

Veteran and Military Students Perceptions of Internships in College

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### Abstract

Military and veteran students are understudied and face different difficulties than traditional college students. The purpose of this study is to gain a better viewpoint of military and veteran students' perspective of internships in college. Through a qualitative phenomenological study, 8 military and veteran students were individually interviewed. Findings revealed that military and veteran students face transition difficulties when leaving a military environment and transitioning to a college or university. The significance of this study will expand career professionals' overall knowledge on how to appropriately support this population and explore commonalities among similar experiences regarding this student population.

*Keywords: Military, Veterans, College, Internships, Experience, Perspectives*

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Introduction**

Taking on an internship in college can provide students with the opportunity to learn the important skills they need to better understand how to perform in a workplace relevant to their career interest. Individuals in the military leave the service with varying levels of understanding towards confidently knowing how to perform successfully in a civilian career work setting. What is important to acknowledge is that career college professionals must not only be able to understand these students but also properly support them in a way that is applicable to their direct needs and capabilities. Learning more about the identities and views of these individuals can help with identifying key factors that may be contingent towards their overall success. Throughout the study, the researcher provides insight gained from reviewing the topic of analyzing veteran students' perception of internships in higher education and explains the relevant information gained from interviewing military and veteran students.

### **Statement of the Problem**

A variety of students who enroll in higher education come from important populations that influence their background and can shape their knowledge or experience. There are cultural or societal influences that can form the personality of an individual before, during, and after their transition into being a student. Military and veteran students who enter college face career preparation challenges after leaving the service and experience a variety of career transition adjustment issues such as difficulties with navigating a new environment, but they can also utilize certain skills that they have practiced using that can help make them beneficial to various fields. When developing support programs, which are created with the concept of improving support for service members and veterans transitioning into higher education, it is vital that applications are focused on establishing an understanding of who these students are and focus on informing them of the factors that are most relevant to their success (Callahan & Jarrat, 2014). It is vital to understand common identity factors and learn more about this population so that career services professional can provide dedicated support to any future military or

veteran students they work with. This population of students is understudied so by exploring how these students navigate new learning environments provides more of an idea of the experiences they typically have compared to traditional college students.

Since it is significantly important for universities and colleges to continuously help successfully prepare students with professional training opportunities that will assist them with gaining a career then they must be properly trained on the best practices on ways to do this successfully. The number of military students and their beneficiaries accessing the military education benefits across the United States has dramatically increased, totaling over billions of dollars' worth of utilized benefits (McCaslin, Leach, Herbst, & Armstrong, 2013). With the increased demand in supporting the needs of these individuals it is important to understand military and veteran students' perceptions of internships in college in order to properly learn how to prepare others who are like apply and work successfully in various career opportunities. If researchers can fill in the gaps in understanding how to properly implement internship training for students in a way that teaches them essential employment quality traits related to their interests and profession, then they can understand how to train themselves to be successful in their field. Building a more thorough understanding of the most relevant skills, traits, and qualities these students will utilize in the workplace will reinforce their motivation and preparation to join the workforce.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to understand veterans' perceptions of transitioning into an on or off-campus internship and identify skills that they use to succeed during their time in higher education. The results found in the data will provide research on how career services professional can gain an understanding of how interested this population of student are in participating in career preparation opportunities. Additionally, the study will help to highlight the most relevant skills military and veteran students use to prepare for career after leaving the service. Understanding these students' backgrounds, experiences, cultures, and goals help with being able to properly assess dysfunctional career thoughts and work with individuals to reduce negative career thinking can have a positive impact on self-esteem and decision-making skills (Buzzetta, Hayden, & Ledwith,

2017). Looking at the unique transition adjustments that military and veteran students typically experience will allow for a deeper understanding how to best prepare to address these issues once they are being faced. Being able to influence positive self-worth or confidence can be a factor that can be influential to these students overall educational and career success.

By better understanding how to link relevant skills with students' perceptions of different industries can improve their capability of being able to adjust their skillset to work in a new environment. This research builds upon the current knowledge regarding challenges of coming into college including the viewpoints of military students on career transition concerns when entering civilian employment opportunities. The field of career counselors needs to recognize that different populations of veterans have distinct needs and face various issues upon departing from active duty and the service (Miles, 2014). Educators, university staff members, and career counseling professional can benefit by being better informed on how to understand these students and develop a better viewpoint of their experiences, so they learn about how to successfully train future military or veteran students.

### **Operational Definitions**

There are important operational words that are mentioned in this research study that must be recognized. The first concept is an internship, which is considered a form of experiential learning, is defined as an opportunity to participate, educate, and make meaning from direct experience (Tucciarone, 2014). For the focus of the study, this is the career preparation program students are discussing and providing their thoughts on. Another vital operational definition that must be discussed is that the concept of skills refers to the level of performance of an individual on a task or the capability to perform a job well, which can be divided into technical elements and behavioral elements (Patacsil & Tablatin, 2017). Students specificity of skill usage is an important aspect that will be reviewed and discussed. Veterans Affairs (2015) defines economic competitiveness as the ability to compete and remain relevant in an ever-changing labor market. The definition of economic competitiveness is important to mention because it is a concept relevant to the research discussion. Regarding employment status, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019) defines the term "unemployed" as those

that do not have a job. Understanding the importance of what unemployment is provides more knowledge to career related motivational factors discussed in this research. Lastly, Grimmit (2018) describes military bearings as being consistent in performing in a professional manner to bring credit upon oneself and maintaining the capability to project a commanding presence and remain confident both on and off duty. When focusing on the emphasis of this study, this term can provide guidance in understanding military and veteran students' mannerisms.

### **Preview of the Literature**

The research related to the topic of veteran's perceptions of internships in higher education shows that students use internship opportunities to better learn the crucial skills or knowledge needed to be competitive in a specialized career. This population of students enter college with various levels of knowledge and experience, but it is important for higher education institutions to properly equip the students enrolled with the tools they need to be professionally successful after graduation because they face issues with unemployment. Among all the unemployed veterans in 2018, 6 percent were age 18 to 24, and 54 percent were age 25 to 54 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). The information related to career transition difficulties helps to inform the study because it provides an overview of how military and veteran students social and emotional experiences could make it difficult when preparing or participating in an internship. When individuals leave the military and enter higher education, they can face a variety of transition issues that they may not normally have experience facing which can lead to negative self-thought.

Military and veteran soldiers encompass multiple qualities that help shape their overall identity and these past experiences change how they perceive the world around them. This population discuss the importance of having the ability and skills needed to successfully carry out their work responsibilities. In order to better prepare themselves for the future employment opportunities these students will use certain attributes they learned in the service to remain competitive and successful in a civilian career. Previous studies regarding harmful attitudes associated with career development found that negative self-thinking can make tasks such as self-discovery and reflection challenging (Sampson, McClain, Musch, & Reardon, 2013). Providing specialized

career support to military and veteran students can be helpful in easing the transition difficulties faced when entering a new working environment but can also guide them in learning how their current skills can be utilized in new areas. In the study it is important to recognize previously identified skills or traits mentioned by other researchers in order to understand if these same findings in this study are consistent with the results received from previous researched participants.

### **Preview of the Methodology**

The design in this study implements a qualitative phenomenological approach to gain a stronger understanding of participants perceptions regarding a specific experience. Using a phenomenological study helped define the experiences or reactions of these students associated with understanding events from their specific perspectives (Mertler, 2016). The process selected for studying the participants included conducting 8 semi structured interviews with military or veteran students through a homogeneous sampling method. This approach was used because it is helpful in identifying any trends, commonalities, or similarities expressed between the group of students being interviewed. This method is supportive for identifying perceptions of events or experience which is important because it can help with identify classifications of individuals beliefs, viewpoints, common experiences. Additionally, it helps with developing a baseline understanding in tracking the various levels of experiences or knowledge each student has gained regarding this research topic.

### **Significance of the Study**

The reasoning for conducting this study is to expand career professional's overall knowledge on how to appropriately understand and support these military and veteran students including recognizing how to expand their skill set in various areas that are related to their major. It is crucial to be able to identify the relevant skills, traits, and qualities these students bring to college after departing from the service. The military can reinforce certain skills that are beneficial to student's ability to prepare to join the civilian workforce and perform successfully once in an internship or full-time career. It can become difficult for military and veteran students to identify and understand how to successfully meet certain civilian expectations but by being able to train professionals to better clarify these demands then it can assist with making their transition adjustment much

easier. Being able to clarify the relevant experiences or skills between typical military job experiences and expectations with civilian professional goals can help with identifying uncertainties these individuals face and provide insight into recognizing what aspects are critical to their professional development.

This study can improve higher education and career professional's success when working with military students because the earlier these individuals can begin to identify, understand, adapt, and practice specific professional qualities then they become more knowledgeable and skilled with implementing this their everyday practice. Students career experience while attending academia rarely gets studied regarding interactions in the workplace, but by better understanding how these students have been previously trained for professional success creates positive opportunities for preparing them for future career accomplishments. Expanding a student's field of expertise is not only beneficial to their educational success, but also will develop their fundamental understanding of their career. Professionals in charge of preparing students to be successful workers could benefit from a clearer understanding of what the most relevant skills and knowledge are in different areas of the military. The more researchers review the best methods of career preparation training for students preparing to work in different industries, then the more relevant traits necessary to be successful in that field can be discovered.

### **Limitations of study**

In this study the results gained are only representative of a small percentage of veteran students located specifically at a private university in southern California. Since there are various branches of the military and various types of higher education institutions then these findings may not directly correlate to the general population of military and veteran students. Additionally, military students can attend a higher education institution in different states or region of the world which could vastly influence the internships demands or expectations. These students may have different experiences than those of the participants involved in this study because different states or geographic locations are known for different industry trades or responsibilities.

Given that the study had a small sample size meant the researcher was not able to gain enough information to appropriately compare demographic differences between participants in the same branches of the

military or between specific branches of the military to see if there were significant differences or similarities. This limited the generalizability of the results because individuals' responses were grouped together to study these students as one combined population but does not explore their perceptions as separate subdivisions. With time and participants restrictions occurring there were limitations in the way participants were recruited to participate in this study because by only receiving information from individuals that chose to volunteer, it may have limited the overall results and created significant bias. It will be discussed that the data received from the participants' experiences is not completely generalizable because many other factors may have influenced these individuals' views of the military, higher education, or internships.

### **Conclusion**

In the beginning of this introductory thesis chapter the researcher provided a brief understanding of topic and the statement of the problem which included an overview of what this chapter will discuss. They then went over key literature findings regarding veterans' difficulties with gaining successful employment and the benefits of being able to transition previous knowledge or training when entering higher education. After that the chapter went over the purpose of the study which was to understand military and veteran students' perceptions of internship in campus including transition experiences they face and skills they use to be successful. Next the significance of exploring this topic which included better informing career services professional on how to help prepare these students for future career success. Then the section discussed a presentation of the relevant literature related to the topic and insight into the phenomenological design developed to conduct the interviews to gain results related to the research study topic. After discussing that methods, the researcher explains that it was important to conduct this study in order to gain more research on how these individual navigate this career related opportunities and identify the ways professionals can better help them overcome the obstacles they face. Lastly this chapter provided an explanation of the operational definition related to this study. In the next chapter the major literature review research topics discussed are the importance of internships on career development, career preparation in higher ed, who are these individuals and why it is crucial to study this population, difficulties these student's face, and how these individual translate their experience into a civilian career.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to understand and review previous research related to veteran students' perceptions of transitioning into an on or off-campus internship and identify skills that they used to succeed during their time in higher education. It was vital to recognize that the better veteran students are at understanding how to describe their prior knowledge and experience, the better prepared they would be when applying to civilian internships. First, I discuss the significance of internships and how these opportunities provide students with the tools they need to be more prepared in their career field. After that, the review outlines who veteran students are and why it was crucial to study this population of students. Next, I explore why career development in higher education is important to professional success and define distinct career development-related concerns that hinder veteran students which requires reviewing how various factors, including anxieties and experiences, hold them back from attempting to gain a career. Then in the chapter, I explore aspects regarding veterans' views on their emotional confidence and negative self-thought with learning how to prepare themselves to achieve a civilian job and translating their skills or knowledge. Lastly, I discuss the concerns related to adjusting to the career preparation demands expected from applying for an internship.

#### **The importance of internship on career development**

An internship, which is considered a form of experiential learning, is defined as an opportunity to participate, educate, and make meaning from direct experience (Tucciarone, 2014). Students use internship opportunities as a way connect their education ambitions to their future career. To advance an individual skillset, students must first gain experience by practicing what they need to learn to be successful through internship preparation. Expanding a student's expertise and self-confidence is not only beneficial to their educational success but will also assist in developing their fundamental understanding of vital career development aspects. Tucciarone (2014) completed a survey that revealed around two-thirds of employers identified that relevant work experience and interview skills are the most crucial factors incorporated in their hiring decisions far more than academic achievements. The importance of this study was to show that

employers want students who are graduating college to enter their employment fields with already prepared professional skills and a direct understanding needed to be successful in that specific industry. Participating in an internship program early on can improve student preparedness for starting a career and can motivate an employer to give a student a better chance to gain employment. Employers are more confident in hiring a student or a recent graduate if they know they are already acclimated to working in this profession. Being able to link college education with career preparation can give insight into the type of work environment students will likely experience and gives a clearer perspective of what one can expect when working in their desired field.

Properly examining the variety of students' perspectives on preparing to work in their field of choice provide an opportunity to discuss anticipations, fears, and the interpretations they have. The academic internship, in conjunction with working internships, offers students unique benefits and experiences that are crucial in developing themselves as professionals in their respective fields of study before graduation (Yin, 2019). In relation to what the previous study mentioned, it was important that students can prepare and practice using career development skills as early as they can in their professional education so that they eventually learn the relevant skills they need to break into their desired field. The ability to make a clear connection between understanding the typical job responsibilities of an internship and the similar expectations from previous roles can help to continuously improve student understanding of how they should be performing which can impact their confidence. This research inspires learners to not only adjust their way of preparing to work, but also encourages them to analyze how their previous work experience has impacted their motivation and current view of their abilities.

Expanding students' level of expertise while they are in college is not only necessary and beneficial to their academic success but can also encourage them to develop a fundamental understanding of their career. Participating in internships support student's professional growth and provides them with an opportunity to apply practical applications of what they learn in the classroom to help clarify career aspirations (Tucciarone, 2014). This study promotes the idea that by being able to participate in an internship helps students break down

and identify concerns related to transitioning into a career but can also be an experience that is used to help encourage self-reflection and challenge one's fears. Students who participated in internships related to university-industry collaboration programs showed an increase in the level of career satisfaction to their vocational understanding because they were now able to gain experience and knowledge that carefully described their professional area of interest (Aktas, Arpacioğlu, & Can, 2018). This showed that when students work in a relevant industry related to their education that interests them it enhanced their learning because they were able to link the knowledge they gained in the classroom and connected it to working in their career.

The research on this topic was limited and does not encompass the vast number of majors and careers, which can create conflicting views on the academic importance of internships. Special populations of students' experiences with internships in college have yet to be studied, including first-generation, undocumented, veteran, and disabled students. There was a lack of empirical evidence from studies on this topic that explain precisely what an "internship experience" looks like compared to real-life practice (Hora, Matthew, & Samantha, 2017). Studying knowledge on what student's perceptions were of internships provided more theoretical understanding on how these work-based opportunities impacted their professional success. Each industry is different and creates unique environments that are not always consistent with other workplace structures and environments.

Internships are a tool that individuals can take part in to better expand their skillset and improve their overall knowledge. This experience prepares students on how to better understand how to be a successful employee in a future industry they plan on working in. Beginning to work in a new sector can cause anxieties and confusion when trying to figure out what qualities are the most important to know or what is significant to learn. Internships provide the opportunity for individuals in different fields to acquire the relevant knowledge that is needed to transition successfully into their future job market. Diverse populations of students in higher education have various career needs, and to better address these concerns, it is important to begin understanding who these individuals are. The focus of this study was to understand the concerns related to underserved sub-population of higher education veteran and military students. This section explored the importance of

participating in an internship because it provides students with an opportunity to participate in their career field and learn the necessary skills, they need to be successful as a professional.

### **Understanding who veteran students are**

To address the needs of student veterans, counselors first must assess who this population is and what support should be provided to help them succeed. Veterans are individuals who previously served on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces and are currently civilians (U.S Department of Labor, 2019). Gaining a better understanding of these students' views and pinpointing their concerns with advancing into a career in their field of interest helps to properly inform academic professionals and realign false views thoughts, such as to encourage more positive perspective-taking. When developing support programs created with the concept of improving support for service members and veterans transitioning into higher education, it is vital that such applications are focused on establishing an understanding of who these students are and focus on informing them of the factors that are most relevant to their success (Callahan & Jarrat, 2014). Learning more about the identity of these individuals explained what tools and experiences they utilize the most when preparing for career after gaining a college degree.

A student's background, demographics, disabilities, and socioeconomic status are all factors that inhibit their ability to reach their professional ambitions. Since there are many other dynamics that have not yet been addressed in previous research to allow for a deeper understanding of how these factors are interwoven in providing support services to these individuals it is necessary to explore this topic. The challenges that returning veteran students face are different depending on their gender, race, or experiences in the military, but most importantly, the fact they are occurring to a prominent amount of students indicates that there is a definitive need to provide tailored services that concentrate on the whole person (Anderson & Goodman, 2014). Every student is unique and not everything is going to work the same for all students so it is important that researchers can better identify how to best support a variety of different factors related to these students' experiences. Using interventions, strategies, and support tools that support the holistic needs of the student will be much more effective in reducing these concerns. Training this population of students on how to use career-

related skills helps them link the practical knowledge they learned in the classroom and service and then connect that expertise to their newly developed career interest. The definition of skills refers to the level of performance of an individual on a task or the capability to perform a job well, which can be divided into technical elements and behavioral elements (Patacsil & Tablatin, 2017).

The more researchers fill in the gaps of recognizing how to implement training for veterans successfully so that they can learn essential employment skills related to their interests, the more confident veterans can become. Skills taught in the military such as teamwork and effective decision making are continuously practiced so when transitioning into higher education or an internship these can often be utilized. It is crucial to recognize that students become more trusting in their ability when they understand the required tasks, skills, or expectations placed on them. Assessing dysfunctional career thoughts and working with individuals to reduce negative career thinking can have a positive impact on self-esteem and decision-making skills (Buzzetta, Hayden, & Ledwith, 2017). Buzzetta confirmed it is essential to identify concerns, fears, and obstacles military and veteran students face when transitioning into a civilian internship. If military and veteran students feel value in what they are doing, they are more inclined to stay motivated to persist when transitioning to a new opportunity.

Knowing the experiences of these students before they enter college can provide a clearer understanding on how they adapt their past knowledge to help support future success. In the military these individuals are prepared to be dedicated and overcome harsh conditions or dangerous obstacles while continuing to move forward through peril, so when transitioning to civilian life they may use determination to adapt their knowledge toward being successful in a new working environment (Hayden & Buzzetta, 2014). This population can face hardships when coming to college so it could be beneficial to institutions to explore these difficulties so that they can identify and understand how they can successfully support these specific students. By understanding who these students are helps professional develop more appropriate support resources that are better tailored to assist them in college. In the next section I will discuss why these students must be better explored and researched.

**Why it is crucial to study military and veteran students**

Military or veteran students and their spouses or dependents are enrolling in higher education colleges and universities, and it is the institution's ethical responsibility to support their needs successfully. Congress put into action legislation that focuses on the requirements for education and career counseling supports for veteran students including, expanding career counseling options for veteran students enrolled in post-secondary institutions (Cahill & Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, 2013). This legal sanction showed that it is ever so important to successfully prepare this population of students to start understanding how to earn a career while enrolled in college. Being able to gain meaningful employment can provide service members positive psychosocial assistance, including the ability to cope with anxiety and challenges, provides increased collaboration and communication with coworkers, and improved feelings of meaning in one's life (Hayden & Buzzetta, 2014). When a military or veteran student participates in a job that they feel is significant to their success it helps them deal with concerns much easier, can improve their overall self-worth, and can increase how much they value themselves. These students sense of importance in their work is something can benefit them in their future career if they feel that what they are doing is valuable.

The field of career counselors needs to recognize that different populations of veterans have distinct needs and face various issues upon departing from active duty and the service (Miles, 2014). This study implies that there is not enough of an understanding of these students by career professionals, so they need to develop an improved comprehension of how these students interact once they enter higher education. The number of military students and their beneficiaries accessing the military education benefits across the United States has dramatically increased, totaling over billions of dollars' worth of utilized benefits (McCaslin, Leach, Herbst, & Armstrong, 2013). With the number of these students increasing it is more apparent that career professionals will be expected to understand how to prepare these students for professional success. The benefits veterans use to gain a post-secondary degree provide a substantial amount of federal funding and revenue to higher educational institutions (Cahill and Council for Adult and Experimental Learning, 2013). This revenue is important to colleges, so it is vital that they provide direct support to these students, so they continue to stay

enrolled and employed. Colleges and universities should assist veterans by helping them achieve greater professional understanding and help them understand how to get hired at a job so that they continue to maintain economically competitive against one another or with the general population (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015). Being able to successfully meet the qualifications to obtain a career in a desired employment field is an essential factor to these students' value in their abilities and their overall self-worth. The Department of Veterans Affairs (2015) defines economic competitiveness as the ability to compete and remain relevant in an ever-changing labor market.

The veteran population encompasses many qualities that are different than the traditional-aged college student and require targeted approaches that match their unique needs. When these students can persevere and adapt to their new surroundings then this can be a benefit to their career success but when they have self-doubt and a negative outlook on themselves it can discourage their abilities. Miles' (2014) study found that employment concerns are the most frequently cited concerns for returning veterans. It is important to recognize that the veterans discussed in this previous research share similar concerns related to what the military and veteran students face in higher education. Soldiers are prepared to take charge and can follow direction well so if they can maintain this way of thinking when transitioning into a civilian career related to their education it can positively support their employment preparation process.

Research shows that leadership roles and supervisor positions in the military do not use the same language as civilian jobs therefore individuals are not sure how the terminology and skills, they have gained transfer to relevant generalizable experience. Most veterans report having difficulty translating the unique language and acronyms they have become accustomed to during their military service into language that is meaningful to civilians (Buzzetta, et al., 2017). For example, students in Buzzetta, et al (2017) study mentioned being unsure on how to explain the importance of their specific military leadership rankings properly to a civilian employer in a way where they would understand and recognize the importance of this accomplishment. Learning how these students navigate these barriers provides career professionals with an opportunity to understand how they can teach other students how to succeed as well in the future of their work. The more

opportunities for military personnel to gain a better understanding of their professional experiences, reflect on previous military employment roles, and learn how to accurately describe their experiences in a way that can connect to internship in college will benefit their overall idea of their qualifications (Buzzetta 2015) Knowing that they are participating in an opportunities towards being able to work in a field they enjoy will give these students a better sense of connected to their career.

An essential career-related topic explored is why student veterans are often faced with career conflict on college campuses. Understanding how to better support student veterans not only benefits career services offices but also provide more in-depth knowledge on how to better understand this population (Lange, Sears, & Osborne, 2016). Both colleges or universities and their counselors must dedicate time to prepare themselves to learn how to provide guidance to this population is important. Nonmilitary students, faculty, and administrators are not always educated on how to properly support veteran students and often have a minimal amount of knowledge or sense of understanding regarding the importance of military training and leadership (Callahan & Jarrat, 2014). By improving the knowledge related to the skills these students use in the military and transition to the civilian careers such as perseverance, adaptability, problem solving, and leadership can encourage career counselors overall understanding of the to teach other military students to identify these traits in themselves. When these students know how to use these skills in a new environment it will help them excel in their career.

Studying the military and veteran populations enrolled in higher education was not only necessary to improve the sense of awareness regarding these students but also identified a direct need to begin implementing programs that recognize their uniqueness and provides intentional guidance. Analyzing job exploration difficulties with transitioning existing knowledge and other career concerns in the broader context related to military service members' and veterans' observations assisted in providing professionals in higher education with the appropriate knowledge so they can improve the quality of their services (Buzzetta, et al., 2017). Being able to adequately offer relevant career support to these students in college can be a significant factor in improving their overall understanding of their skills and can provide them with the tools they need to be

confident in their abilities so that they can perform successfully. The more we can explore this topic, the better we can understand veteran students' perception of internships.

The research involving the significance of the impact of internships on military and veteran students' career success is lacking empirical evidence. Research related to conducting an assessment and reviewing the influence of internships on unemployment rates for veterans and college students, is minimal (Hora, et al., 2017). Reviewing this population's experiences and expectations involving internships assisted with improving how professionals gain employment opportunities and can additionally help them navigate essential factors of concern that can arise, such as doubt in skills, limited career understanding, difficulties with transitioning to civilian or educational environments, and obstacles limiting professional growth. In this section it explored that the better researchers and career professionals are at understanding military and veteran students' needs so that then they can develop better preparation systems to meet the challenges they face and better prepare them for future career opportunities.

### **Difficulties veterans/military students face when coming back to a civilian lifestyle**

Active duty military men or women and former servicemembers face challenges associated with returning to school to earn a formal degree after being away from traditional education for such a vast amount of time. The problems veteran students face includes not only learning to navigate the labor market but also the higher education system (Cahill and Council for Adult and Experimental Learning, 2013). In the military soldiers are trained to not go against their superior officers and follow their orders but in college they are asked to be practice independence and self advocacy which often encourages them to challenge ideas or behaviors that were once routinely followed. When entering a college environment where there is no direct command to follow or ranking structure that they are expected to adhere to it can create adjust complications. Entering college and experiencing this environment for the first time can be overwhelming for this population of students because they are used to being around a hierarchal leadership dynamic where they were never expected to self-advocate and challenge the status quo (Callahan & Jarrat, 2014). Military and veteran students who can understand what is going on around them and adapt to these shifts are able to reduce some of the difficulties

related to transitioning. Many students may not have had a non-service-related employment position in their field of interest, which can create difficulties for their success but if they use skills such as teamwork and problem solving, they can understand how to find internships in college. By seeking guidance and asking the questions that could lead them to better understanding of the exploration and application process for gaining employment they will be more capable of gaining successful employment.

A challenge that military and veteran students face is trying to link the relevance of their experience in the service and translate these skills successfully so that they can stand out when applying to jobs. Military service members and veterans face difficulties that affect their ability to successfully obtain a career, such as reintegrating into civilian society, transition readiness preparation, issues with job searching, and difficulty in understanding how military skills translates to civilian employment opportunities (Buzzetta, et al., 2017). This study spotlighted the essential aspects that needed to be better explored through conducting more direct research with these individuals. Understanding that specialized encouragement was needed to support these groups of students better is just the first step in creating an atmosphere that encourages their success. The more intimidated and anxious an individual becomes about applying to a job, the less likely they will continue pursuing that career (Hayden & Buzzetta, 2014). The more assured these students were with being able to meet the challenges and demands of a civilian job then the more successful they likely will be at using their military training to help them perform successfully. It was essential to recognize that not every student function in the same way, but this group of individuals had unique characteristics and identities that needed to be addressed when working with a career professional.

Developing a clear connection to understanding the veteran population's concerns involved with gaining an internship assisted in reducing the anxieties and difficulties they face when transitioning into their profession. Callahan and Jarrat (2014) suggest that student service members and veterans often require guidance on when it is appropriate to express their apprehensions and should be encouraged to voice these concerns when necessary. Veterans in Callahan and Jarrat (2014) study mentioned needing guidance on knowing how to talk about apprehensions because they felt the military was not a encouraging setting that welcomed them to express

concerns they were facing because they have typically been trained to disregard any negative thinking that hindered performance. Knowing the best ways to address situations when they occur and being able to advise students how to manage this anxiety when it occurs can provide positive support to these students over all self-worth. Boosting this populations confidence in college will allow them to trust in themselves to be a stronger leader and motivate them stay maintain the dedication they had when serving their country while they are working in college. Veterans can benefit enormously from having open conversations about employment-related worries that they are facing from transitioning and should also begin practicing navigating decision-making now that they are no longer living in an environment where the military controls their actions and career choices (Miles, 2014). Each education field requires different focuses on understanding how to accurately carry out various tasks and have strict guidelines on how to complete objectives or goals in a precise way so it is important that these individuals figure out what the expectations are so that they can meet or exceed them.

Being able to explore the common traits linked with the career preparation anxieties of military and veteran students will better allow for professionals to learn how to guide these individuals more effectively. Career counselors in colleges and universities must understand how to prepare these students for selecting an internship that accurately matches their career interests, values, and overall satisfaction. Self-knowledge and self-esteem play a direct role in the client's career-planning process and is comprised of an individual's knowledge of his or her values, confidence, interests, skills, and employment preferences (Hayden, 2014). These qualities were important to review because by supporting these students we can better prepare to understand what skills they feel are most important to their professional success. This research implied that career counselors must be able to improve these qualities of an individual which will not only boost their self-esteem but will prepare them for gaining successful employment through an internship.

If career counselors are not recognizing and supporting the needs of veteran students, it can increase their chances of not completing their education and increasing their odds of becoming unemployed. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019) defines the term "unemployed" as those that do not have a job. Among all the unemployed veterans in 2018, 6 percent were age 18 to 24, and 54 percent were age 25 to 54 (U.S. Bureau of

Labor Statistics, 2019). This study showed that at least half of the unemployed veterans having difficulties finding a job had this happen to them once they became older in age. When these students work with career advising professionals, they are expecting that they will be given instructions and tools to help them understand and prepare for gaining successful employment. Career counseling resources that both assess and enhance confidence in this population of students may help them achieve greater overall satisfaction in their post-military career (Roberson & Brott, 2014). These individuals who are facing difficulties gaining successful employment right after leaving the service will try to find an organization that can train them for a new profession or try to talk with someone who can guide or teach them how to successfully apply to a job, which can often include entering or returning to college for reeducation. Coming to higher education already being trained on how to be a responsible, self-sufficient, and effective communicator will be beneficial to these students because this can benefit them managing high stressful situations or when performing under pressure in a new civilian employment field.

Veterans who have spent a good portion of their life in the service may have a lack of awareness of civilian employment options (Hayden & Buzzetta, 2014). Some students may have entered the service right after graduating high school and may have never had a civilian job or non-military experience navigating a workplace. Identifying these issues, analyzing the situation, understanding the choices available, and finalizing a choice are all aspects that were discussed when studying the perceptions of military or veteran student's views on career decision making concerns. Previous studies regarding harmful attitudes associated with career development found that negative self-thinking can make tasks such as self-discovery and reflection challenging (Sampson, McClain, Musch, & Reardon, 2013). This research showed that when student veterans feel more confident in their overall professional capabilities, they are more likely to understand how previous skills gained from prior experience can be transferred to their current career ambitions. If veteran students have a positive view of internships in college it may improve their likelihood of identifying military related skills such as dedication and responsibility that could be utilized in future work opportunities. Successfully enhancing

veteran students' problem-solving skills are necessary for improving their ability to think independently, analyze critically, and identify concerns that can arise when making complex decisions.

The researchers found that dysfunctional thinking during the decision-making process can negatively influence rational decisions for veteran students (Hayden, Ledwith, Shengli, & Buzzetta, 2014). When making illogical choices the student veteran may not feel satisfaction in the choices they are making, the solutions they are creating, and how they approach certain situations. These research findings on negative and positive self-thinking had an impact on veteran students' self-esteem, overall confidence, and motivation to apply for a future career. If there was any doubt or disbelief in one's own capability it can cause them to lose faith in their ability to be a successful worker.

Researchers have found that student veterans' confidence in their thoughts and readiness for the college-to-career transition correlated to their overall life satisfaction with a career decision (Robertson, 2020). These findings showed that these students' belief in their professional ability encourages happiness and appreciation for their profession. Being satisfied with the choices these students are making can help improve their confidence in their profession which can motivate them to better manage employment problems they could be facing. The more these individuals feel they are better equipped to complete the tasks and duties expected from them then the more likely they will be effective communicators and dedicated employees in the workplace. Assessing for dysfunctional career thoughts and working with individuals to reduce negative career thinking can have a positive impact on the knowledge and decision-making skills (Hayden, et al., 2014). This research informs career professionals on how they can train military and veteran students on how to refrain from being influenced by negative self-thought, which will have a positive influence on their overall self-esteem and belief in their abilities.

The research findings related to difficulties these students face including negative self-esteem, self-confidence and self-thinking can lead to sabotaging behavior that could potentially hinder an individual's professional success, so career counselors need to know how to address these difficulties when they face this. By knowing how provide direct support to work with these students to address and alter this behavior

counselors will have a positive impact on helping them become more confident in what they think and do. Having these students have a positive belief and view of themselves will lead to an improvement in their ability to engage with employers and feel satisfied with the work they are doing while in college. Career counselors may not understand the research related to veteran student's negative self-view difficulties they experience in college, so this knowledge informs these professionals how to address and navigate these difficulties. By successfully shaping these individuals' perceptions of themselves then they will have belief in themselves that they are making the right career choices.

If individuals are not gaining opportunities to become engaged in their profession or receive the chance to explore their interests, there is a chance they will become disengaged with finishing their degree and lose the possibility of acquiring their perspective career. Professional work experience makes students more marketable to employers who prefer to hire people with fewer risks, and job seekers who have proved themselves by completing an internship are less risky than someone with no practical work experience at all (Yin, 2019). This showed that employers are looking for applicants who are participating in these work-based learning opportunities and feel these are a using system for preparing new hires. Military and veteran student's previous knowledge involving adjusting to change and their willingness to be trained will benefit their success in an internship. Taking part in internships that is linked to one's future aspirations helps prepares students for applying to professional careers directly related to their interest while also ensuring that the student is a qualified and viable candidate.

This section identifies and explains the various challenges and difficulties this population faces when returning to civilian life including cultural adjustment issues, navigating environmental differences regarding leadership structure or self-management, and lack of awareness on what to expect once transitioning. It also discussed the specific skills and knowledge military and veteran students bring through their military service that can be used to successfully gain employment. Additionally, it discusses the impact negative self-thinking has on veteran or military students' self-esteem, ability to decide and ability to prepare for a future career. Next it discussed how these difficulties impact career professionals and employers. The next section will explain how

career preparation opportunities in college help military students transition to civilian employment opportunities successfully and help with overcoming difficulties these individuals face.

### **Career preparation and higher education**

On and off-campus internships help students lessen the transitional adjustments and anxieties involved with having to move from learning about these industries to gaining first-hand work experience in the field. The shift from military service to civilian life often is described as a transition, a term commonly used by career counselors to understand life changes (Miles, 2014). Transitions occur frequently in a military or veteran student's life so they may be able to adapt but not always so when needed career counselors must be informed on how to provide dedicated support for this dilemma. The key aspects involved with assisting a student to overcome career-related concerns when transitioning into college include technical knowledge, decision-making skills, and self-exploration (Hayden, et al., 2014). Employment barriers hindering military and veteran students go unrecognized if they are not expressed by the student, making them more challenging to identify. If a student expresses these concerns with a counselor, then it is important that this individual is trained on the proper procedures that can help change these dilemmas.

One of the most significant concerns is that veterans, on average, experience unemployment at a higher rate than their civilian counterparts, but by implementing career-focused interventions designed to assist this population, it can improve their overall employment success (Hayden, et al., 2014). This research showed that if dedicated career support is not provided to this population of students then they are more likely to face issues establishing a successful career. Service members leaving the military have expressed that gaining stable employment was a critical component that assisted with helping their ability to readjust into civilian society (Hayden & Buzzetta, 2014). Being able to practice working in an area before committing to a career choice can increase a student's sense of understanding and interest in that job. This highlighted just how important career development opportunities are to veterans because it provides them with meaningful work can create a sense of purpose in their lives and influence life-long satisfaction regarding their education or employment (Miles,

2014). When these students find a sense of purpose in the work, they are completing it only makes them more dedicated to being successful.

Scholars have yet to gain a clear understanding of how students manage different identities as workers or navigate dueling perception (Brooks, 2014). Being able to learn the aspects related to how this population performs using these dual roles provides researcher with a deeper understanding of who these individuals are. Having such a limited range of studies regarding veterans' experiences in higher education makes it difficult to compare research findings across disciplines and makes identifying a uniformed set of standardized expectations nearly impossible. Understanding the skills, traits, qualities, and factors that are stringent for improving their success will help students properly reinforce their knowledge and better prepare to join the workforce. As stated by Yin (2019), when students leave their comfortable surroundings, it forces them to face some real challenges in an unfamiliar environment, which is like what they will also experience after college. By exploring this research, it helped prepare military and veteran students for future career success and provides them with an understanding of how to successfully obtain employment after leaving the military.

### **Military and veteran students' ability to prepare for their career**

Being a competitive applicant is an essential factor involved in successfully achieving employment in one's specific area of knowledge. Some correlations exist regarding specific skills industries require and those which students possess; however, knowledge of individual technical and technological skills is still lacking (Patacsil & Tablatin, 2017). This research shows that there are some relevant findings found related to skills needed in specific industries but there is still no exact match discovered throughout every career opportunity. Career counselors can use this information to inform the way they give tailored advice to military and veteran students in specific industries as well as linking previous skills or knowledge to this new employment field. With innovative careers and industries currently being created, it is more difficult to know how to best prepare and train students for these brand-new job markets. If someone wants to transition into a new industry, it is crucial that they adopt, connect, or relate their skills to the expectations of those careers. The challenge is trying to enable students to realize how broad critical competencies and aligned skills improve their employment

opportunities in a highly economically competitive market (Patacsil & Tablatin, 2017). Gaining employment experience is crucial in understanding what areas of development are significant to this industry, and it also allows you to reduce concerns that come with having minimal preparation or understanding.

Participating in a relevant job while attending college can improve a student's ability to recognize and practice using industry skills that are important to their field. Individuals who have served in the military face transition difficulties when beginning to work in the civilian sector, because previously there had always been controlled by another entity that oversaw their own career decisions, so this new aspect of freedom becomes a challenging concept (Roberson & Brott, 2014). Not knowing how to act independent is something that can make students feel apprehension when faced with having to be responsible for their own professional career. By being self-sufficient and utilizing problem solving skills these students use this knowledge to help them better adjust to these new roles. Establishing departments on campus that provide appropriate support services to these individuals will help reduce issues involved with adapting to the institutional culture.

### **Translating military experience into civilian career skills and relating it to their field**

Military and veteran students must be able to learn how to explain their most salient skills and past experiences in a pleasing way that is most relevant and specific to their career choice. With the prevalent demand for military and veterans' concerns needing to be addressed regarding career development support, researchers must study ways in which career professionals can effectively address these issues as they become increasingly relevant (Buzzetta, et al, 2017). Researching veterans' perspectives on internship preparation and selection improved their ability to know how to be successful not only in their studies but also in achieving a professional career in their respective fields. Developing a range of transferable and soft skills can also help veterans recognize the value of their military experiences (Miles, 2014). By identifying and clarifying more expectations involving career responsibilities, researchers create a straightforward understanding of career expectations. The researcher can reduce preparedness gaps that hinder these students from gaining successful employment.

Military and veteran students are enrolling in college with various levels of professional experience and career knowledge including having a strong work ethic, adapting to challenges or change, and perseverance to succeed. Understanding how to teach military and veteran students accurately on how to transition these applicable career-related skills to their current civilian career will help present them as more knowledgeable applicants who already have experience working in their desired industry. Research has found that previous experience is critical to employers, perhaps even more so than education, and can also be obtained by participating in an internship (Tucciarone, 2014). The practical knowledge and understanding veterans gain in the service, and the classroom is more relevant than they might realize and can help reduce the concerns that they have regarding pursuing their career interests which is why career professionals must be prepared to address this in their everyday work.

The more we as researchers review the best methods of career preparation training for students who are preparing to work in different industries, the more relevant traits necessary to be successful in that field can be discovered. It was found that veteran students have difficulty identifying and securing jobs that are relevant to their skills, experiences, and interests (Cahill and Council for Adult and Experimental Learning, 2013). This research showed that it is even more important that career professionals can teach military and veteran students how to solve this problem and identify previous knowledge that could help prepare them for this future concern. If counselors are unable to prepare this population, these students may continue facing these career concerns throughout their education and even after they graduate. This section discussed the importance of helping these individuals establish a successful and satisfying careers which can significantly improve their self-esteem and confidence, but this requires them being able to successfully transfer past knowledge to currently support their career interest.

### **Summary**

Participating in an internship while gaining a degree in higher education can prepare students by teaching them professional development skills related to their career interests and provides them with an opportunity to understand how to establish meaningful employment successfully. Military and veteran students

are a unique population of individuals that are increasingly enrolling in college and universities after leaving the service, and they are transitioning into these higher educational institutions having various levels of knowledge and experience. These individuals are entering college with experience in problem solving, leadership, perseverance, effective decision making, communication and adaptability skills. Internship experience for veterans can be a successful tool that could better prepare them to transfer these skills towards obtaining a civilian career. It is critical to explore this population of students because they often face difficulties gaining successful employment and often experience transition anxiety that hinders their confidence. Being able to understand better ways to help service members transfer their experience in the military in a way that is relevant to their future career will be a way to help them understand how to adjust to the demands of applying to a civilian internship or job.

The next chapter discusses the methods used in this study to explore veteran students' experiences, concerns, and the difficulties they face when trying to transition into a different lifestyle and employment system. Through a qualitative study the researcher interviewed participants to explore the various traits or skills a veteran student utilizes to help them be more successful when applying to a job and analyze the perceptions of military and veteran students regarding their thoughts, experiences, and feelings when trying to apply to a civilian internship on or off-campus. Interviewing individuals that have formally served or are currently serving in the military and who are active college students provided meaningful informational related to understanding these individual's career-related talents and difficulties.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology

The purpose of this study was to understand military and veteran students' perceptions of transitioning into an on or off-campus internship and to identify career-related skills that they use when applying to jobs. After reviewing the previous literature related to this topic it is important to recognize how the researcher developed their research design to better study this population. First, I will discuss the importance of using a qualitative approach to interview and study students who have served in the military. Next, this chapter will discuss the types of questions included when designing the structure of the study and how this population was gathered to gain this data. Then the researcher will review the participants' demographics, the site setting, and procedures. Lastly, this chapter will look at the analysis of the study, positionality, and limitations. Expanding upon veteran students' experiences with gaining an internship in college and understanding how they prepare themselves to achieve a civilian career will help provide more insight into how career counselors can support these individuals' needs better.

### Research Design

This research involved a qualitative study that identified commonalities between the participants' thoughts and feelings regarding their interpretations of gaining an internship in college. Qualitative research involves collecting, analyzing, and clarification of data and descriptions that give insights into an exciting trend (Mertler, 2016). Using this form of measurement for the study provided the researcher with a stronger understanding of the students' perspectives, experiences, and skills utilized to help them succeed. The researcher implemented an approach that reviews various aspects of an individual and uses multiple ways to interpret these experiences and how they make meaning from these moments.

Using a phenomenological study helped define the experiences or reactions of these students associated with understanding events from their specific perspectives (Mertler, 2016). Depending on how military and veteran students make meaning of an outcome will influence and shape how they develop a sense of understanding regarding how to better navigate career employment-related experiences in college. Individuals

perceive situations differently, so was crucial when reviewing participants' results that the researcher identifies both different classifications of individual perceptions and seemingly typical experiences. The researcher used this format for the study because it does not create questions that have a right or wrong answer but require more thoughtful reflection on a critical moment for these students.

With this type of approach, the researcher can develop a close relationship between the participants, which makes it easy for the participant to contribute to shaping the research (Eyisi, 2016). As educators, we study how individuals and groups construct self-determination knowledge around moments they experience in higher education and how they utilize this knowledge to overcome obstacles, improve their overall well-being, and reinforce the correct career readiness skills. Studying the holistic needs of this populations' behaviors provided opportunities to examine how they communicate their thought processes, the structure of how they reason, identity factors, and standards for practice regarding this experience (Eyisi, 2016). Gaining an outsider perspective is what is beneficial in learning how these students operate in higher education.

Without having a direct understanding of the problems these individuals face, then there is no validity in testing for anything specific. The population will self-identify concerns or difficulties they are facing through interviews, and then the researcher will use this data to help develop a rationale for studying this topic. Acquiring the perspective of this population of students allowed the researcher not to influence or promote a specific idea. Understanding uncertainties these individuals face provided insight into recognizing what aspects are critical to successful professional development.

It benefited the research to identify links between this population of students and what traits are similar and which are different. Being able to work directly with this community allowed the researcher the opportunity to better understand and gain insight into these student's identities more than if they were surveyed. A limitation of this method included being unable to compare the amount of difference between the participants' responses. The research was not be able to define an exact level of how well they feel confident with being able to use a specific skill. The researcher's results cannot be analyzed numerically, which can lead to a higher chance for misinterpretation or create bias views when looking at the data. Additionally, this approach can be difficult to

replicate because it can be interpreted differently depending on the researcher or findings can be inaccurate or misleading (Eyisi, 2016).

### **Instrumentation**

When interviewing students, it was vital to review demographic information because it was essential when considering the participant's length of time served in the military and the amount of time since they have left the military. It was also necessary to look at how many years of full-time work experience the participant had, what is the highest degree earned, and how many internships have they currently participated in as a student. Also, the researcher tracked the generalizable age gap, gender, and ethnicity of the participant. All these factors were built in an online form (Appendix D) that was filled out when signing up to take part in the study. It was crucial to acquire this information to gain a better understanding of identity factors related to the participant's background that are significant to consider.

The research design involved a semi-structured approach to interviewing military and veteran students enrolled in higher education. This form of collecting data was supportive in identifying consistent trends or themes occurring to these students during the experience of applying for an internship. It was necessary to recognize and review issues or difficulties this population faces and gaining a better understanding by hearing their perspective on this situation which can present authentic feedback. Allowing participants to openly express their thoughts and feelings without being confined to a limited frame or structure created a more welcoming environment conducive of motivating openness and communication.

Since the researcher used a qualitative method to gain a deeper understanding of these students by receiving direct information, it allowed for an exploratory approach that can identify what the most salient issues that should be recognized or observed are. Reviewing concepts involving reflection and reflective thinking come from phenomenology and are fundamentally important to a wide range of research in education (Lukenchuk, 2006). Using this method allowed participants to discuss strategies they used to succeed, and the skills they felt were useful in achieving an internship. Since these questions did not require measuring or scaling ability but more about commonalities among traits, it was more likely that the participants felt comfortable with

providing a response and having their results be comparable.

When implementing this interview (Appendix E), it was important to ask what the participant's experience was with working in an internship in college and what they think had most prepared them to apply to an internship in college. It was essential to develop a baseline in understanding the various levels of these student's internship experiences. It was also vital to look at what military students think has most prepared them to work in an internship while in college and to describe any instructions or training that they were given to prepare them for this experience. It was important to understand the amount of training these individuals have gain previously the military.

Lastly the researcher asked the participant to discuss ways that they have prepared for applying to internships and how that has made them feel. Learning what the participants considered to be easy, confusing, or things they had minimal experience with was essential to review. Learning what skills these students felt were the most important when working in an internship was helpful to recognize similar traits and identify factors related to their experiences which provide better personal insight. These nine questions were given out on a semi-structured interview scale through paper, web, and phone. To recognize if these are important questions to ask, the researcher consulted with a veteran's coordinator at this interview site.

### **Participants**

The population in the study consisted of college veteran/military students enrolled in higher education institutions who were preparing to transition into civilian employment opportunities. These students were from various branches of the armed service and have a fluctuating level of years that they have been enlisted in the United States military. The length of time since the participants have last served varied between each person. The educational ambitions and identities of these students differed, so it was important to discuss both their general feelings and what thoughts they had about gaining an internship. These participants were often older than traditional-aged college students and were accustomed to stricter regimented lifestyles, which can be different than the typical university learning environment.

These participants carried multiple identities that included being a soldier/veteran, student, mother or

father, and various other characteristics, so these aspects of their lives must be acknowledged and reviewed. The students studied have multiple levels of understanding of how to successfully utilize their skills and gain employment. Some of these individuals may have been a first-generation college student, and others had family members that have obtained a college degree. The students' demographics ranged in age, race, gender, and learning goals. Many participants involved in this study were males because there is a higher percentage of this gender enlisted in the military. According to the Postsecondary National Policy Institute (2019), in 2014, 73% of student veterans were male, and 27% were female. Still even with this current data, the researcher attempted to reach out and include female participants if possible.

The researcher applied a homogeneous sampling method to determine the participants to be interviewed for this research because all the students being studied needed to share the similar traits of being a veteran student in college. This sampling method reviewed specific sites or entities because they possess the same qualities or characteristics (Mertler, 2016). After carefully identifying the aspects of the participants that were salient, including previous military involvement and enrollment in college, the researcher then used a site that occupied these students so that all those incorporated in this office shared that requested identity (Mertler, 2016). The researcher interviewed individuals that were recruited from a university Veterans resource center. Going to where this audience spent their time and visited frequently provided an ample amount of opportunity to find students that fit this category. The researcher reached out to the coordinator at this department to be granted permission to recruit students out of this office. These individuals were asked to participate in the study and decided they would like to take part in the interview.

To inform students about the study, the coordinator at the veteran's center sent out an email blast (Appendix A) to the entire group of veteran students on the campus, requesting their participation or if they knew any individuals who would be willing. The email asked if any military or veteran students at the university would like to participate in an interview regarding career-related skill development and internship experience in college. The correspondence provided the researcher's email, information on how long the study will be, and delivered instructions on how to sign up (Appendix B). Students signed up in the Veteran's

resource center as well. This study was strictly voluntary and permitted anyone interested to sign up. To gain a more substantial amount of input and find more people, the researcher also utilized snowball sampling (Mertler, 2016) and asked existing participants to recommend other students that matched this specific population. Receiving referrals from military students who know other individuals in the same network provided additional participation involvement.

### **Demographic data analysis**

When reviewing demographic information, it was essential to consider the length of time in the service, what branch of the military they served in, the amount of time since they last enlisted. Additionally, the research included questions regarding race and ethnicity, gender, and age. It was essential to cross-compare these categories to distinguish if there was any recognizable similarities or distinct differences between these groups. By reviewing multiple aspects related to the students' identities it allowed the researcher to look more in-depth to varying characteristics of this population.

Participants involved in the study were between the ages of 26 to 40, which placed them out of the range of traditional-aged college students. Out of a group of eight participants, two participants (25%) were female and six participants (75%) were male. The military branch percentages of participants who were interviewed showed that four participants (50%) were from the Army, two participants (25%) were from the Marines, one participant (12.5%) was in the Navy, and one participant (12.5%) came from the Air Force. Half of the participants (50%) served in the military between four to eight years, and the other half of the participants (50%) served in the military for 10 to 18 years. Three participants (37.5%) were still active duty military, and the other five participants (62.5%) had been out of the military for four years or less.

Five participants (62.5%) had not participated in any internships, two participants (25%) participated in one internship, and one participant (12.5%) participated in two internships. Seven of the participants (87.5%) had zero, or less than a year's worth, of experience in an internship while attending college. All of the participants (100%) were working toward earning a bachelor's degree. The participants' ethnicities included four Latino (50%), one Caucasian (12.5%), one Pacific Islander (12.5%), and two mixed races (25%).

The similarities and differences in demographics of the participants are summarized in the table below:

Participant	Age	Gender	Military Branch	Length of time in the military	Internship participated in	Degree	Ethnicity	Currently Enlisted or Veteran
Daniel	26-40	Male	U.S. Air Force	6 years 7 months	0	Bachelors	White/Mexican	Veteran
James	26-40	Male	U.S. Army	4 years 3 months	0	Bachelors	Caucasian	Veteran
Shawn	26-40	Male	U.S. Navy	14 Years	2	Bachelors	Pacific Islander	Veteran
Sandy	26-40	Female	U.S. Marine Corps	4 years	0	Bachelors	Latino	Veteran
Nomad	26-40	Male	U.S. Marine Corps	17 years	1	Bachelors	Latino	Currently Enlisted
Lia	26-40	Female	U.S. Army	8 years	1	Bachelors	Latino	Currently enlisted
Muscles	26-40	Male	U.S. Army	10 years 7 months	0	Bachelors	Latin	Veteran
Bravo	26-40	Male	U.S. Army	11 years 6 months	0	Bachelors	Asian/White	Currently Enlisted

**Setting/Site**

The researcher primarily reached out to students that were enrolled at a small private religious four-year university in southern California. The university enrolled a diverse student population and is identified as being a Hispanic serving institution. There were over 4,000 students enrolled at this campus, and there were more than 700 jobs on campus dedicated to student employment. This institution had an educational curriculum, including undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs.

Since the researcher was utilizing a snowball sampling method to reach out to participants at the campus, there was a chance that students outside the university could have gained access to this study. To reduce this outcome, the researcher checked each student's school identification card and restricted interviewing only to those enrolled on campus. By only selecting results from one setting it provided consistent data pulled from the same location, which reduced any site differences. Using one site for the study lessened the concerns for anomalies or outliers to occur from outside involvement.

**Procedures**

After obtaining IRB approval, the researcher established communication with a prospective applicant expressing interest in participating and obtained their informed consent (Appendix C) through email. The researcher worked to find available time and preferred method of communication. When the student decided to meet in person, the researcher reserved a private room at the university where they conducted the interview. It is necessary to have a private space so that the student felt safe expressing their thoughts.

The researcher let the participant know the qualifications involved with taking part in the interview: they told them that their involvement was entirely voluntary, the information they provided was entirely confidential, and that at any point in the process, they could choose to stop participating. The researcher gave the participants a list of questions before the interview began so that they were given a moment to review and formulate their thoughts. The researcher asked for the participant's permission to be audio or video recorded and documented their response. The researcher explained how they will use this information to enhance their research knowledge and was used to associate thoughts and behaviors among students with similar backgrounds.

The researcher also informed the participant that they will take the appropriate steps to protect their information, including names or identifiable features, by locking their data in a cabinet, and password encrypting the interview recordings so that a limited amount of people can access it. It was crucial to clearly outline these opening aspects of the research to the participant, so they were aware of what they are taking part in and so they were informed about how this information will be used. Before the interview began, it was essential to ask if there were any questions or concerns about moving forward. It was important to remind the participant how many general questions they were going to be asked and reminded that they could face follow up questions regarding these general questions. The students were told that they were not limited to a specific amount of time to answer any of the questions but to provide in-depth experience perspectives so that the researcher can receive ample amounts of information. On average, each interview was about 45 minutes to one hour.

When the interview began, the researcher refrained from expressing any specific type of emotion and did not display favoritism towards a kind of response. By only moderating the situation and providing the student with a channel to express their thoughts they were not influence the interview. There were times where the researcher asked the participant to clarify their thoughts or feelings if their answer was too broad. Still, the overall goal was to limit as much researcher involvement so that the participant was not influenced to respond in a specific way. The researcher limited their position in the situation, so there was a more significant opportunity to receive more authentic results and information. As the interview concluded, the researcher asked the participant if they had any questions about the discussion or any related thoughts or concerns. The student was thanked for their participation. Then the meeting was transcribed into a word document.

### **Analysis**

When reviewing the results gained from the interviews, it was essential to start by identifying trends and commonalities between the skills the veteran students were utilizing and their experiences with gaining an internship in college. The process of analyzing this data involved utilize multiple coding iterations which was used to gather group data patterns together to provide similar types of information regarding trends (Mertler,

2016). This population of individuals provided an understanding of the difficulties they faced, and the researcher compared those experiences to other participants in the study. The goal for reviewing the data was to look for aspects of the information that answered the research questions, provided more information and challenges to current or future practice, or guided future professional practices (Mertler, 2016). To better explore this topic, the researcher gathered information that was relevant to their lived experiences. Whether an interest was significant depended on reviewing specific conditions and was not always able to be well-defined (American Psychological Association, 2009). Student veterans were less likely than non-veteran students to invest time outside of the classroom on activities not essential to the completion of their course as a result of parenting responsibilities, work, or other factors (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2019)

The researcher measured commonalities and identifiable aspects that these military students experienced when trying to gain an internship in college. The researcher measured if there were similarities between all the different military branches and looked at demographics results related to participant's genders, ethnicity, major. When reviewing the results, it was important to recognize that the findings discovered made sense when looking at the data. The researcher sent the transcript back to the participant to review after transcribing the interview and followed up with participants, which allowed them to elaborate or remove aspects of their responses they felt were not representative of what they were trying to say. If the participants are clearly explaining the same then there is a higher likelihood the results are more valued, and the findings made can be trusted. As defined by Mertler (2016), "Trustworthiness is established by examining the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of qualitative data, as well as the resultant findings" (p. 179). Finally, the researcher followed up with the participant after the interview through email to help review the accuracy of the transcript after all the final edits had been included in the transcript.

It was important when reviewing this study's findings to remove or reduce as much personal bias and expectations as possible so that it only left the results available to analyze and improve confirmability. Additionally, by having participants that were inclined to contribute to the research, then they were more likely to speak candidly. The results gained credibility through these interviews because they were coming directly

from the participants that are or were members of the desired population from which the researcher is attempting to recruit. Lastly, to promote validity, the researcher did not fabricate findings, accurately represented the perspective of the participant, acted within ethical boundaries, and remained objectively focused.

### **Positionality**

The researcher's professional background in career-related employment helped encourage the decision to study the topic of veteran and military students' perceptions of gaining an internship in college. It was important that when considering these students, the individuality of each participant was what was most important to examine. Asking a set of questions to these individuals allowed them to formulate their thoughts and explain their experiences with having minimal influence from my identity playing a role. When interviewing, it was essential to ask questions that did not solely solicit a primarily positive or negative response, but also encouraged the participants to discuss their honest experiences.

It was critical not just to have occupation-related questions but also some that assessed multiple aspects involved in military and veteran students' sense of identity. Because not every student has the same ambitions, then the researcher looked at career-specific related questions but, more importantly, reviewed generalizable traits that were commonly experienced or shared. To reduce bias views, it was vital to intentionally look at experiences that were shared by not just one group, but all veteran students which allowed for comprehensive data and information collection. To improve participant safety and well-being, the researcher consulted with the Veteran's resource center coordinator and a veteran student not involved with the study to look over the questions for the interview to see if there was anything that could create concern for the participants. Students from all backgrounds may also have similar experiences, so this was not something that only occurs within the military or veteran student population. Still, these individuals might respond differently to these career expectations and demands over average students.

Even though the researcher had not served in the military, it was crucial to study veteran students' views involved in gaining an internship in college because it helped identify strengths that they use and barriers they

face. Initially, the researcher had the university's veteran's coordinator, who understand this population of students, assist with reviewing the findings received from the interviews. Having someone with a more significant and different understanding of these students' identities provided more knowledge on why these participants stated certain things. When looking at the data, the researcher reviewed findings from an outsider's perspective and was impartial when evaluating the information received. Not being connected to a specific branch of the military and having minimal connection to the armed service reduced some bias related to different types of military branches. The research was based solely on the veteran populations' experience with gaining an internship. The study encouraged all groups of individuals to participate but did not review the participants' socioeconomic status and ableness, which can limit the type of data the researcher received.

The researcher's gender could have played a role in influencing the thoughts, responses, reactions, reflection towards specific questions; thus, it was crucial to limit opinions, body language, tones, and assumptions so that nothing interfered with the subjects' answers to the questions. It was also necessary when looking at the data that similar responses between different groups were considered equally as significant regardless of any external components or influence. As a white male researcher, it was a possibility that this factor influenced the way the data was perceived and could lead to restrictive findings. To reduce this issue, the researcher kept the questions strictly about career and career-related perspective. Still, if concerns regarding problems with racial and gender discrimination were brought up, then they were recognized and included in the research. Participants' perspectives on their ethnic identity regarding this topic was included in the data collection process because it allowed the analysis to explore veteran students' racial and gender identify traits related to their experiences in college.

The researcher looked at variances between different races and genders of groups of veteran students when reviewing the results but primarily looked at commonalities and similar traits among participants, so this reduced the need to shift lenses. When considering the questions for the interview, the researcher attempted to develop a structure that encouraged detailed answers, but still evoked many kinds of results from the participant. Eliminating the need to focus on differences among races and genders promoted fewer bias reviews

because the researcher was primarily focused on the objectives of learning about student's experiences and skill development trends

### **Summary**

This chapter discussed how the researcher used a qualitative approach to interview military and veteran students' perception of skill development and internship experience. Next, the chapter discussed the types of questions that were included in the interview, the dynamics involved with developing the structure related to carrying out the study, and how this was population was recruited. Then the researcher reviewed relevant participants' demographic traits, information regarding the site setting, and procedures involved with communicating with veteran students. Lastly, the chapter looked at how the researcher analyzed the data received from the study, including factors such as positionality and limitations. The next chapter will consider the findings obtained from carrying out interviews with military students and will discuss any relevant information or details that were discovered.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Findings

This chapter details the findings from interviews with military and veteran students, to explore the research question of what are military and veteran students perceptions of internships in college which includes looking at research related to skills they utilize, experiences they have, obstacles they face, and knowledge they've gained. Interviewing military and veteran college students provided the researcher an opportunity to understand the participants' views and perceptions regarding their interests in participating in internships. The findings revealed several major themes. First, participants disclosed that they were interested in taking part in internships to learn skills related to their career interests, so they can also gain a better understanding of how to transition into civilian employment positions after college. Next, participants expressed feeling they had a lack of experience when understanding various aspects related to obtaining an internship and discussed why military and veteran students' lives do not always allow for opportunity to work in an internship in college. Additionally, the participants expressed their feelings about what aspects of internships and career preparation resources could be better adjusted to better support their needs. Lastly in this chapter the researcher discusses obstacles these participants faced which included transition and adjustments issues, time commitment difficulties or concerns with being older, and cultural adjustments to being in a new environment.

### Participant Demographics

The students who were interviewed came from different branches of the military, varied in gender or race, and had several years of experience serving in the military. These elements combined to provide diverse experiences that identified patterns of thoughts related to positive views towards participating in career related experiences in college. The participants represented a different type of student because they often enter college at a later age, utilize different skills from enlisting in the military, and overcome distinctive transition obstacles that can make their experiences in college different than traditional college students.

### Theme 1: Thoughts related to getting an internship in college

The first major theme that emerged from interviewing the participants was identifying their thoughts related to getting or participating in an internship in college. While studying this theme, the participants mentioned their perspective of an internship and additionally their views on internship outcomes. Participants in this study all expressed a similar belief that taking part in an internship in college was an essential aspect in gaining significant knowledge or skills related to a specific area of study or occupation. Five of the participants (62%) explained to the researcher that even though they have not participated in any internships, they think it would be something that could provide them an opportunity to develop the skills necessary to expand their professional experience and education. Muscles discussed why they felt it was vital as a veteran to participate in an internship because:

even though I haven't done one, I could still think that working in an internship in college would be a great way to get a head start on a future job. For example, since getting out of the military, I haven't worked in the civilian side for many years, so if I was to also have an internship in school, I could set myself up better to adjust to working in my field after I get my degree.

Muscles' statement provides insight on the notion that veteran students feel encouraged to participate in an internship in college because they know it will make them more successful in landing a job related to their degree after graduating. These students identified and understood that participating in an internship is something that can help make them more prepared for their future career.

Interviewees explained that they had little knowledge of what internships were before entering college but were more interested in exploring what was available once they became aware of these opportunities. Daniel explained that they are "extremely open to the idea and would love to have the possibility of applying for an internship." This statement is representative of the other participants as all of them expressed positive feedback toward the idea of being involved in internships. Lia confirmed the notion that being able to participate in an internship while in college could:

give her a good idea of how to work with others in the same field or other fields that she's interested in and gain a mentorship to help grow skills relevant to whatever she needs to know once she gets out of this internship.

The more Lia learns and prepares herself with the applicable knowledge she needs to be successful then the more likely she will fit in with likeminded colleagues and be prepared for future opportunities.

Research has shown that participating in an internship in college is beneficial to students' career development, and the participants who have previous internship experience expressed that, as well. Nomad explained that:

one of the things he learned about working in an internship while in school is, you get to work with projects, and you get to work with different people in a way that helps you sharpen your skills so when you get out of college you're not unprepared and don't know what to expect with the employer.

Having opportunities that encourage individuals to practice aspects related to their career that they are not familiar with is a useful tool to learn the demands that they must meet in the future. As Nomad mentions opportunities to work in an internship while attending college can be a beneficial option worth considering, because it can provide important real-life experience for students to help prepare them for future career attainment in their field of interest. This thought was also confirmed by Daniel who explained that "internships are a great way to immerse yourself in a field that you're looking to get a job in while in college so that way you gain experience, and it allows you to either make the decision yes, I want to go this way or no." Daniel, Muscles, Lia, and Nomad previously explained that being able to learn more about their career could help them and other student's overall understanding of if they would be satisfied with working in a specific industry.

### **Sub theme 1: Internship perspective in college**

College campuses offer an environment where students can communicate with one another to discuss how they feel on aspects related to their education and their career. Military and veteran students in the study discussed how their interactions with others were impactful towards their perspectives around internship

participation. Muscles mentioned “being in the school and working in a less strict position could help individuals get comfortable with working with people around you so you would have an easier career transition.” Muscles understand that participating in an internship in college would not hold the same level of severity as it would be if they were still in the military. Muscles explained that participating in an internship in college is something that would be beneficial and interests them because it allowed him to take on something with partial responsibility on learning aspects related to his career. He explained in the military your dedication is much longer than just an eight-hour shift and there's a big difference in time commitment expectations. As a college student Muscles felt he was more likely to be able to take part in internship because it would be beneficial in preparing him to be successful in his field but also because it was a smaller time commitment option compared to something more full time. The flexibility and less regimented structure of higher education allowed Muscles participate in career related opportunities that can successfully prepare him for a civilian career.

Higher education institutions provide students with resources, tools, and social interaction opportunities that help contribute to their professional identity. This is shown in Sandy’s response where she explains “being around people in college that have done an internship have shared their experiences with me but with talking to these people I get an idea of what other people feel and gauge their experiences on how beneficial it can be.” Sandy’s experience with talking to peers about participating in an internship provided an additional perspective on what may have been a factor that shaped her perception on internships. Her interactions with other students helped her learn important aspects of how internships function, why someone would participate in one, and potential benefits that could be gained from this experience. Sandy felt if she were to get into an internship in college she “would have an idea of what’s it going to be like and what it’s going to take to prepare and that’s primarily from talking to people and really just discussing the topic as a whole.” Sandy used the experiences and perceptions of those around her to help shape her idea of what other people feel so she can gauge their experiences in a way that helps to benefit her knowledge. Since Sandy has no current or previous experience

working in an internship in college her peers played a heavy role in informing how to view these career opportunities and if they are worthwhile.

### **Sub theme 2: Perceptions of internship outcomes**

The participants explained that many benefits can be gained from internship participation, including essential skills and professional knowledge. Participants were also hesitant of what outcome could occur when participating in an internship in college. Sandy explained if she was to take on an internship in college “am I going to go in there, getting something out of it or am I just going to go there to waste my time.” It is important to note that some of the participants expressed the opposite feeling of Sandy and discussed the importance of taking part in an internship regardless of the outcome but shared the same belief that at times they felt unsure of what could be gained from these employment opportunities. This was shown by Muscles who disclosed “when getting an internship in college, there are skills that I haven’t honestly learned in the military and being in college you get to prepare for the civilian side, but I really don’t know what skills I should learn.” There are aspects with starting a new career where an individual will not always feel confident in what they should be doing or if what they are doing is right for them. Lia discussed that in an “internship in college I feel the difference is, that they can be very vague sometimes and, in the military, there is just one way it needs to be done.” This point that Lia made is relevant to the other participants’ thoughts regarding the idea that some military and veteran students would appreciate a little more direction or clarity to better understand internships and what they offer. The more this population of students can understand what skills they need to learn and utilize, the more prepared they would feel with participating in an internship or preparing to apply to one.

### **Theme 2: Skills military and veteran students feel are important to utilize**

Military and veteran students are coming into college with an ample amount of skills and training they practice that could be transferred to civilian professional positions including an internship in college. The participants explained there were key skills they were universally trained on throughout all branches of the military, which they felt were crucial to supporting employment success. While studying this theme it was

found that the participant expressed being able to work with individuals from different backgrounds, can adjust to different demands or expectations, and persevere to overcome hardship.

### **Sub theme 1: Discipline**

The participants mentioned that the military is very structured in such a way where there is a strict expectation on specific tasks to be carried out correctly and there are also high expectations of the workers' professionalism. As James explains "one thing I learned that I know has been really helpful and I think would be helpful for an internship is discipline and learning how to do a job correctly, and if I made a mistake, how to fix it without going outside of my means to get it done." Some of the other participants shared James' idea that discipline comes from the notion of having "military bearings." Grimmit (2018) describes military bearings as being constant in performing in a professional manner to bring credit upon oneself and maintaining the capability to project a commanding presence and remain confident both on and off duty. Muscles goes into further detail to explain that "having the military bearings, they call it is yes sir or no ma'am, just being respectful and being self-aware of people around you, because the military is a different environment so you just have the discipline to know where you're at, at all times." This same concept of respect is shared by both Sandy and Shawn where they discuss that there is a level of expectation in how much respect is given and received. For example, these participants mentioned that there is a command structure that must be followed, or else certain actions may be taken as rude or disrespectful. They must continue to promote a professional demeanor, or they could be reprimanded.

Maintaining discipline is something that any student can benefit from learning, but military and veteran students have embedded this skill into their overall professional identity from surrounding themselves in an environment where this is demanded of you. The participants discussed this skill has been beneficial to their educational and professional success while in college. Nomad talks about how "the discipline that I got from the military is the biggest quality I use here as a civilian doing an internship and has made a big difference on my employment success." This participant discussed how this skill helped benefit his overall professional success because it pushed him to consistently apply for internships in college and successfully complete his job

expectations. The same idea of using discipline to be successful was shared by Lia who provides a great example of this when she revealed the “discipline she gained in the military made her confident enough to be able to complete any task put in front of her and prepared her to meet deadlines on time while providing a great attention to detail.” Discipline is something that is felt to be extremely valued and is a skill that is continuously practiced even after leaving the military. Additionally, Lia, James, and Nomad all expressed being able to transfer their past skills towards assisting them in completing a degree in college has been helpful in obtaining a future career after they graduate.

### **Sub theme 2: Adaptability**

Another skill that participants mentioned frequently that is utilized both in the military and as college student was the ability to adapt to whatever situation they are placed in. This population is constantly adjusting and learning new ways to complete objectives so that they can continue to maintain success in completing whatever goals they have. Bravo expressed the notion of how adjusting is important if he were to do a college internship because:

you must be able to work with different people, with different ages, different races, and ethnic backgrounds to accomplish whatever mission that the internship has or working in different environments that aren't necessarily ideal, which involves being able to adapt in different environments.

Being able to adjust with those you do not always work well with or finishing a responsibility under the least ideal solutions is a skill Bravo explains he utilized in the military and in civilian careers. This skill of collaboration and teamwork was represented throughout various branches of the armed service and was specifically embedded into the purpose of being a Marine. The Marines explain that their soldiers improvise, adapt and overcome any obstacle in whatever situation they are needed and have the willingness and determination to defeat anything to obtain victory in the communities where they live (Marines, n.d.). This skill was rooted in military and veteran students' identity and was linked with their determination to try to be the best.

Situations the participants experienced in the armed service has shaped their perceptions of how or why they need to be able to adapt because during emergency circumstances, this skill could potentially assist in their survival or ability to succeed during vital moments. Lia described this in her response where she talked about how soldiers must:

take a step back and see things from everyone's point of view to understand this is not the only way to do something and for example, if you're going to lead a platoon into combat, you are not going to just see it your way because what if someone comes at us from the left, then we need to see it so everyone needs to come together and put their thoughts on the table.

Lia expressed that it is imperative that soldiers successfully carry out responsibilities efficiently and effectively. It was discussed that when presented with a challenge, these individuals are trained to adjust to whatever is needed from them regardless of what that might require.

Military and veteran students come to college trained in such a way where they unconditionally embody these notions and their understanding of what being adaptable means beyond just understanding it as a simple skill that is used. Muscles and Sandy both talked about how they felt it would be easy to adapt to basically anything because back in the military "you have to adapt and overcome which meant when having to try something new, I first would be a little nervous but as soon as I figure out how everything's working then I am able to carry out the mission." Muscle discussed in the interview that as a soldier he was trained to complete missions successfully and that contributed to his overall positive self-satisfaction. As a student he hopes to continue to maintain that same achievement to feel satisfied that he is completing important work. Sandy discussed the importance of being adaptable because this trait is important in being a leader and she mentions that being able to adjust to change has helped her with acclimating to new roles or responsibilities. During the interview's these two participants discussed that as students they are learning to adjust to being in a college environment versus being a soldier which changes how they function and communicate around different individuals.

Being able to adjust to military expectations and demands are not the same as educational or civilian professional demands, which makes adapting throughout the transitional period difficult for military and veteran students. Shawn discussed concerns between:

transitioning out of the military and doing things a militaristic way versus doing things civilianized, which is not easy for us to separate from, but it is also hard to get rid of those habits so it is important that we are able to switch between our identities while in a working environment.

Shawn explains that he must understand when and how to navigate between his different identities because these influences the way he thinks, performs, and acts when around others. The data explained that not every military and veteran student can easily transition previously learned training skills to adapt towards working in higher education or civilian employment opportunities. It is important to recognize that these abilities are not used the same by every participant and that every individual utilizes this skill in their own way.

### **Sub theme 3: Diversity**

Serving in the military allows individuals to travel the world and work with all sorts of different types of people from various backgrounds or cultures. Learning to be more diverse in the way we manage relationships and understand others is extremely important in both the armed services and in college. The participants expressed in their responses how important this skill is and identified that appreciating diversity or understanding individuals that are different from them should be utilized when working in an internship in college. James discussed that in the military “you are always learning to work with people of all kinds of personalities, even people you don’t get along with, but regardless of how you feel the job has to get done, so you push past your differences and work to complete the goal.” Being determined to accomplish the mission or objective has trained these students to adapt to their surroundings, which is exactly what is encouraging them to be better aware of how to conduct themselves when communicating with those who are from different backgrounds.

In college, military and veteran students are taught to continue practicing, understanding, and discussing topics related to diversity whether it is cultural, physical, sexual, social-emotional learning, or other related areas. Lia stated that a skill she can transfer over to being a college student and a veteran was “being able to work with other cultures and ethnicities because being in the military, we work with a lot of diversity so that has helped me to work well with others around me.” Lia explained in the military soldiers are asked to hold themselves accountable and act professionally around those they interact with including being able to work with those who come from a background other than their own. Kamarck (2019) explained that over several years, there have been many changes in efforts made by Congress to improve diversity, equal opportunity, and inclusion across the military workforce. These individuals are now more than ever being expected to hold themselves to a higher standard of behavior when it comes to working with different populations of people.

Participants felt that in college and internships, students would most likely face experiences where using diversity skills would be beneficial. Muscles expressed that:

soldiers participate in training on how to understand working around others and knowing not say certain things because people can get offended, which is helpful to know in college because there is a lot of different students with different backgrounds, so you got to be careful with what you say or what you do because it might upset them.

Understanding the importance of being able to navigate working and interacting with individuals that are unique in character and carry different identities is something that the military prepared the participants in being able to do. Shawn and Muscles explained the same idea that providing soldiers with training and diversity enrichment programs while in the service can help make these individuals more open to learning about other cultures and backgrounds when they go to college and can provide an opportunity to open up their ability to work with others in career opportunities such as internships. Shawn stated, “in the military there are different races around you and people from different backgrounds or different walks of life, but we were given training to be able to understand each other a little bit more.” Shawn felt that being able to increase his sense of awareness of how to

properly act or work around others was a helpful skill or trait that provided him the opportunity to be even more successful in his military career.

The notion of accepting others and being able to adapt to working with others from different backgrounds is a skill that not every military or veteran student chooses to use in their professional identity. Certain concerns were brought up by participants in the study who explained that they were able to practice using this skill, but that they felt other soldiers around them could have benefited more from being given more opportunities to practice this. Shawn suggested that “difficulties arise associated with communication skills as far as talking to people certainly still arise and that is because some people don’t have that practice so that is something some still need to learn as well.” Shawn explains that adapting his communication skills attained from diversity training provided by the military to situations or experiences that could occur in college or during an internship may not always transfer the same dependent on certain circumstances. The research data found that being able to train military and veteran students earlier when they enter college on how to crossover and familiarize themselves to this new environment will provide these students an opportunity to understand what differences they should be better aware of.

### **Theme 3: Military and higher education environmental transition differences**

Transitioning into a higher education environment after leaving the military can create adjustments and changes that this student population may not be used to experiencing but participating in an internship in college can be helpful with acclimating. These include adapting to changes regarding authoritative structures, understanding social and cultural shift experiences with working with students versus soldiers, and identifying differences in duties or expectations in military employment compared to internships in college. The transitioning experiences coming into college changed the way these students had to learn to manage new responsibilities and approach situations.

#### **Sub theme 1: Differences in duties and expectations**

There are vast disparities when comparing the differences between military employment responsibilities and internship expectations in college. Nomad explained that in the military “working hours could vary

drastically which means sometimes you put in eight hours or sometimes you put in 14 hours, but when it comes to a college internship they are more flexible about hours so you get to prioritize your career, education, and learning at the same time.” In higher education, students are expected to prioritize their studies over working strenuous amounts, but as expressed by Shawn soldiers hold multiple roles that are often synchronized so that they are interwoven together all at once. Shawn discussed this when he explained that in the military “he had several different jobs but also one specific job and within that job, he had several different roles and progressed into different positions.” This showed that even though Shawn oversaw one primary work duty, that position also involved having to take on many other responsibilities.

In the military, there are many high-level expectations and responsibilities given to soldiers and it is necessary that they are successfully able to carry out the work they are given. Sandy discussed that in the military:

you’re given much higher expectations as if you were to be given in a job and you feel if you do wrong in the military, you’re looked down upon, and in a civilian working environment you’re open to make mistakes, and you learn from them.

These anticipations and demand adjustments are something that occurs frequently to military and veteran students, so when switching to a college or university, these individuals face difficulties adapting to knowing entirely how to do the work expected of them. Nomad confirmed Sandy’s statement by explaining:

between the military and an internship obviously the military can be quite stressful and you have to meet certain demands or criteria requirements but when you’re participating in an internship you don’t have that same pressure, although it’s critical for you to perform and learn how to do the job, but it’s not as stressful.

In college, military and veteran students may not understand that they are allowed to make mistakes or not know how to do something and that they have much more autonomy and opportunities to challenge the status quo but they may commonly still stay reserved and keep their concerns to themselves.

The participants expressed that they do not often feel that they know how to function independently in a system that is not as governing as the one they are typically accustomed to. For example, James discussed that “you can quit an internship with minimal repercussions, but once you’re in the military for better or worse you can’t quit and you’re stuck with your contract, unless you want to have a bad record or dishonorable discharge.” As James discussed in college you are pushed to be an independent thinker and form your own thoughts or views but that may not always happen right away when you start your degree. Bravo shared a similar idea to this when he explained “the military consumes your whole life, both while you’re on the job and while you’re off the clock really, and I think with internships they only pertain to the moments you are working.” Since there are additional responsibilities included in military jobs that differ from internships in college, the participants may not understand what is expected of them when they participate in career opportunities while attending college.

### **Sub theme 2: Changes in cultural shifts**

Besides mentioning the differences in job duties and responsibilities between working in the armed service compared to higher education, there are cultural shifts that also create challenges and concerns for the participants. Muscles discussed that in the service “you are used to saying certain words and rankings, so soldiers are expected to always respond back to somebody higher or lower than them in a specific way but in the civilian side you don’t have to be careful with addressing individuals in the same way.” Having to adapt to the changes from one environment to a completely different one is a common experience expressed frequently as well as learning to identify the drastic differences between the two worlds. Shawn explained the culture is different in the military where “structure is everything such as the way you’re treated and the way you act versus an internship in college where I feel there’s more fluidity in what you do and while there are still rules and structure, it’s not quite the same.” Understanding these differences earlier on in college can be beneficial for a military and veteran student in being able to navigate these different environmental changes and will prepare them to adapt to change.

The sooner the participants transitioned from one realm to another, the harder it seemed to adjust to the new cultural shifts, rules, and expectations. Shawn confirmed this by stating that “in the military, you have a rank structure so you are expected to handle things at the lowest level so you don’t just go straight to the top and talk to the highest supervisor that works in your division, there is a chain of command that must be followed.” When going into college or when participating in an internship, students are encouraged to reach out to a more qualified professional to essentially mentor or advocate for them. These vast differences make adjusting to civilian life that much more difficult because it adds an additional layer of changes on top of what these individuals are already getting used to. Bravo explained that:

it is difficult jumping into the civilian world because there are much more unknowns and potholes rather than being in the military where everything’s taken care of for you. You know where you’re going to sleep, you know you’re going to get fed, and you know you’re going to get paid on time.

Losing this sense of comfort that the military provides makes it more difficult to transition and feel comfortable with working in a civilian internship.

### **Sub theme 3: Importance of internships in college on helping with transitioning**

Many participants addressed the idea that internships could be a helpful tool that would assist in making transition difficulties much easier to overcome. Shawn explained that he feels “internships are important for military and veteran students’ transition into the civilian workplace environments, especially coming from the military, culture is different so to be able to receive civilian career experience while in college will give a different perspective.” Some participants have no previous employment experience prior to joining the service, so when exiting the military, they would not have any knowledge of what these differences are. Muscles added to this finding when he discussed how if he:

wanted to just get started on a career somewhere in the civilian side, having experience already with an internship while in college would be helpful because if I was to finish my education, I wouldn’t know how it feels to have a civilian job.

These students were not accustomed to navigating career paths within the civilian sector because they have minimal professional experience doing anything non-military related. This concept was also expressed in Shawn's response where he discussed how he has faced similar experiences because he went to the military "straight out of high school when I was 18 years old and had no other job while I was in the military." Having no prior involvement or understanding of what one should expect once departing from the service made preparing for a job in college more difficult for him.

The importance of internships is that they can help improve students' understanding of the employment field they plan on working in after college. Having military and veteran students take part in a relevant career opportunity in college can help ease them into understanding how to better perform and meet the expectations of their future superiors. Nomad explained that "working in an internship in college is a very critical aspect of transitioning out of the military and any military personnel that is unable to get a job right away should try an internship because internships are a very useful way to transition into the civilian sector." At the beginning of trying anything new, it is better to gain a clear understanding of what to expect and the military helps prepare these students to adapt to these changes well. Daniel mentions this when he explained "something the military instilled in me was you're always going to start at the bottom and in order for progression, you have to do these certain things like internships which seems to be a steppingstone." Knowing how to advance in a sector you know very little about can be very beneficial to advancing these students' skills so that they are able to achieve a good profession after gaining a degree.

#### **Theme 4: Military and veteran students' Concerns with Internships**

A common theme presented in the data suggested that even though the participants consider participating in internship experiences to be crucial for professional success, not everyone was easily capable of taking part in career opportunities. Individuals involved in the study discussed that there were challenges and obstacles related to getting involved in the career process. Challenges in committing time or concerns with being older than the average intern were areas mentioned when trying to understand how to get an internship in

college while being a military or veteran student. Being able to participate in an internship in college is not universally accessible to all military and veteran students so it is important to recognize that.

### **Sub theme 1: Committing time**

Military and veteran students are not always given the same availability to take part in an internship in college compared to traditional aged college students because they have other commitments that can take up majority of their extra time while not in classes. Participants expressed that they have very limited free time since taking care of their families became a top priority once they weren't serving in the armed forces. Daniel discussed this aspect because he noticed:

everybody getting out of the military was in a completely different place in their life. I went into the military single and I came out married. Some people go in single and come out married with children, so everybody has different time commitments after leaving.

The participants may not all experience the same time restraints, but they are all trying to balance multiple responsibilities that do not merely include being a college student. Bravo adds to this by discussing that "it's difficult because a lot of the student veteran population have outside families, commitments, primary jobs and other things to support so it makes it really difficult to even consider participating in an internship." These individuals were not always able to lend this additional time or effort in an internship because they have wives, children, families, or other outside duties that are equally as important.

Time management can be very difficult for students because their top priorities include attending classes and studying, so incorporating anything into their schedule that requires a high amount of attention or demand can become overwhelming. Sandy talks about how "it is definitely different in the military because you have this set time and schedule that you're doing working and studying so it's kind of a routine you follow when it comes to working." In higher education that routine is not the same which can cause a disruption in being able to participate in an internship in college on top of all the other responsibilities these military and veteran students experience. College students are expected to be responsible for managing their own educational responsibilities such as enrolling in their courses and completing their coursework on time.

**Sub theme 2: Being older than average interns**

The participants expressed concerns with not feeling connected to participating in internships because they felt that these experiences were for younger individuals and since they typically enter college being older than the average student age group, they feel they don't fit in as well. This is expressed in Bravo's concern as he considered it difficult because "at my age I feel that a lot of college internships are more geared towards traditional undergraduates, and people of that age demographic, so I think it might be different for me being a lot older." Bravo voiced feeling less inclined to participate or investing time into internships because he believed he does not fit the demographic that industries are looking to hire.

The students expressed this notion that since they are not as young as average interns, they get placed in situations where they are expected to know how to perform even though they may not have any previous experience. Shawn explained that "it hurts that there are assumptions that older veterans must have done this before but sometimes we haven't, even though people assume we know what we're doing so we must be fine, but we're definitely not fine." Although this population has a variety of knowledge or understanding because of their military experiences and background, Shawn expressed that it is no indication that their previous skills or knowledge is relevant to their current career ambitions. They explained since they are older than typical college aged students it makes them feel more deterred from participating in a part time internship because of their age. Daniel explained "I am a little bit older than some people, but because of that I do have a different experience than others." It is necessary to recognize that this participant's perceptions of internships in college is based on many various factors of influence that can either motivate or deter them from being interested in participating in this professional career opportunity.

**Conclusion**

Carrying out this study revealed that all the participants have found that internships are important in career development even though not all of them have experience participating in one. With exploring this topic more in depth, it was discovered that military and veteran students transfer and utilize skills they have gained in the service such as discipline, adaptability, and diversity skills, to help them succeed in gaining or performing in

an internship in college. Next, participants discussed environmental or professional transition differences between a military job versus an internship in college, which included conflicting duties or expectations, cultural shift changes, and the importance of internships in college to help with transitional complications. Lastly, participants shared concerns with internships, which included difficulties being able to commit additional time due to other primary responsibilities and being older than the average student. In the next chapter, the researcher will discuss the interpretation of the findings and how they relate to expanding career professionals' overall knowledge on how to appropriately understand and support this population of students. The researcher will further discuss the implications and importance of these findings while considering what this means for future research relevant to this similar topic.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Discussion

Military and veteran students are understudied and face different difficulties transitioning into professional civilian careers compared to traditional aged college students. Developing a better understanding of how military and veteran students utilize previous experience and skills gained in the service to be successful in an internship while attending college can help improve their overall expertise and professional success. The purpose of the study was to understand veterans' perceptions of transitioning into an on or off-campus internship and identify skills that they use to succeed during their time in higher education. This was done through a qualitative phenomenological study design that involved taking an exploratory approach to develop a baseline in understanding the various levels of this population's internship experiences through applying a homogeneous sampling method.

In the previous chapters, the researcher found that study participants all expressed a similar belief that taking part in an internship while attending college was an essential aspect in gaining significant knowledge or skills related to a specific area of study or occupation. The data suggested these students use skills such as discipline, adaptability, and diversity to connect to future employment opportunities while overcoming transition difficulties. In this chapter, the researcher will connect, compare, and interpret the significance of these findings, as well as connect them to current literature. Then, the researcher will identify limitations and implications on how this informs career professionals and future researchers.

### Summary and Interpretation of Findings

In the previous chapter, the researcher discussed the relevant findings gained from carrying out the study including reviewing veteran or military students' perspectives of internships and identifying significant skills veteran students practiced in the military that are important to utilize in an internship while in college. Studying the transition experiences and difficulties these individuals face allowed the researcher to explore specific areas where veteran and military students could be better supported. From the data received from conducting the eight interviews, the researcher analyzed and compared responses from the participants in order to study and identify

commonalities in experiences or thoughts they shared.

### **Students' thoughts regarding internship preparation on career development**

The military and veteran students who participated in the study expressed interest in being involved with working in an internship while in college so that they can learn the skills they need to be successful in a civilian career. The previous chapter discusses that this population of individuals often faces difficulties participating in these employment opportunities because they may not always have the availability to participate or feel confident to apply. Interpretations discovered in the findings section confirmed that these students want to participate in a career preparation position to be better prepared for future employment opportunities and to also gain knowledge on how to work in a nonmilitary employment environment. It is likely these students' motivations to participate resembles what the existing literature states regarding the topic of veteran student's perception of internship in college because even if they have never been involved in one, they understand why they matter. Previous researchers also mentioned that students know that participating in internship while in college helps support their overall career development (Yin 2019). The participants perception that it is beneficial to take part in an internship while in college could be connected to military students understanding that they should be fully invested in their professional career.

The participants dedication to being able to accomplish their goal of successfully obtaining a job in their field of interest could be what motivates them to consider acquiring an internship. Every participant in the researcher's study expressed that participating in an internship in college was something that they consider would benefit their overall career development and would provide them with a better understanding of their ideal career. This eagerness of wanting to be involved in entry level employment opportunities while in college can be contributed to this population of students being able to find skill development chances that will benefit them but will not require a full-time commitment. In the military soldiers are given a job that encompasses more than what a typical job would require so when transitioning out of the service and into college it is important that these students learn to do something correctly before they are unable to adapt correctly which can cause them to feel overwhelmed with too many demands.

Additionally, this population of students faced obstacles related to being expected to perform at their highest ability in the military, which is also what the participants expressed was a factor that swayed their confidence in themselves. This could be why these individuals are very eager in learning how they could prepare better or continuously perform successfully when transitioning into their new career field. This motivation of needing to be more professionally successful and confident in one's ability was also confirmed by the military and veteran students interviewed who had no current or previous experience participating in an internship in college. It is likely when military and veteran students feel they are not always sure what expectations or duties they are going to have to be responsible managing after they are no longer enlisted in the armed service then it can create a sense of doubt that they are not carrying out task successfully and with great intentionality.

Since professional ability and skill development were the key aspects that contributed to the participants' willingness to participate in an internship, then it was important to them that they can practice that in college. Similar research by Tucciarone (2014) states, "internships help students see practical applications for what they are learning in the classroom and clarify their career aspirations (regarding not just what they want in a job but also what they don't want)" (p. 29). This can be related to the belief that gaining employment experience is not only crucial to understand what areas of development are significant to specific industries but also allows them a chance to reduce concerns that come with having minimal preparation or understanding of their career responsibilities. This notion of wanting to prepare successfully for a career found in Tucciarone's (2014) study expressed similarities to what the participants expressed in this study because they could view that involvement in any career related employment opportunity will be integral to helping them identifying areas where they express facing difficulties transitioning to a civilian working environment. Individuals in college are more accustomed to being expected to perform professionally and are commonly placed in opportunities where they experience some form of learning that connects them to their perspective profession to make sure they are satisfied with their career choice.

Typically, military and veteran students have to manage multiple roles and responsibilities both in and outside the service so it is possible they mentioned being older than the typical student and having difficulties

committing time because they notice they have much more demands and expectations to meet in order to feel they are being successful. Since some of the participants were not able to take on an internship at the time of the study due to obligations that took majority of their time such as having to oversee family or financial responsibilities this could be a motivational factor that contributed to participants thoughts related to internships being a younger student opportunity. Veterans face additional challenges that civilians do not due to the unique differences between the two cultures (Sargent, 2014). Since military and veteran students tend to enter college at an older than the average student, they may feel they are less likely to be able to commit to taking on an unpaid internship because they tend to have more financial obligations. Understanding that the participants may be expressing that they feel they are older than the average intern can be also related to adjustments transitioning demands they experience in a civilian world. Since these participants can feel unsure on how to perform independently as a student, they often face concerns related with their confidence in their abilities.

### **Understanding how military and veteran students succeed in college**

The participants involved in this study expressed facing unique differences transitioning into the new environment of higher education which included adjusting to new responsibilities, following a new authoritative structure, and learning to adapt to a new cultural environment. As previous research stated, the problems veteran students face includes not only learning to navigate the labor market but also the higher education system (Cahill and Council for Adult and Experimental Learning, 2013). The reason these students may have expressed facing these obstacles is because when they are in the military it can be a very strict and rigid environment that relinquishes majority of the amount of control they own. They are demanded to obey orders or directions and follow the commands of their leadership without questioning authority but when they discharge and attend college, they are faced with a completely reversed dynamic. Both the male and female participants expressed the same idea that being a student was something that took time to adjust to. It is likely their thoughts related to adapting to these new changes is something that came up because this can occur to almost any individual coming into a new place with different rules and is not limited to just one specific military branch,

gender or ethnicity, and age group.

The results related to military and veteran students expressing the ability to overcome any situation they face, maintaining strong professionalism, and working well with individuals from all backgrounds were mentioned because these are skills these students practice training while they were enlisted. These results were different than what previous researchers have found regarding skills most students utilized because according to the research scholars are still trying to understand how students manage different identities as workers (Brooks, 2014). When the participants were sent to other countries as soldiers, they would be put in situations where they had to learn to safely navigate their surroundings to identify possible threats or areas of support so they would have to adapt how they worked with others or approached a new environment. This involved working with those who did not speak the same language, come from the same background, believe in the same things but it also included showing those around them respect, honor, and discipline. These students may still be maintaining this same sense of pride in their work while in college, so it is important to them to maintain this consistently

The findings discovered regarding discipline, adaptability, and diversity were highlighted as being the most important skills the participants to utilize in an internship, which could have been mentioned because these are something that can be familiarized with civilian working or learning environments. The notion of discipline is something that both soldiers and students both implement in their work since expectations are placed on them to perform ethically, responsibly, and fairly. Additionally, the findings related to the participants use of adaptability was likely mentioned because military students use this skill in both college and in the service because they frequently learn to navigate new environments that unfamiliar. This skill may have been named because individuals in military are often sent on leave to serve their duties in another country other than their own and they may even be moved around frequently during the length of time they stay enlisted. Lastly the revealing of students use of diversity was discussed by the participants because in college and in the military individuals are expected to work with others that they may not normally be used to in order to establish strong working relationships to develop solutions to different situations. These individuals have experience

collaborating with those who come from all different backgrounds including different geographical locations, cultural groups, religious affiliations, and other factors.

One reason why these skills were highlighted the most in this study may be because in the military, you are expected to prevail over whatever opportunity or challenges you are presented with so when these individuals became students, they adjust to accomplish whatever was needed from them regardless of what that might require. The more opportunities for military personnel to gain a better understanding of their professional experiences, reflect on previous military employment roles, and learn how to accurately describe their experiences in a way that can connect to internship in college will benefit their overall idea of their qualifications (Buzzetta & Hayden 2014). It is crucial to understand that the participants expressed in this research study that it was imperative for them to successfully carry out their expected duties efficiently and effectively while serving in the military and as a student. Many of the participants may have talked about how this is one of the core values of the military because success is a requirement and specifically in the marines their soldiers heavily trained to be able to adapt and overcome through any obstacle. The participants shared that these skills were specifically representative to military and veteran students because they are intrinsically motivated to persevere and become accustomed quickly to new situations or else it in service this could mean the difference between life and death.

### **Military and Veteran students transition difficulties and concerns**

In the findings chapter the researcher discovered that the students mentioned having concerns related to transitioning into a career, needing help understanding how their military identity plays a role in how they function as a student in college, and face difficulties understanding how their skills are relevant to their civilian career. The reason the participants in the study most likely spoke about adjustment experiences they faced or will face when working in a different environment was because this is a typical issue this population has while attending college. This statement was supported by Yin (2019) research, which found that when students leave their comfortable surroundings, it forces them to face some real challenges in an unfamiliar environment, which is like what they will also experience after college. Military and Veteran students become so accustomed to

certain cultures that are highly influential on their behavior, so they have difficulty adjusting or breaking away from that style of living.

These research participants discussed that while attending college they have difficulties figuring out how to navigate issue regarding leadership structure, independence, and being self-guided because these are new aspects of professionalism they are possibly not used to experiencing. When these students have minimal experience facing and managing challenges that they are not commonly used to experiencing such as communicating with co-workers who don't understand the military lifestyle, transitioning previous military skills to a civilian careers, and switching between different professional identities then it makes it even more difficult to familiarize to the demands of civilian internship opportunities. Military service members and veterans are facing difficulties that affect their ability to successfully obtain careers, such as reintegrating into civilian society, transition readiness preparation, issues with job searching, and difficulty in understanding how military skills translates to civilian employment opportunities (Buzzetta, et al., 2017). Buzzetta et al.'s (2017) findings are similar to what the researcher discovered in the results collected from this study which showed that participants faced comparable difficulties such as adapting to being a student while working in a civilian internship, adjusting to a new culture which involved navigating a new societal leadership structure, and adapting to new duties or responsibilities. These obstacles the participants discussed experiencing was likely mentioned because these are inevitable situations that are very likely to occur during their time in college.

### **Significance of the Study**

The importance of exploring military and veteran students in higher education can help to further contribute and expand the knowledge around understanding the backgrounds of these students. Researching more about the factors that are connected to these students' identities will help to inform career counseling professionals on how to best support this population in specific ways related to their specialized careers. The significance of these findings can help to add information related to how professionals can best prepare, or support military and veteran students transition into college and be successful in preparing them for a civilian career. Studying the most important aspects related to increasing these students' chances for success and being

able to be competitive in obtaining a job will allow for them to be better understood which untimely can lead to them feeling better supported.

Career counselors may not have a direct understanding or experience working with current military or veteran students, so they are not always familiar with knowing what the best practices are to support their exact needs in a way that is specific to their professional background but also their military experiences. Being able to reduce the lack of clarity on how to transfer skills and expertise from the military to higher education can help professionals so that they can prepare these students to better identify or utilize certain traits to be more successful in transitioning and adjusting. This study is significant because it will inform career counselors how to be better aware of the specific skills these individuals practiced during military training that have helped prepared them for future employment opportunities in or after college.

#### **What does it offer us in terms of new knowledge?**

The research findings discussed in this study can help with identifying new or better ways to help translate these students experiences so that they maximize their previous knowledge or experiences to further enhance their professionalism and adapt their skills to transfer more cohesively to civilian employment opportunities. The research data and themes discussed can provide new knowledge on how to shape or adjust the support given to military and veterans students by career professionals so that is directly relevant to them. Since these students do not have the same background as traditional aged college students they need more specified support that is associated to what their exact needs are. This study provides a glimpse into what these students think and feel which provides a clearer understanding of who these individuals are.

Knowing what these students' thoughts and concerns are related to participating in an internship in college can help career professionals know what resources or services can be given to decrease these apprehensions so there are more consistent positive outcomes in their overall professional success. Learning about the skills these students believe are important to utilize to be successful in a career while in college can be used to inform future military and veteran students on applicable areas they may not initially recognize. Since career services professional may not understand the transitions differences these students face, this research can

offer new knowledge on what these students typically experiences and why they should be better studied. Lastly discussing and understanding the concerns military and veteran students experience when participating in an internship in college can provide a deeper understanding of the challenges that they face.

### **Limitations**

Limitations in the study should be noted. First, the results gained from the study only represented a small percentage of veteran students at a private university in southern California. Expanding this research to consist of individuals at different types of institutions in higher education could change how the student responds to the interview questions. Additionally, military students in different states or regions undergo vastly different experiences than those of the participants involved because different states are known for different industry trades. What a student experience at an internship in California will not always be the same as what a student experiences in an internship in a farming state or when they are involved in government related career opportunities. Depending on what is the most in demand industry around your city or state can shape individuals view on what they hope to gain from an internship. Additionally, not all the same openings for internships are distributed equally throughout each state so students in industry specific states have more availability to participate in a certain type of internship where a student in another state would not. Lastly, the participants thoughts, backgrounds, and identities are shaped by the areas or environments in which they live in, so they are not always comparable to other students in different regions.

The small sample size also meant the researcher was not able to gain enough information to appropriately compare demographic differences between participants in the same branches of the military or between specific branches of the military to see if there were significant differences or similarities. This limited the generalizability of the results, as it was not entirely representative of other characteristics of this entire population of students. Additionally, the data gained were not dependent on the participants' role in the military, which could change the skills that these students use and the approach they take to gain an internship in college. By analyzing a variety of students who have or had different roles in the military it changed the data collection process and made it difficult to identify trends between internships perceptions and previous military

employment positions. By not having an identical sample size and profile the researcher findings are not directly related to any specific military career.

This study analyzed students who were previously enlisted in the military and are enrolled in higher education, but it did not look at the differences of perceptions between majors or degree types regarding students' views of internships in higher education. Since there are a plethora of different disciplines a student can gain an education in then it could be important for a researcher to review if there are commonality between specific degrees and students' perceptions of internships. By focusing this study on students who are studying specialized programs it may show that students utilize different skills or face different challenges relevant to their specific industry or degree.

It is essential not to assume the data received from the participants' experiences will be entirely generalizable because many other factors can influence these individuals' views of the military, higher education, or internships. There are limitations in the way participants were recruited to participate in this study because by only receiving information from individuals that chose to volunteer, it may have limited the overall results and created significant bias. Only interviewing those who volunteered to take part eliminated the perceptions of those who were not involved, which limits the representation of the sample. Military and veteran students who were eager to be involved in this study could have swayed the results to show a higher sense of confidence that is not equally representative of other members. Working towards a better understanding of military students would contribute to helping improve their overall success in college and help them strengthen their chances of gaining a successful career.

### **Implications for Professional Practice**

The findings discovered in the previous chapter help with providing more directed professional career preparation training that is tailored to helping these specific students navigate employment opportunities in college more successfully. The findings related to skills these students use, experiences they face, and difficulties they have provide career counseling professionals with the knowledge they need to help better prepare military and veteran students transition from their military career towards learning to prepare for a

civilian career. Explaining how prior abilities or experience gained in the service can be beneficial for future civilian success is essential to discuss with these students because they may know understand how to effectively translate this knowledge. Since transition difficulties are reoccurring for this population then it is essential to learn the corrects ways to successfully guide future generation of students who will enter college having that same similar military background.

By teaching career professionals how to accurately clarify the specific traits these students come to college with already prepared to utilize and understand military and veteran students' experiences will help with guiding them in understanding how to properly support these individuals. Reminding these individuals that they are skilled at adapting to new situations that can be challenging and often overcome difficult struggles will help to remind them that they do have the tools they need to be confident in their abilities. When providing this support to these students it is important to encourage positive self-thought and reflection which will improve their overall self-esteem which is crucial for their confidence in their abilities. Making sure these students know it is important to ask questions when they are unsure and to seek guidance when facing difficulty will be crucial to mention when working with military or veteran students because they may not feel prepared to advocate for themselves.

Being able to discuss and translate the specific skills that have helped these students perform successfully in the military will allow career professionals to explain which military duties or responsibilities transition to what an exact civilian employment related area. In order to support these students to be successful is their education, career success professionals must be able to understand how to advise them to use relevant knowledge they have already gained in the service and use these experiences to practice using skills such as adaptability and dedication. Accurately helping these students identifying the relevant skills, traits, and qualities that they bring to college from the military needs to be mentioned when providing support because it reinforces their understanding on how to better prepare to join the civilian workforce. Being able to freely discuss the uncertainties these individuals are facing or will face can provide insight into recognizing what aspects are critical to their overall success and professional development training, so it is important to encourage an open

dialogue of communications.

When working with this population of students it is important that these individuals are not treated like traditional students because they are already entering college with previous work experience and knowledge. Since they are not always willing to take on an entry level working position such as an internship then it is important to remind them why it would be beneficial for their career to participate in an internship and how it would make them more successful as a future applicant for a job. Since military and veteran students often enter college at a much older age then they may feel less inclined to participate in internships so it is important when supporting them to provide encouragement that informs them that these opportunities are not just for younger individuals and are recommended to anyone willing to gain more career knowledge.

When creating targeted programming related to training these students on how to connect previous learned career-related skills to internships in college, it must be required that they are shown how to link practical knowledge they are learning in the classroom to their passion or professional career. Career professionals must help prepare students to be more aware of the skills they already have which can make them stronger applicants and more likely to be successful when transitioning to working in a civilian sector. It is vital that career professionals help provide transition preparation knowledge as early as they can to help these students identify, understand, and practice specific qualities to be more successful in a civilian job that interests them.

One way career services offices in higher education can provide more directed support to military and veteran students is to create resources that help them find more veteran friendly career opportunities. These students often are older, so they are going to be more inclined to look for openings where they are working with others similar in age. They may not want to consider taking part in an internships on-campus because they feel these are more for students who are younger and have minimal working experience, so it is important that career professionals still encourage this population to consider all employment opportunities available to them. By targeting these students early on in their transition into college and informing them right away on how to be more professionally successful it can prepare them for their new career much sooner which will help reduce

adjustment difficulties they might face.

Moving forward career counselor and career services offices should begin collaborating with veteran services offices at colleges or universities because these students may be less inclined to ask for help or come to these spaces. By building a sense of comradery with these students and with the office they may be more inclined to visit which can assist career services professionals in developing trusting working relationships with these students. When providing guidance or presenting a career preparation workshop to this population of students it would be important for professionals to consider that these individuals are more mature than the typical college student but that they also still face similar transition concerns. In conclusion it is important for career services offices and counseling professionals to learn to work with military and veteran students early on in their transition into higher education to provide them with the tools or knowledge they need to feel more inclined and prepared to apply for internships.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Researchers should consider factors linked to specific identity factors such as military branches, participants' gender or race, age, or previous military roles. Since this was a more generalized approach that encompassed all military branches in the United States then it can be beneficial to study each branch separately to identify if the validity of the research findings is still relevant when studying specific departments. Since this research study interviewed individuals from different backgrounds it reduced the relevancy of responses between all the participants. Having multiple factors involved in the results gained it made it more complicated in being able to directly link the findings to one specific group of soldiers. Looking at only one branch of the military can provide a clearer outline of how these separate groups function uniquely different in comparison to multiple branches.

Additionally, it would be important to look at non-American military and veteran students who participated in other countries' armed services to see if these factors are consistent in other countries. Depending on the country when military and veteran students serve it can change an essential aspect of the study because the rules and expectations of duties or responsibilities change in different countries. In the United

States armed service individuals choose to participate but in other areas some individuals are not given the same liberties. Being forced to serve will have a different influence on your feeling and could provide dissimilar perspectives or experiences then those that volunteered. It is also important to recognize that this research conducted only consisted of veterans who were honorable discharged from the military but did not receive any findings linked with those who were dismissed due to unfavorable conduct. Individuals who are dishonorable discharged may be more likely to have a negative perspective of the military and not feel inclined to discuss their time in the service as being beneficial. These individuals may feel that the service did not effectively prepare or support their overall professional success.

Other aspects that are important to consider in for future research is to look at the differences of perceptions between educational majors or specific occupations conducted in the military. Some students have more relevant skills gained in the services that they can successfully transition to a future career where others do not have the same opportunity. Combat soldiers learn different skills then intelligence experts so there is not always standardized skillset that can be gained from serving in the military. Even though similar trends were discovered in the data does not mean that this is consistent for every role.

Lastly this research was missing feedback for changes for future resources or adjustments that could be made to better support these students when transitioning out of the service and into higher education. Being able to learn what resources or guidance would be most beneficial to acclimating to a new environment could be beneficial to help enhancing these student's ability to succeed academically and professionally. Knowing the skills these individuals use to be successful in their career is important, but it is also necessary how these students would prefer to be helped. This population could require a more tailored approach of being trained because of preferences they have developed.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to explore military and veteran students' perceptions of internships while attending college. Interviewing eight participants who represented different branches of the military provided an understanding on how these students' experiences influences their outlook on internships, as well as career

preparation challenges regarding returning or adjusting to a new employment culture or learning environment. Participants identified concerns such as discrimination difficulties with regard to age or experience, unsurety on how to transfer military skills to a relevant career, and freedom to choose a career option for themselves. This knowledge provided an opportunity to recognize substantial factors that could impact preparing this population of students for professional success.

Data analyzed in this study found that military and veteran students expressed that it is important to review perceptions of internships in college so that career services professionals can better recognize how to best support this population while they are attaining a degree. This included exploring how interested military and veteran students are in participating in an internship while in college, learning more about what skills these students are utilizing to prepare for an internship in college, and identifying unique transition difficulties or adjustments that military and veteran students typically experience. Studying this population provided the researcher with an indication of typically experienced moments or factors linked with this population of student's professional identity.

The skills these participants identified practicing included discipline, adaptability, and diversity. These students experienced environmental and professional differences which include differences in duties or expectations, cultural shift changes, and recognizing the importance of participating in an internship in college to help with transition difficulties. Lastly, military and veteran students presented concerns with committing to participating in an internship which included a lack of understanding on how to gain them, being able to commit, and being older than the average student. This knowledge and research will be used to better enhance career services professionals in being able to better understand and support military and veteran students.

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**Appendix A**  
**Email sent out to participants**

Dear {Name},

I am currently a master's student at California Lutheran University, conducting research on veteran student's views on skill development and gaining an internship in college. The researcher am reaching out to invite you to participate in my research study.

To be included, you must have currently or previously served in any branch of the military and are currently enrolled in classes at a college or university.

The study will require 45-60 minutes of your time for an interview to help me to obtain my Master of Science in Counseling with an emphasis in College Student Personnel. I can meet you wherever you like, or we can meet at a quiet and convenient location. Additionally, if you are unable to meet in person, we can arrange a time to talk on the phone or through an online program (skype or zoom). Please let me know if you can be a part of my study.

The results of the study will be available upon request.

Thank you for your consideration.

Kind regards,  
Ryan Akers  
Masters student  
California Lutheran University  
805-493-3279  
rakers@callutheran.edu

**Appendix B****Confirmation Email to Participants**

Dear {Name},

Thank you for the opportunity to interview you for this study on veteran student's views on skill development and gaining an internship in college. Please reply to this email with the following information, as well as to confirm your interview:

Date:

Time:

Location:

Attached is an informed consent form for your records. the researcher will bring one for you to sign on the day of the interview.

The study will require 45-60 minutes of your time for an interview to help me to obtain more information on the understudied area of veteran student's perceptions of campus and its relation to career development. Let me know if any questions.

Thank you again for your time.

Kind regards,

Ryan Akers

Masters student

California Lutheran University

805-493-3279

[rakers@callutheran.edu](mailto:rakers@callutheran.edu)

## **Appendix C**

### **Informed Consent Form**

Title: Veteran Students Perceptions of Internships in College

Name of Principle Investigator: Ryan Akers

Name of Organization: California Lutheran University

**Introduction:** My name is Ryan Akers, I am a current master's student, and am conducting a study through California Lutheran University on veteran student's views on skill development and gaining an internship in college.

This proposal has been approved by California Lutheran University's Institutional Review Board, which is a committee whose task it is to make sure that research participants are protected from harm. For more information, go to <http://www.callutheran.edu/irb/>. If there is anything in this consent form you do not understand about your participation in this study, please call me at 805-493-3279 or email me at [rakers@callutheran.edu](mailto:rakers@callutheran.edu).

**Purpose of the Research:** The academic internship, in conjunction with working internships, offers students unique benefits and experiences that are crucial in developing themselves as professionals in their respective fields of study before graduation (Yin, 2019). The purpose of this study is to understand veteran students' perceptions of transitioning into an internship in college and to identify career-related skills that they use when applying to jobs.

**Participant Selection:** You are being invited to take part in this study because you meet the qualifications to participate and currently enrolled in classes. You were recruited through the Veterans Resource Centers database, which the researcher has gained permission to access from the Veterans Coordinator at California Lutheran University.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. It is your choice whether to participate or not. If you choose not to participate at any time, it will not impact the relationship you have with your university. You can decide to withdraw for any reason at any time. You can also leave any specific question unanswered without consequences and remain in the study if you choose.

**Procedures:** To participate in this study, you will be asked for 45-60 minutes of your time where the researcher can come and meet you at whatever location is preferred or through the phone or internet to answer questions about your experiences. The information will be recorded. Your name and your organization's name will not be recorded; a pseudonym will be assigned to your interview for identification. The information is confidential. No one else but you and the researcher will be present during the interview unless you would like someone else to be there. You can choose to skip any interview questions asked, for any reason at all, and can still take part in the study.

**Duration:** For this study, the researcher will meet with you once for conducting the interview. After our meeting, the researcher will send you a transcript via email to review for accuracy. Finally, if anything is unclear as the researcher is reviewing the interview, the researcher will contact you for a brief phone interview to clarify any issues. You can also access the study and the results upon request.

**Risks:** The interview is on your perspectives but discussing certain topics and sharing personal experiences that an individual may not feel prepared to discuss can cause you discomfort. The interview questions discuss career related aspects about professional experiences in both the military and college, which some individuals may not

feel they want to share. Discussing previous experiences in the military may trigger unwanted negative feelings and anxiety. Additionally, sharing situations where you felt you were not fully prepared professionally can bring discomfort or stress. You can choose not to answer any question if you feel any question is too personal.

It is possible that someone could potentially find out who you are by looking up where the researcher works. They then they could possibly identify the Veterans resource center on the campus, and through that they could identify students involved in the study. As much as the researcher will do to safeguard your identity, by agreeing to participate in this study, you are also aware that there is not a 100% guarantee of anonymity.

**Benefits:** This study adds knowledge in the field about internships, career development, and veteran student's college preparation. It allows for a better understanding of what internship employment preparation consists of for military and veteran students' students. It can provide professionals and students in higher education a better understanding of how to understand these individuals' experiences in college.

**Confidentiality:** Your name and your affiliation will not be known to anyone other than the primary researcher, Ryan Akers. The information collected will be used to complete a Thesis for the California Lutheran University's Master's program in college student personnel. Your interview will have a pseudonym on it instead of your name. Results will be reported without identifying you or your military affiliation. Only the researcher will know what your pseudonym is. This method is not anonymous, but it is confidential.

**Consent Statement:** I have read the information above. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I am at least 18 years old and freely consent to participate. I understand that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. I also know that the researcher will be audio recorded during the interview.

**I have received a copy of this consent form for my records.**

**I consent** voluntarily to be a participant in this study

**I do not consent** to participate in this research study

**Print Name of Participant** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Participant** \_\_\_\_\_

**Print Name Principle Investigator** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Principle Investigator** \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix D**  
**Demographic Questions**

1. Are you between the ages of 18-25, 26-40, or 40 or older?
2. What is your gender identification? If you choose not to identify yourself put N/A.
3. Are you currently or have you ever served in the United States military?
4. What specific branch of the military did you serve in?
5. What is the length of time you served in the military?
6. What is the amount of time since you left the military? If currently still enlisted put N/A.
7. How many internships have you participated in as a college student?
8. How many years of internship experience have you gained while in college?
9. What degree are you currently earning (Ex. Bachelors, Masters)?
10. What is your ethnicity: Caucasian, Latino, African American, Asian, or Multicultural or Other?
11. What is your preferred date and time for the interview?

## Appendix E Interview Questions

**Verbal Reminders: READ:** You can drop out of this study at any time, for any reason and it will not impact your relationship with college or university. You can skip questions for any reason and still stay in the study if you choose. You have signed the Informed Consent form that you have a copy of.

**\*Start Recording**

“Pseudonym name \_\_\_\_\_”

1. What are your thoughts and experiences with working in an internship in college?
2. What previous experiences do you think has most prepared you to applying to an internship in college? Anything else?
3. In terms of preparing to apply for an internship, tell me more about how you would feel about that? What would be easy, what do you consider difficult, what would be confusing, and what do you feel the least prepared doing?
4. What transferable skills or tools have you learned through the military that you think has prepared you the most to be able to work in an internship in college? Anything else?
5. What are skills that you feel are most important to use when working at an internship in college?
6. What are some similarities and differences between obtaining and working in a military job compared to an internship in college?
7. Can you describe any directions, instructions, or training that you were given through your military experience that prepared you for gaining a job while in college? (if no training was provided skip question #8)
8. If future employment training were provided for military or veteran students, what topics should be included? What else? Why?
9. What are ways that military and veteran students can be supported in college to help make career transitions less difficult?
10. Are there any aspects of your professional or personal identity that will/has help or hurt you in gaining successful employment while in college?
11. Is there anything else you'd like to share regarding being a military or veteran student and internship or career support that I did not already ask about?