

**HOW STUDENT VETERANS AT SALEM STATE UNIVERSITY
COPE WITH COLLEGE CHALLENGES:
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY**

Honors Thesis

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Abstract

This is a study on how student veterans at Salem State University have been able to overcome challenges they have faced in college using the leadership skills they acquired during their service in the military. I conducted a qualitative inquiry by interviewing 4 student veterans who are currently attending Salem State University. These interviews were between 15 and 25 minutes in length and were composed of semi-structured, open ended questions involving military experience, college experience, challenges faced in college, and leadership. After conducting these interviews and analyzing the data, I found that this group of student veterans who attend Salem State University do in fact use leadership skills acquired in the military to cope with challenges. I conducted this study, because it is important that the community be aware of what positive skills student veterans have, as well as the leadership skills they are equipped with to overcome challenges. From this study I was able to find that this group of student veterans who attend Salem State University use several leadership skills to help them succeed in college and overcome challenges: self-discipline, self-confidence, endurance, determination, drive, respect, and positivity. Understanding what leadership skills these students have used to cope with difficulties they faced is significant, because it helps the university and community at large see what positive skills they have. It also can help with improving services for veterans on campus, by supporting them in using these skills in beneficial and productive ways, as in coming up with methods to get more veterans involved in events and to be overall successful. As the group of participants was small, further research should be done in order to have a more conclusive understanding of veterans at Salem State University.

Introduction

In the last decade, more and more men and women are returning to college after serving the United States in the military. These students face different types of challenges and more of them than the average student does. Many studies focus on what types of challenges these unique students face, but there is very little research on what leadership attributes these students have that they have gained from serving in the military.

Veterans often times come home from serving in the military with serious and complicated challenges that they have to face in the civilian world. There is culture clash, as well as mental or physical illnesses, that may be making it tougher for them to adjust easily. When a veteran returns to college after serving, tasks such as studying, paying attention in class, working with nonveterans, and connecting with nonveterans may prove to be very challenging. Although these veterans face several challenges, they have also been through experiences that have taught them life lessons and may have taught them a lot about leadership and taking charge when the time comes. This study was designed to figure out the challenges that student veterans at Salem State University face and what leadership skills they use to overcome such challenges.

Literature Review

There has been a lot of research and studies done on student veterans returning to college and the challenges that they face. The research focus is generally on the specific challenges that student veterans face and how colleges and universities can better assist these students in making their transition smooth. The main points of the articles or studies are to find what veterans feel are their biggest challenges in college and therefore get

colleges to change their veteran programs to help assist and serve these students more effectively.

Badger, McCuddy, and Olsen (2014) conducted a study that involved interviewing 10 student veterans. The purpose of this study was to gain insight into “their perceptions of personal strengths that support academic success, the challenges they experienced in the academic setting, factors impacting veteran participation in college resource programs, and suggestions for ideal resources aimed at supporting the student veteran” (Badger, McCuddy & Olsen, 2014). They found from this study that the veterans saw their strengths as self-discipline, leadership and teamwork abilities, and having a new perspective to bring to the classroom. The study also found that some common perceived challenges of the student veterans were social interactions, financial stress, and culture/role adjustments. Some common reasons for low participation in veteran programs were that veterans don’t want others knowing they are veterans, they live off of campus, and they also have a lack of free time. By discovering what these student veterans felt their challenges and strengths were, it helps others to develop better programs to assist veterans in adjusting to college more easily and smoothly.

Glasser, Powers, and Zywiak (2009) focus on how military veterans returning to college face a “social and academic environment” that is much different from the military environment that they are used to. This new college environment offers the challenge of culture clash, which can often be very intimidating and hard to tackle. Students speak much differently in class than soldiers speak while they work, which takes getting used to. Student veterans were also shocked at “their classmates’ lack of attention, text messaging, giggling and complaining,” as well as “unfiltered questions they were asked

once their classmates found out they were veterans” (Glasser, Powers, & Zywiak, 2009). This clash of culture makes it difficult for veterans to ease into college mode. The article then gives some suggestions to colleges as to how to make the transition easier for this group of new students: assigning them veteran mentors, assisting with their benefits from the military, and making them aware of their fellow veterans on campus (Glasser, Powers, & Zywiak, 2009). Thus the article aims to improve college life for veterans.

Ackerman, DiRamio, and Mitchell (2008) conducted a study that was based on the interviews of 25 students who had served overseas during the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts. The results allowed the authors to break down the transitions of these veterans into distinct categories of moving in, moving through, and moving out. These stages were first gone through when the veterans joined the military, served, and exited. They then began again in the moving in stage when they enrolled in college. This article/study aims to show that veterans face challenges upon enrolling in college largely due to the culture shock and transitioning phase it offers. This article also ends with suggestions by veteran students to their colleges on how veteran programs and assistance can be improved to better serve them.

Leadership of military members and college students has been of interest for many years. Crowley (1931) conducted a study on leaders and followers in criminal settings, military settings, and student settings. From these three settings he formulated groups of criminal leaders and criminal followers, Non-commissioned (NCO) leaders and Non-commissioned followers, and student leaders and student followers. To these groups he administered twelve psychological tests that he hoped would help prove that leaders possess different traits than their followers in those three settings. From analysis of the

data, Crowley (2008) was correct that the leaders did have different traits that the followers did not. For the NCO's compared to their followers, they had traits such as higher self-confidence, ability to make decisions faster and know they will be upheld, higher finality of judgement, higher intelligence, and higher resistance to opposition. Student leaders on the other hand showed that they were more aggressive than their followers, had higher self-confidence, higher finality of judgement, higher motor impulsion, higher radical tendencies, and had faster decision making. This study concluded by making no overall assumptions of traits all leaders must have or making generalizations except within this frame of people.

Bokhari, Razali, Yusof, and Zakaria (2014) conducted a qualitative study in Malaysia to find out how to improve leadership skills of college students so that they were better prepared for the job market after they graduate. They aimed to find out if a Reserve Officer Training Unit (ROTU) could help develop leadership skills. 63 participants who were a part of this ROTU for the first year responded to a questionnaire about their experience in the program. They found from conducting this study that leadership of students needs to be improved in order for them to have better feedback from the students. Thus the university needed to encourage students to get more involved on campus with different types of extra-curricular activities.

Cope, Harris, and Hendricks (2009) focused on a leadership program that was created at the Edith Cowan University in Australia to increase the leadership skills of nursing students. These students were involved in the program during their fourth semester of their undergraduate career. This program was developed, because the university felt that many college graduates were not prepared or taught leadership skills

in order to be successful in their nursing careers. All of the 10 students that were accepted to be a part of the program took a pre and post program questionnaire. These questionnaires allowed the university to see that the leadership program did actually improve the leadership of the students that took part in the program. It improved leadership skills such as communication, developing actions and implementing them, setting goals, confidence, tolerating others, as well as other skills. These heightened skills were assumed to help these students in their future nursing careers. Although they focused on a program for nursing students, they discuss the overall importance of leadership for undergraduate students as a basis for this study. In their introduction, the text says, “Authors postulate that university graduates, as a whole, are ineffective leaders, and suggest that the most likely cause of this leadership void is lack of formal leadership training” (Cope, Harris, & Hendricks, 2009).

Hamrick, Rumann, and Associates (2013) discuss several aspects of student veterans in higher education in their handbook. It discusses things such as student veteran organizations, enrollment of student veterans, the GI Bill and other benefits, and many other aspects of higher education having to do with veterans. The handbook also provides vignettes in which students describe their personal experiences in college having to do with certain challenges they faced as well as insights that they had about veteran life in college. This book can be used as a tool in understanding what needs to be changed at an institution of higher education. It also helps the reader understand more about veteran life in college.

Other articles written focus on improvement of leadership skills and effectiveness, as well as things such as authenticity. They also help to make sense of what a leader should be and possibly some traits that good leaders possess.

George, Mayer, McLean, and Sims (2007) focus on how leaders must be devoted to personal growth in order to evolve into their best form of self as a leader. Leaders cannot follow an outline to become a certain type of leader or possess a certain set of traits, because with doing so, they become unauthentic. Therefore, leaders are performing at their best when they are their most authentic selves. The authors make suggestions in order for leaders to achieve this authenticity: learning from your life story, knowing your authentic self, practicing your values and principles, balancing your extrinsic and intrinsic motivations, building your support team, integrating your life by staying grounded, and empowering people to lead (George, Mayer, McLean, & Sims, 2007).

Bennis and Thomas (2002) explain how many leaders who are able to inspire others have actually taken away important lessons from trying times in order to become who they are today. Many leaders went through adversities or trauma and were able to overcome such tough times and become great leaders. The authors interviewed over 40 top business leaders who surprisingly had all faced some sort of adversity or had gone through some sort of intense time, which the authors coined “crucibles”. These crucibles were very impactful on the leaders and allowed them to reflect deeply about who they were. Ultimately, they attributed their leadership to these crucibles. In this article, the authors list characteristics of these leaders: learning from difference, prevailing over darkness, and meeting great expectations (Bennis & Thomas, 2002). The authors also list four skills that great leaders have that also help people get through tough times: “ability

to engage others in shared meaning”, “a distinctive and compelling voice”, integrity, and “adaptive capacity” (Bennis & Thomas, 2002).

The imperfect and incomplete leader is the focus of Ancona, Orlikowski, Malone & Senge (2007). They discuss how leaders do not have to know everything or be perfect in order to be a great leader. Everyone has their own skills and capabilities, so each person must be able to ask others to help when they do not know something. Having others around who can make up for the skills that a person lacks is the best thing to do. The authors worked at the MIT Leadership Center for six years in order to study leadership within organizations and then teach this to different levels of leadership in companies. They found that many of these leaders struggled to be the complete and perfect leader. From this, they were able to come up with a “model of distributed leadership” (Ancona, Malone, Orlikowski, & Senge, 2007). This framework includes sensemaking, relating, visioning, inventing, and how to balance all four of these tasks (Ancona, Malone, Orlikowski, & Senge, 2007). The authors provide this framework in the hopes that individuals, teams, and organizations will take advantage of it in order to discover the balance of their skills, as well as their strengths and weaknesses.

After having asked groups of executives across Europe and the United States for over 10 years why they thought anyone would want to be led by them, Goffee & Jones (2000) highlight four qualities that inspirational leaders must have. They found that most executives did not know how to answer that question. The authors came up with their own theory to illustrate what qualities they believe leaders must possess. These include displaying their weaknesses selectively, relying on intuition, using tough empathy, and showing their differences (Goffee & Jones, 2000). In order to have these qualities and use

them effectively, they must be part of a leader and not something that the author was forced to manifest so that they are authentic.

Boyatzis, Goleman, and McKee discuss that many teams who are not connecting or don't work well together are often lacking in emotional intelligence. Once these groups emotionally connect with one another even in disagreements, they are becoming more productive and connected. In order for a team to function well, the members must understand what the norms of the group are and how the group is supposed to function. When members of the team set up norms, it becomes more evident what is acceptable and not acceptable in the group. Teams can also work toward increasing their emotional intelligence individually and as a group to better work together. The authors provide an appendix that lists the aspects of emotional intelligence. These include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management (Boyatzis, Goleman, & McKee). It is ultimately the team leader's job to help facilitate the creation of norms and the increase of emotional intelligence in a group.

There has not been a lot of research or studies done on how the leadership skills that veterans gained from military experiences have helped them deal with the problems they faced when they returned to college. Thus the focus of this study is going to be on such topic, to provide new insight on student veterans, and how their leadership skills have helped them overcome difficulties in school. Do they or can they draw on the skills, especially those pertaining to leadership, that they have acquired and developed during their time served in the military?

Methodology

For this project, I conducted a qualitative inquiry based on grounded theory by interviewing 4 student veterans who attend Salem State University. This type of inquiry was appropriate, because of the components that Creswell (2016) discusses. The research had an emerging design, a complex picture, open-ended data collection, and a flexible writing structure (Creswell, 2016). It involved participants' views and inductive data analysis (Creswell, 2016). The context was significant as well, and researcher bias is present (Creswell, 2016). The students were volunteers who were at different stages in their education. The interviews I conducted were held in study rooms in the library and in the Bertolon School of Business on campus, and they lasted anywhere from 15 to 25 minutes. The length solely relied upon the students' depths of answers. I asked semi-structured, open ended questions that allowed for the students to give more than just a yes or no answer. These questions were worded in ways that helped open up the students to their thoughts on how the military may have helped them cope with challenges in college. They were also worded in such ways to help the students explore the challenges that they face, as well as what positive leadership attributes they felt that they have gained from their experiences.

After the interviews took place, I listened to the audio recordings and transcribed word for word what the students had said. Once the transcriptions were complete, I then went through them one at a time and read through each answer and coded them by highlighting any words or groups of words that stuck out as leadership skills or challenges. For example, if I saw the word "self-discipline" within the transcription, I highlighted it and then wrote "self-discipline" above the word as a leadership skill. If the

transcription said “interacting with students was difficult,” I wrote students as a challenge. After going through all of the transcriptions and coding them, I separated the codes into themes of challenges and leadership skills. I then had a list of challenges under each student, as well as leadership skills. From there, I counted the number of times the codes were displayed within the four individual lists, and I discounted the codes that showed up less than three times. The codes that I included in this study were present 3 or more times within the lists so that my findings were valid and not in any way biased or forged.

Case Study

75% of the participants in this study were male. 75% of the participants were undergraduate students, while 25% of the participants were enrolled in a graduate program. Of those who are undergraduate students, one third is in the first semester at Salem State University, one third is in the third year, and one third is in the fourth year. 25% of the participants served in the Army Reserve, 25% served in the Air Force, and 50% served in the Marine Corps. 50% of the participants had been deployed as part of their contract with the military. The mean time served in the military was 4.63 years, with the shortest time being 1.5 years and the longest time 8 years. 75% of the participants completed their service and did not reenlist, while 25% were still serving. All had different jobs and responsibilities within the military. All of the participants happened to be business students at Salem State University.

Salem State University statistics show that in the fall of 2014, the university had 7,600 undergraduate students enrolled and 1,667 graduate students enrolled for a total of 9,267. Of these 9,267 students, around 300 were student veterans. They, therefore,

represent approximately a mere 3.2% of the school's population. Although student veterans make up a small portion of Salem State University students, the university is veteran friendly, with a newly dedicated Veteran's Hall, faculty and staff to help assist veterans with anything that they need, and benefits such as military credit given for education and experience gained while in the military. Salem State University has a Student Veteran's Organization that hosts events, holds meetings, contributes to charity, as well as many other functions that allow student veterans on campus to gather together, work as a team, and support one another. The university also has a Learning Community program, where student veterans can enroll in a Veteran Scholars community where they travel with the other students in their community to 4 classes throughout 2 semesters. For the fall of 2015, these classes were "Foundations of Writing" and "First Year Seminar". Next semester, the students will take "Public Speaking" and "The United States in World History" together. This community allows for student veterans or students who are still serving to be amongst other veteran and military members so that they can build connections and find support in one another. The first semester is supposed to help these students with the reintegration process as well as resilience, while the second explores engaged citizenship.

All of the student veterans that were interviewed had their own personal challenges and problems they faced returning to college, specifically Salem State University. Since each one had different experiences in the military, it is natural that they will have different challenges. Although some of the challenges these students faced were different, there were definitely similarities that emerged. These challenges included

dealing with younger or less experienced students in the classroom, finding the right professors, and figuring out their new environment.

Less Experienced and Immature Students

Most of the student veterans that were interviewed talked about how a big challenge for them was interacting with younger, immature, and/ or less experienced students. This is not surprising, because Badger, McCuddy, and Olsen (2014) found in their study that this was a challenge for student veterans as well. Having experienced a lot more than the average college student, these student veterans found it difficult to relate or intermingle with such students. Time of service varied for each student veteran, but they all had the commonality of having other experiences that most college students do not. Two students had deployed, which means that they have seen different parts of the world that other students have not. Another student saw and treated military members who were injured overseas. These experiences separated them from many other students because of factors such as age, maturity level, and respect. They often felt frustration at students who did not adhere to respectful ways of communication with their professors. They also had trouble with comments that students would make just in general discussion with the class. It was difficult being able to relate to students who were younger and had not seen what they had in the military. Not necessarily knowing how to talk to them or how to interact with them was a struggle. One student described his experience with younger students to me:

“There were times where they would come in. They would look like they were about to sit down next to me, and they would see my backpack, and for some reason, they would get up, and turn around, and go sit somewhere else.”

It should be noted that this student's backpack was one that would be used in the military. For some reason, other students were wary of sitting next to someone they could clearly see was a veteran. If other students are cautious to even sit down next to a veteran, it makes it very difficult for these students to interact with them and connect with them in order to feel comfortable and a sense of belonging. Another student said,

“It's definitely hard to deal with the younger students when you have so much experience under you belt with like your world experiences.”

For these student veterans, learning how to interact with the other students in their classes and/or trying to ignore the comments or lack of respect of some of them was a definite challenge. These students are a minority in the university, so finding common ground with other students can be difficult, because they have just seen so much more in their lives.

Finding the Right Professors

Professors were definitely a big topic for these student veterans, which is not very different from other college students. Which professor you choose to take a class with highly impacts how the semester will go and how you might do in that specific course. Every professor has a different style of teaching, different ways of interacting with students, and different methods in creating a learning environment for students. Thus, not every student is going to fit well with every professor and vice versa.

Two students explained how sometimes professors are not sensitive to veteran issues. Sometimes they contribute to the discomfort that these students feel in class by the things that they say or fail to say. Another said that he has had professors who would not

explain topics a second time for clarity even when he asked politely. When students desire to earn their degrees within a certain time period, and they are dealing with the GI Bill, it makes it very difficult when they are in a course with a professor they don't feel comfortable with or whose teaching methods are not right for them. One student had to drop a class because the professor was not helpful to him when he asked for help, and he was disrespectful to the student on top of that. Another student said,

“My biggest difficulty is trying to make my class schedule work regardless of the professor.”

She spoke of how she felt like she could not drop a course even if she did not like the course the way the professor taught it. This makes for a very long semester, especially when student veterans are already dealing with other challenges.

Figuring Out a Different Environment

It was also apparent that for these student veterans it was a challenge upon enrolling in college to figure out their new academic environment after serving in the military. This was brought about due to the difference in structure and lifestyle of college and the military. The military is a much more rigid and authoritative institution, whereas college is not so much. College is rather a place for exploring, being creative, and finding oneself as an individual. These students were taught a certain lifestyle and way of behaving, so to transition into a new environment definitely takes a toll on one's sense of balance and belonging.

For these students, things such as learning a new kind of culture and using different language were some things they had to figure out. One student said,

“The biggest thing for me was learning to not talk like a Marine anymore. Being in the Marine Corps, everything is very hard if you will. For me, it was extremely difficult to break that cycle and making sure I was being tactful at times.”

This student spoke about how language is so much different in the military than in college, so trying to speak more professionally was very difficult, especially since there were other veterans that he would interact with at the university. It should be noted that this student spoke eloquently and professionally during his interview.

A lot of students at Salem State University enroll right out of high school or shortly after, so there isn't any huge adjustment in this area. For these student veterans, time spent away from an academic environment ranged from around 2 years to over 8 years. It is difficult for many students to get back into the mindset of college after summer break, never mind the years that had separated this group of students from school. These student veterans were also transitioning from a completely different environment, one with a rigid structure and set roles, to a learning environment that promotes the growth of one's self. In the military, authority is a must and it is made very clear who is in charge of whom and of what. When transitioning back into college, some of the students who had taught and led other military members, were not entirely sure of what their new role was in the classroom and at the university. One student said that,

“The younger kids, they kind of, not that they didn't respect it, but they kind of see you as too authoritative I think sometimes. It's very hard not to take that role in class...because it's very hard not to take charge.”

This student had a difficult time in figuring out her place amongst young students, whom she would have been leading or teaching things to in the military. She would find

herself holding back from taking charge in different situations. Her instinct was to keep the students in line. Figuring out what is acceptable and what is unacceptable to bring to college in terms of lifestyle and habits learned in the military was a struggle for these students.

Leadership Skills of the Student Veterans

After interviewing this group of student veterans, several shared leadership skills were found to be amongst the many that allowed for them to overcome the challenges that they faced at Salem State University.

Confidence

All of the student veterans not only illustrated self-confidence by the things that they said, but also from the way they carried themselves during the interviews. The student veterans sat up tall while they answered the interview questions and kept constant eye contact while they spoke. All of the student veterans exhibited that they have a voice in the classroom. They are not afraid to speak up to give their opinions or to ask questions if they do not understand something. They also have a voice with other students, whether it is through group work, tutoring, or working in the Student Veteran's Organization. They also had confidence in themselves that they could do anything they put their minds to. One student said that, "After being in the military, I know that I can do whatever I want." By this, the student meant that the military instills in its members a sense of confidence that allows them to believe that they have the power and capability within themselves to do whatever they set their minds to.

Discipline

Self-discipline was very apparent for all of these students, either because they specifically said that it was a skill they had or because they talked about the importance of skills such as timeliness and task management that they have. It was also apparent, because of the fact that they were able to overcome the challenges they faced when they enrolled in college. They did not walk away from their college education, even though things were hard at first.

The students talked about the important of timeliness and task management, especially in a college environment. This is something that is highly stressed in the military. In that setting, when you are early you are on time and when you are on time you are late. Therefore, these students carried this habit into their college life showing up for class early for other college students, but just on time for military members. Many of the students also discussed how as soon as they would get a homework assignment, project, etc. they would start the task immediately after classes ended. They left no time for assignments to pile up to then become stressed about. This also was a habit that transferred over from the military, because when they were/are given tasks they must be carried out and completed in a timely fashion, no excuses. This skill allows these students to get things done quickly and leaves time for other things. They also explained that by getting assignments done right when they are assigned, it reduces the chance of stress that often heightens when too many things are due at once and too many things are on a student's mind.

Endurance

Endurance ties in with the self-discipline of these students, because in being self-disciplined they were also enduring tough adversities and a difficult adjustment period. These students could have given up and unenrolled themselves from college, but they decided to keep pushing themselves forward through the challenges they faced. One student said that he learned to “Never quit” and to “Just push through it”. In enduring through many difficult experiences such as deployments and other stressful situations, these students were taught to never quit and to just keep pushing themselves to success.

Determination & Drive

These student veterans showed determination in the ways that they pushed themselves to succeed. They were resolute in the things that they put their minds too no matter what difficulties or obstacles ensued. They all have the goal to graduate from college with a degree, and they won't stop until they succeed in that. Getting an education was important to them. One student was able to increase his GPA by more than 3.0 since he enrolled in college, because he was so determined to succeed. As mentioned in the section regarding challenges, one student is so determined to finish her degree on time that would not let herself drop a class regardless of how she felt about it. This particular student actually said that determination allowed her to overcome challenges.

Respect

These students all had a sense of respect for others and for authority holders. Even though these students have gone through many different and possibly difficult things while in the military, they were still respectful of professors, other faculty, and other students. This was apparent especially when they would discuss their annoyance with

other students who were disrespectful in class by not paying attention, making jokes, talking to other students when the professor was speaking, or making statements that were inappropriate. Their irritation with other students' lack of respect showed that they had respect for the professors and felt that they deserved it. These students learned to respect their leaders in the military and this transferred over to the college setting. They feel that it is important to do so.

Positivity

There was a general sense of positivity from these students not only from what they discussed with me during the interviews, but also from their presence and the way that they presented themselves. All of them were so willing to help others. One student spoke of how he tutored students just because he wanted to help them understand the material in class. Although they all had challenges adjusting to college life, they were all just very positive about their overall experiences in college and were happy to be at Salem State University getting an education. These students all enjoy the environment that the university offers and are glad to be studying there. They are also rather positive about their military experiences and have gotten a lot out of them. Most of them enjoyed the jobs that they had while serving and had nothing negative to say about their experiences.

Analysis

When it comes to leadership, there is no set in stone list of traits, qualities, attributes, etc. that lead to success. There have been so many different studies done on what makes a good leader and how leaders can improve their skills and themselves as

leaders. There have also been many studies and articles written about student leadership skills and how colleges can implement programs to assist these students in improving their skills. For the student veterans in this study, they enrolled in college with leadership skills that they had acquired or strengthened while in the military. These skills can be compared against other studies and articles on leadership skills and traits to find out if these student veterans are in fact leaders according to the literature.

The student veterans connect with a leadership quality in the article mentioned by Goffee and Jones (2000), because they “dare to be different”. According to the authors, inspirational leaders will use what is different or unique about themselves to their advantage. These leaders show that they are different and have no problem with it. Differences could be apparent or very subtle. With these student veterans, they may make it apparent or not that they are different from the other students. They are definitely different in terms of age, which is apparent for some. They are also unique in the fact that they are a minority in the school, and they have served in the military and gotten many different experiences from their time in service.

They also illustrate that they have many aspects of emotional intelligence as discussed by Boyatzis, Goleman, and McKee. The study that I conducted did not cover aspects of emotional intelligence, so I cannot point to each one and show that they have those skills, but they have many that were clear. The first part of emotional intelligence is self-awareness, which includes emotional self-awareness, accurate self-assessment, and self-confidence. Asking questions or for advice seems to be something important to these students, so it would be safe to say that they have accurate self-assessments of themselves. The students are self-confident in that they are not afraid to ask questions or

to speak up and voice their opinions. They believe that they can do whatever they put their minds to and believe wholeheartedly in themselves and their abilities.

The next part of emotional intelligence is self-management. From the list of factors that make up self-management, the student veterans exhibited self-control, adaptability, achievement, initiative, and optimism. These students exhibit self-control in class when other students or professors are making remarks that are upsetting or irritating to them. They try to ignore classmates that are disrespectful to professors, and they remain calm. Taking the step to transition into college was a big deal and offered many challenges along the way. These students are adaptable, because they were able to transition from one environment to another and overcome the obstacles in their way. Achievement is important to these students, because they enrolled in college to get an education and a degree. They expect themselves to do well. They also take the initiative, because they feel that they can do whatever they put their minds too regardless of what challenges come their way. Finally, they are optimistic, in that even though it was a struggle to adjust to college, they are still happy to be in college and getting a better education.

Social awareness is the next part of emotional intelligence of which the students showed service for the fact that they had sacrificed a lot while in the military. They enlisted in the military to serve the people of the United States, which shows that they care about others. Many of them talked about how helping others was important to them in college as well.

Although Ancona, Malone, Orlikowski, and Senge (2007) focus on how organizations can use the framework the authors created to improve their skills, it

definitely can be used in the college setting as well. These student veterans had to use the skills the authors discuss in order to be successful in college. They used sensemaking in order to make sense of their new, academic environment and to figure out their place in it. They used relating when they connected with other student veterans on campus and tried to relate to other students in the classroom. These students used visioning when they saw themselves getting a degree and enrolled in college to do so. They also used visioning when they chose their major to study. It could also be said that they used inventing, because they had to figure out how they were going to get a degree and get through college with the challenges that they faced. They had to figure out new ways to think and approach situations so that they could make their visions a reality.

Their transitions out of the military and into college life could be considered a crucible, according to Bennis and Thomas (2002). Their experiences in the military could also be considered a crucible, because they may have gone through very difficult periods of time when they served. These crucibles allow for leaders to be great, because they take away from these experiences in order to better themselves. As an institution, the military demands a certain way to do everything. With this comes challenges and obstacles. These students were challenged with leaders who pushed them to be the best they could possibly be, and this may be part of the reason why they have been successful in overcoming their challenges in college.

The study that was done at Edith Cowan University by Cope, Harris, and Hendricks (2009) shows that implementing a leadership program improved the leadership skills of the nursing students involved. These skills were expected to help these students in their graduate and nursing careers. The questionnaire that was given to these students

pre and post program showed that they had improved things such as positivity to change, toleration of others, and goal setting. The student veterans at Salem State University exhibit the same skills. They are optimistic about their careers at Salem State University and the environment it offers, even though they have faced several challenges along the way. They are tolerant of other students in class who are not respectful of the professors or who make remarks that are insensitive or inappropriate. They also use goal setting, because they enlisted in the military and then enrolled in college to get a degree. They all are very focused on making that goal a reality.

Although these veterans don't fit into a cookie cutter list of leadership traits, they are comparable to studies that have been conducted and articles that have been written. These student veterans were able to use the leadership skills that they acquired in the military to be successful in overcoming challenges, just like leaders in an organization would do or other students in a college setting.

Recommendations to Salem State University

When interviewing the student veterans, two questions were asked regarding veteran life at Salem State University. One was "Do you enjoy the environment that Salem State University offers?" and the other was "How would you improve veteran life at Salem State University?" It is important for these student veterans to be able to share with the university how they feel about their college experience as well as what they think could be improved upon in order for student veterans to have an easier transition into college life, as well as a more enjoyable and productive time.

Overall, the students enjoy the environment that Salem State University offers. They were all in agreement that the university does a great job in getting the students

involved and transitioned into college life. This was in regards to applying and getting in contact with Veteran's Affairs.

They did have some interesting recommendations that could help Salem State University in figuring out better ways to get veterans involved on campus, as well as make their transitions easier and make them feel more comfortable while they work to get their degrees.

Promotion of Events

One of the suggestions was to improve the promotion of events, meetings, etc. held by the Student Veteran's Organization, as well as recruitment of more student veterans to join. The Student Veteran's Organization seemed to have a very positive impact on these students, so being able to find ways to better promote the organization and different events held by it would definitely do a lot of good for the veterans who are not involved. When these students are able to come together and relate to one another and brainstorm new ideas for the organization, it really brings them together and helps them find a sense of belonging on campus; a reason to stick around after classes end.

First Year Students

Reaching out to new students right away and addressing their concerns, issues, fears, etc. and then continuing that type of discourse throughout their time at Salem State University, may get them on board and feeling a part of the school right off the bat. One student mentioned how working together in the Veteran Scholars Learning Community to create a presentation to show the university how veteran life could be improved on campus really brought those students together and gave them a sense of purpose outside of the classroom.

Getting Professors, Faculty, and Student Staff Involved

Another great recommendation was coming up with a policy or program where professors, other faculty, and student workers have to go through the training of veteran sensitivity that is offered on a voluntary basis right now. Some students talked about how some professors were not respectful or cautious of things said that may affect veterans in a negative way. Making this sort of training mandatory would greatly benefit the student veterans who may feel very uncomfortable at times.

A More Spacious and Open Spot for Veterans

A final recommendation is creating a more open, spacious, and friendly area on campus where veterans can spend time together, as well as get advice or meet with officers or faculty. One student talked about how many veterans don't feel comfortable spending time in the space that is currently there, because it is very tight and everything seems interwoven. There are issues with privacy and serious matters that don't blend well with the veterans who are trying to relax, destress, and have a good time with one another. Having a separate area where veterans can spend time together and interact and not worry about disturbing others would be great for them.

Conclusion

There is not any one way that these student veterans have coped with the college challenges they have faced at Salem State University, but they have all been able to draw from their experiences in the military to help them through this process. From this study and the literature that has been written on topics of student veterans and leadership skills, I have found that this group of student veterans at Salem State University was able to use

leadership skills such as self-discipline, self-confidence, endurance, positivity, determination, drive, and respect to overcome the challenges they faced in college after serving in the military. Since this study was conducted with only 4 student veterans, an overall assumption or generalization of student veterans at Salem State University cannot be made, but further research should be conducted in order to continue this study. With the interviews of more student veterans, Salem State University would be able to get a clearer picture of just how their student veterans cope with college challenges using their skills. It would also allow the school to have a better understanding of how to improve the programs and services that are offered to this special group of students.

Although several leadership skills were found to help and guide this group of student veterans, only two of the students interviewed felt as though the military had taught them how to be leaders. The others felt more like they had been taught to be good followers. Unbeknownst to them, they are all leaders not only for what they have sacrificed in order to protect this country, but also because of the traits they exhibit in and out of the academic environment. They deserve to be applauded and thanked for the sacrifices they have made and rewarded for the leadership skills that they all exhibit every day.

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Appendix A Interview Guide

Basic Background Questions

Are you active duty, reserves, or guard, or no longer serving?
What branch did you serve in and for how long?
What was your job in the military? Did you enjoy it?
Were you deployed for any period of time?

Basic Questions about Salem State

How long have you been attending Salem State University?
What is your major?
Do you enjoy the environment that Salem State offers?
Have you been or are you involved with the Student Veteran's Organization on campus?
If so, how?

Challenges

Have you had any challenges here at Salem State? If so, what were they?
Were you able to overcome these challenges? How?
Do you feel as though being in the military helped you overcome these challenges?

Leadership in the Military

Do you feel as though you were taught how to lead in the military?
What is/was your rank?
What kinds of responsibilities did you have?
What lessons have you taken away with you from being in the military?
What lifestyle characteristics in the military were transferable to college life? What didn't?
What advice could you give a veteran who is just starting college or re enrolling now?
How do you define leadership personally?
What do you think that your leadership skills are? How do they help you in everyday life?
What makes a good leader to you?
How would you improve veteran life at Salem State?