? When I going to get paid, I didn't get paid for three months and I was broke as hell, you know. I was just about, some guys were close to getting evicted, you know, so that's one good thing about USF, they have enough money to hire people to do it.

GU: We just need to allocate our resources to help vets.

KW: She (Angela) does a great job. I never had, even when I was applying getting ready to come here, she would answer every email, she would get back to me. so that was very good.

GU: How do you see your life changing after you graduate from USF?

KW: Well, the plan was, I work at a company called SIS, it's a security company. They do security for Google, Apple. I work at Google in Mountain View. So I think I would get a full time position there and then get my way through Law school and be a lawyer. And I know that's not possible unless you get a degree from a good school, you know. And also what drove me towards USF is all the stuff about not having enough classes, not having enough professors, people getting laid off. All that stuff. And I was sick of it, sick of struggling, I am sick of all this, every time I tried to do something; it is like bang, roadblock, and roadblock. I had to constantly navigate myself through all this bull shit. So I just thought, I will pay the money, I will go to USF, I don't want any stress. I just want to get in my classes, I am willing to do my classes and let me graduate. You know, that's why I came here. To be honest, that's the only reason that I came here. I wouldn't have to pay any money to go to SF State. I wouldn't have to pay any money to go to SJ State, even Berkeley, it would be free. But I chose to come here strictly for that, that I didn't want the stress. I was sick of it.

GU: How's your family involved in your education, your future goals?

KW: Yeah, well you know. They don't like me not being around them all the time. But I say it is not going to be like that forever, you know. The goal is not just about me anymore. Everything I do is for them to be comfortable you know, so. My wife is supportive, she understands what's going on so.

GU: Are your parents living in the area?

KW: Yeah, they are willing to help me whenever I need it. Yeah.

GU: Have you invited your family to come to USF?

KW: No, no that's one thing I am not good at. I would say I am not involved in any campus activity. I'm sure my parents would love to come. I just don't have the energy.

GU: We do have some events where you can invite them.

KW: I know you do.

GU: The reason that I am asking is because it is also important for your family to see where you're spending most of your time. Where you're getting your education?

KW: The problem is that I also work weekends, so, I work Saturday and Sundays. This Saturday I am doing the October outreach but I got to leave at 11 because I have to be at 2 in Mountain View. Like I said, it is not as easy for me you know. Actually it is very difficult, it is a lot. No extra time for non-class activities.

GU: What student services have you used at USF?

KW: You, that's about it. The counselor.

GU: How about career services?

KW: No, no, and I've been getting those emails. The one thing I want to do is the graduation checklist.

GU: Yes you need to start getting into that.

KW: Yes, maybe next semester I'll do one of those. Like I said, I been seeing you and tried to get my stuff straight.

GU: You already talk a little bit about this. Your motivation to come to USF was to go to law school. Has that change. Or have you always thought law school is your goal.

KW: It was always kind of in the back of my mind. Because my dad is an attorney. And he has his own, he calls it firm, but he's the only guy in the firm, you know what I mean. So he works for himself. So he wants me to take over his clients or whatever. And my younger brother, he was going to be a lawyer, he just graduated from Cal Poli, and he's kind of up in the air running around down in San Luis Obispo. So you know, there may be some light, not a lot pressure to be a lawyer. But also financially it is a great move, like I said, everything I do is for my family to be comfortable, so it makes sense. My fun time is over so it is time to get to work.

GU: How old is your daughter now?

KW: My daughter is two and I have an 8 month old.

GU: Yeah, when we were at orientation you talked about it.

KW: Yeah, she was ready to pop.

GU: That's a lot of changes, especially now when you graduate.

KW: She wanted the kids close together; she's far apart from her sisters. She's got like a four year old sister and like a twelve year old sister. And she's my age so. We had our daughter and then she said, no we're having them close together, you know. I was like oh god, all right. But we're done now so. Two kids is enough. We're done, it's over.

GU: Is there anything that you think is important for your education here at USF, something that you would implement?

KW: Just like I said before, it is not that it is the nice thing to do. Is a good business decision for USF to support the veterans, because it is guaranteed money, you know, and it is very simple to target, you know. You have a small, not even that small, they are going to be growing, Iraq and Afghanistan is going to be over in 2014, the Army is downsizing it, and you have millions and millions of young Veterans college age guys. They are going to be entitled to post 9-11 GI bill benefits. It is a guaranteed thing. And for colleges not to give that veteran's preference you know registration preference to veterans, they are not even throwing a bone and have them on the table. It just doesn't make any sense. Because they are going to get the money, these guys aren't the guys that are not going to get loans. These guys are going to get loans and they have money in the bank so.

GU: Do you usually talk to other Vets on campus.

KW: Yeah, yeah. Well there's a couple. USF doesn't have many veterans; they barely have any at all. No one thinks they can come here because USF doesn't have any kind of outreach or anything saying to veterans come here. It almost like they don't want them here.

GU: We want them here.

KW: I literally that's the kind of thing I get, you know, and even they tried to start that group last semester and I went in there and some of those guys, they couldn't continue to come here because they didn't get any support, you know, they had to stop, they were like, man I can't do it anymore, you know, so, shit, it doesn't make any sense. And they say in the video how they support veterans, it's like come on. You have to throw us a little bit of help here.

GU: So the relationship that your family has with USF, that's the main reason you came to USF?

KW: Yeah, I came here not expecting much support, not asking for it. It was not about that. If it was about that I wouldn't have come here, you know what I mean.

GU: During the admission process. Were you working with a person from admissions?

KW: No.

GU: So you did everything on your own.

KW: Yeah. I just came here, I applied, I got in, so I just got it and it was just me and Angelina, I said Angelina is this a good schedule and she said yeah and I just registered, and then I saw you, that was it. No one recruited me, I did see anyone.

GU: I know one thing about you guys is that you guys are very independent.

KW: Yeah.

GU: You guys are trained to be independent.

KW: Yeah, no one has to hold my hand to tell me what I need to do. Like I said if I was expecting some kind of additional, someone to tell me hey you have to do this, I mean, you have to be proactive with this stuff, you know. Long story short, like I said it is not about the support, if I had thought I want to come here if they do this, and this, and this. It is not about that, Like I said, I want my degree, I want to go to work, I want to make money, I want to be happy, you know what I mean that's what it is about. It is not about trying to make it as easy as possible for me to graduate. I am willing to do the work like we were talking about.

GU: I noticed that about you guys, I guess it is part of your training, but you are very discipline in regards to following the steps to get things done.

KW: Exactly, you just nailed it on the head. And it is such a simple concept. Students, any kind of military veteran students are going to do it. You don't have to pull their teeth to get them to turn in their homework assignment or to get them to come to class. They are going to come to class they're going to be 10 minutes early and they are going to get it done. It is easy you know. That's the only thing I am upset about.

All they need is the veteran preference registration (early registration) so they don't have to worry about it. But here I usually get into classes because of the class size.

GU: But if we can accomplish something do you think that would make a difference?

KW: And it is such a simple move and USF can say, hey we offer veterans preference registration they will get more veterans that way. But they don't say anything so nobody comes here, they don't say anything. If you ask any veteran at City College they'll be like, the only ones that think that can come here is because I told them. That's it. Everyone else is like, oh I can't afford that school.

GU: You still have some relationships in the veteran center in City College right?

KW: Yeah, I just took my Marketing group class down there. We were doing like a primary research for a frat like house for Veterans, so. We went down there I showed them the VRC, talked to the guys for little bit.

GU: That sounds good, do you mind sharing some of your findings.

KW: Sure, so the idea that we all took in the marketing class is a Veterans house, frat like house for students vets only. You don't have to have any disability, all the requirement is you have to be a student, you have to have post GI bill benefits. Ant the whole concepts is, vets only pay when they are at school. So during the summer months you don't have to pay. The idea was to pay a little bit more a month so you don't have to worry about rent, that's the idea. And then we came up with the idea of all this additional services like counseling essentially of all the things that most colleges don't do. Like to have someone that is familiar with the GI bill, that keeps track of all the changes to the GI bill so they can advise these guys and make the process so much easier. Because it is a battle, there are so many changes; they make the rates go up and down, up and down. It is a battle and it is hard. That's part of the reason I came here, I just wanted to go through school, I didn't want to go to State and have all my classes thrown back in my face.

GU: Thank you, is there anything else you want to share

KW: That's it, I hope that helps.

END OF CONVERSATION