Academic Faculty Members' Perceptions of Student-Veterans' Transition

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Abstract: This study sought to explore faculty members' perceptions of student-veterans' transition at a two-year college compared to a four-year institution. The guiding framework for this study was provided by Schlossberg's (1984) Theory of Adult Transitions. A simple random sample was used to identify 557 academic faculty members for the study. Overall, there were several significant differences between two-year and four-year faculty members' perceptions of student-veterans' transitions.

Keywords: Veterans, Academic Faculty, Student Transitions, Two-year Institution, Four-Year Institution

Due to the authorization of the Montgomery GI Bill in 2008, it is estimated that more than two million veterans serving the wars of Iraq and Afghanistan will be eligible to pursue postsecondary education (Barry, Whiteman, & MacDermid Wadsworth, 2014; Vance & Miller, 2009). According to Persky and Oliver (2011) "the legislation requires development of policies and institutional practices that are informed by research" (p.112). Several researchers have argue that with the influx of returning student-veterans to U.S. colleges and universities, there is a gap in the understanding of their needs by higher education professionals (Barnard-Brak, Bagby, Jones, & Sulak, 2011; Elliott, Gonzalez, & Larsen, 2011; Livingston, Havice, Cawthon, & Fleming, 2011).

The current impact of the reauthorization of the GI Bill on the influx of the amount of student-veterans pursuing post-secondary education is an indication that faculty members' ability becomes an essential issue (Barnard-Brak et al., 2011). It is important for faculty members to engage student-veterans in meaningful conversations about transitions throughout their college experience. Thus, using Schlossberg's Adult Transition Theory allows academic affairs administrators to take student-veterans' uniqueness into account. Additionally, this study will fill gap in the literature pertaining to academic faculty members' perceptions of student-veterans' transitioning at public post-secondary institutions. The purpose of this study was to explore and compare academic faculty members' perceptions of student-veterans' transition.

Methods

The target population for this study consisted of academic faculty members employed at a large (20,000+ students), public, four-year institution and a large (19,000+) public, two-year institution located in the Western United States in the same community. A sampling frame

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consisting of all academic faculty members employed during the fiscal year of 2014 was obtained from the division of human resources at both institutions. Sample size was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) formula. From this formula it was determined that a simple random sample of 557 academic faculty members would be needed to obtain a 5% margin of error at a 95% confidence level. Of the total sample size, 297 were selected from a two-year institution, and 260 from a four-year institution.

The instrument was tested for reliability using Cronbach's alpha procedures. Cronbach's alpha value was α = 0.767 for the 31 Likert-type scale items, thus the instrument was deemed reliable (Gatignon, 2014). Kuder-Richardson 20 (KR-20) was used to measure the internal consistency of the 10 dichotomous ("yes/no") items of the instrument. The KR-20 reliability coefficient was calculated to be 0.731. This was considered acceptable according to Tuckman (1985).

The data collection phase of this research was conducted during summer and fall of 2014. After having all procedures approved by the appropriate Institutional Review Board (IRB), data were collected using the web-based survey assessment platform, Qualtrics. Elements of the Tailored Design Method (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2009) were utilized to achieve an optimal return rate with four follow-ups. Although 165 surveys were started by the participants, only 136 surveys were completed, resulting in a response rate of 24.41% (136/557). Non-response error was controlled by comparing late respondents to on-time respondents as outlined by Linder, Murphy, and Briers (2001) in which they noted that late respondents tend to reply similarly to non-respondents. Individuals that responded prior to the fourth contact were considered to be early respondents, while those who responded after the fourth were considered late. A comparison of these groups revealed no differences in the responses of late and on-time respondents.   According to the literature, the average response rates for web-based surveys are approximately 30% (Sue & Ritter, 2012).

Data were processed through preprogrammed range and logic checks and exported into IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows (Version 22.0) database for further cleaning and analyses. Statistical analysis procedures for this study consisted of descriptive and inferential measures such as means, standard deviations, and a series of independent t-tests.

Results

Sample Population

The average age of faculty members at the two-year institution was 49.5 years. The majority of the faculty members at the two-year institution were female (56%), White, non-Hispanic (70%), completed a master's degree (63%), and reported having completed over 10 years of postsecondary education working experience (50%). At the four year institution, the average age was 49 years old. White, non-Hispanic (80%) females (53%) comprised the majority of the sample at the four year institution. Most of the faculty members completed a doctoral degree (81%), and reported having completed over 10 years of postsecondary education working experience (59%). A majority of the respondents at both institutions (85% and 77% respectively) indicated that they never served in the U.S. military.

Response to Objective One

Objective one focused on selected demographic differences between faculty members at a two-year and four-year institution. Table 1 shows that faculty members serving student-veterans at the four-year institution in this study were significantly different from their two-year counterparts on educational attainment, $t(132) = 6.02$, $p = 0.000$, $r = .46$. Contrary to this

finding is the work of Gonzalez (2012) who found that there were no significant differences between educational attainment of faculty members serving student-veterans at a two-year and four-year institution. On average, faculty members at the two-year institution had significantly greater distribution of instructors serving student-veterans than faculty members at the 4-year institution, t (71.71) = -2.98, p = 0.004, r =.33.

Table 1
T- test Results for Demographic Differences between Faculty Members Serving Student-Veterans

Variable	2-year Institution			4-year Institution			*t*	*df*	*p*	*r*
	n	*M*	*(SD)*	*n*	*M*	*(SD)*				
Education	87	2.16	(0.88)	47	3.06	(0.70)	6.02	132	.000	.46
Teaching title	88	5.09	(1.92)	47	3.76	(2.69)	-2.98	71.71	.004	.33

Note. r = *effect size*.

Response to Objective Two

Two- year and four -year faculty members were compared in terms of their perceptions of student-veterans in comparison to traditional, non-veteran students. Of the 12 items which measured attitudes toward student- veterans, the only item on which four-year faculty differed was their perceptions of 'student veterans are more likely to be confrontational with faculty who are perceived to be unprepared for class.' Four-year faculty members were more likely than their two-year counterparts to 'somewhat disagreed' that student-veterans are confrontational with faculty who are perceived to be unprepared for class, t(132) = 2.21, p = 0.029, r = .18. This finding contradicts a previous finding by Gonzalez (2012) in which no significant differences were found pertaining to the statement 'student-veterans are more likely to be confrontational with faculty who are perceived to be unprepared for class.'

Response to Objective Three

Faculty members were asked about their perceptions of the overall campus culture at their respective institutions. Two of the six items that measured campus climate, accounted for significant differences between the two group means on the following items: 'granting transfer credit for skills acquired while serving in the military,' t (94.01) = -3.55, p = .001, r = .34, and 'faculty should NOT have to adjust their teaching style in consideration of student veterans,' t (92.29), -2.16, p = .033, r = .22 (see Table 2).

Response to Objective Four

Faculty members were asked to assign ranks (1= highest and 6 = the lowest) to individuals who they perceived as responsible for helping student-veterans with various problems they may have. An independent t-test revealed significant differences between the two groups in the following problem areas: difficulty finding a job, having problems with PTSD, and difficulty talking about military experiences (see Table 3).

Response to Objective Five

Table 2. *T-test Results for Perceptions of Overall Campus Culture Provided for Student-Veterans*

Variable	2-year Institution		4-year Institution		t	df	p	r
	n	M^a (SD)	n	M^a (SD)				
Grant transfer of credits	88	3.04 (0.86)	48	2.47 (0.89)	-3.55	94.01	.001	.34
Faculty should not have to adjust their teaching style in consideration. of student-veterans	88	3.12 (0.82)	48	2.79 (0.87)	-2.16	92.29	.033	.22

Note. aMean computed on a scale: 4 = Strongly agree; 3 = Somewhat agree; 2 = Somewhat disagree; 1= Strongly disagree. r = effect size.

Objective five focused on participants' willingness to attend seminars for faculty and staff, with reference to the needs of student-veterans. Almost three-fifths (58%) of the faculty members at the two- year institution indicated that they were 'somewhat likely to very likely' to participate in a voluntary seminar pertaining to the needs of student-veterans. On the other hand, a little more than half (51%) of the faculty members at the 4-year institution reported that they were 'somewhat likely to very likely' to participate in a voluntary seminary pertaining to the needs of student- veterans.

Over two-fifths (42%) of the faculty members at the two-year institution revealed that they would rather attend an 'in-person seminar' format. However, their counterparts (43%) reported a preference for an 'on-line seminar' format instead. It is worth while noting that over one-third (35%) of the faculty members at the two-year institution reported a preference for both 'in-person and on-line seminar' format as compared to 17% of their counterparts.

Implications

The results of this study provide several important implications for practice. It appears that the variables, 'educational attainment and teaching title' may influence faculty members' level of awareness of the transitioning of student veterans (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006).

Because campus life is more likely to be less structured than military life; creating a structured setting in the classroom is likely to reduce conflicts between student- veterans and academic faculty members. Rumann and Hamrick (2009) noted that many student-veterans are likely to experience anti-military bias from academic faculty members on campus. According to Mulhere (2014), "higher education institutions carry misconceptions about biases toward veterans that limit their ability to support them effectively" (para. 5).

Table 3. *T-test Results of Who is Responsible for Helping Student-Veterans with Selected Problems*

Problem	2-year Institution			4-year Institution			*t*	*df*	*p*	
{Who should Help}	*n*	*M*[a]	(*SD*)	*n*	*M*[a]	(*SD*)				
Difficulty finding a job {Staff }	87	3.10	(1.57)	47	4.51	(1.71)	1.26	68.04	.000	.15
PTSD {Dept.VA}	87	1.50	(0.88)	46	2.00	(1.38)	2.19	65.13	.032	.26
Difficulty talking about military experiences {Dept.VA}	87	1.62	(0.96)	46	2.32	(1.43)	3.00	67.32	.004	.34

Note. { } information inside of brackets indicates who should be primarily responsible for helping student-veterans with selected problems. aMean ranking values of who should be responsible for helping student-veterans with selected problems: 1= highest to 6 = lowest. PTSD= Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Dept. VA = Department of Veterans Affairs. r = effect size.

Academic faculty members should consider including a student-veteran friendly awareness statement in their syllabi. According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (2014), this statement may read as "Veterans and service duty military personnel with special circumstances (e.g., upcoming deployments, drill requirements, disabilities) are welcome and encouraged to communicate these in advance if possible, to the instructor" (para. 1).

Today's student-veterans are likely to have some challenges finding employment. Thus, proper mentoring from post-secondary staff personnel will help to reduce this problem and provide a supporting environment for the transitioning of student-veterans (Hamrick & Rumann, 2013).

It appears that faculty members would benefit from selected training awareness programs concerning the availability of veteran services on campus for student-veterans. Student affairs administrators at community colleges and four year institutions should give thoughtful consideration to this research and to their policies and procedures related to the training of faculty members involve with the transition of student-veterans. The current impact of the reauthorization of the GI Bill on the influx of the amount of student-veterans pursuing postsecondary education is an indication that faculty members' ability becomes an essential issue (Barnard-Brak et al., 2011). It is important for faculty members to engage student-veterans

in meaningful conversations about transitions throughout their college experience. Thus, using Schlossberg's Adult Transition Theory allows academic affairs administrators to take student-veterans' uniqueness into account.

Directions for future research include: (a) Replication of this study with of a nationally-representative sample of faculty members, (b) a national comparative study of student-veterans' post-secondary completion rates at selected two-year and four-year institutions across the country, and (c) study assessing the return on investment of the GI Bill as measured by program completion rates at two and four-year institutions. Finally, because community colleges are more likely to receive less resources (e.g. funding) when compared to four-year institutions, a study should be conducted to study the impact of the quality of their student-veterans' programs.

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