SUPPORTS FOR STUDENT VETERANS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: CHAT AND UNDERSTANDING STUDENT VETERANS' SENSE OF COMMUNITY IN COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

By

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ABSTRACT

SUPPORTS FOR STUDENT VETERANS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: CHAT AND THE PREDICTORS THAT INFLUENCE STUDENT VETERANS' SENSE OF COMMUNITY AND THEIR EFFECT

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John Christman

In this study, I examined and described the experiences of student veterans across three institutions of higher education. This dissertation has three overlapping purposes. First, this dissertation expands the existing scholarship and research on supports for student veterans in the form of student veteran resource centers, as well as how these supports illustrate others' understanding of the needs of student veterans. Second, this dissertation helps to better understand the degree to which student veterans feel like they are part of a community and how student veterans are provided with varying levels of support. Third, I conclude by providing stakeholders in higher education with suggestions based on the findings and feedback from my two studies to take into consideration with regard to the creation and implementation of student veteran resource centers. By analyzing the experiences of student veterans, the resource centers, and the administrators who operate them, this study fills important gaps in our understanding of the purposes of these resource centers, as well as how and why student veterans choose to use them. This study pursues answers to two groups of guiding questions:

1. What are the commonalities or differences with regard to the goals of student veteran resource centers at different universities, such as how they are used and what their purposes are? Additionally, how do these commonalities and differences illustrate higher education administrators' understanding of the needs of student veterans?

2. What are the predictors that have the strongest influence on student veterans' sense of community in communities of practice, and given that each university in this study is the recipient of the same award for supporting student veterans, how does each university demonstrate this support and what are the possible differences?

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INTRODUCTION

Nearly three million active duty military and reservists have been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001 ("Costs of war," n.d.), and those returning are making the transition from the structured life of the military to higher education. There were approximately 400,000 student veterans on university campuses in 2000, and since the passage of the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 (more commonly referred to as the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill) in 2009, the largest educational reform since the passage of the Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944 (Mettler, 2005), that number has nearly doubled (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2010). Steele, Salcedo and Coley (2010) reported that more than half a million veterans applied for these benefits during the first year of its implementation. According to the Office of Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs (2010), upwards of 75% of veterans have now finished some level of education post-high school. Additionally, roughly 11% of veterans have now earned a four-year degree (Office of Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, 2010), suggesting that more veterans will continue to pursue higher education after completing their time in the service. Consequently, many universities have experienced an increase in the amount of student veterans on campus (Griffen & Gilbert, 2012).

Student veterans represent an important population of students, and while historically there has been an existing body of research on student veterans in regards to the utilization of the G.I. Bill and degree completion rates (Callahan & Jarrat, 2014), there is very limited research in higher education literature on the supports student veterans receive when they arrive (DiRamio, Ackermann & Mitchell, 2008; Vacchi & Berger, 2010). There are few studies that address the challenges and tensions that veterans experience during this transition, which may include isolation, developing relationships with faculty and students who may share different viewpoints,

and not receiving credit for coursework or training that was accomplished in the military (Ackerman et al., 2009; Callahan & Jarrat, 2014; Horn, 1996). These challenges and tensions, coupled with a fear that they might not be as prepared as more traditional students (Ross-Gordon, 2003), could contribute to high levels of attrition and the lack of desire to pursue academic goals for student veterans (Fisher, 1997). Given all of this, it is incumbent upon the institution of higher education to provide veterans with supports and resources on campus for their future success (Kuh, Curce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008). This dissertation expands on current research to develop a broader understanding of existing supports that are provided to student veterans.

One challenge for universities in supporting veterans is that many people, including fellow students, have not been exposed a regimented and structured lifestyle such as the military. As Schiavone and Gentry (2014) maintain, as "less than 1% of the nation's population currently serves in the armed forces (compared with 9%, for example, during World War II), there is a great disconnect between veteran-students and non-veteran-students on today's college campuses" (p. 29). This divide between these two groups of students may reflect the relatively limited research on veterans in higher education with regard to supports. Additionally, this lack of research on supports in the form of student veteran resource centers may limit the stakeholders of higher education in making changes to address these issues. Having such research will allow these stakeholders "to make data-driven decisions that impact the lives of student veterans" (Cate, 2014, p. 20) in the form of policies on campus or supports targeting student veterans.

In order to make the transition from the military to campus life manageable, some universities have provided supports in the form of student veteran resource centers for student veterans. I define student veteran resource centers as communities of practice (CoPs) and areas

where student veterans can receive information about their benefits, get involved in volunteer organizations, learn about job opportunities after graduation and meet other student veterans. When provided with such physical locations, such as a lounge or club, veterans report having a positive experience and feeling a stronger sense of belonging to the group and university (Norman et al., 2015). While there appears to be a lack of a consensus definition of student veteran resource centers, I constructed this definition from observations and time spent in various student veteran resource centers. However, simply creating such places for student veterans does not guarantee how the place will be used, that the place is useful for whom it is supposed to serve, and that there is agreement about the purpose of the place (Gehl, 2006). There appears to be an assumption that simply creating a student veteran resource center is good enough.

I argue that student veteran resource centers, as a place, are not independent entities that are completely detached from the broader university. Rather, places influence the various social and cultural practices of the university while at the same time being shaped by them (Canter, 1977; Gieryn, 2000). Tilley (2001) argues that places themselves do not have agency and that meaning is only created when something is used towards a specific purpose. Thus, places provide agency to those who use it. As noted above, my dissertation develops a clear understanding and implementation of supports, such as student veteran resource centers for veterans on campus, while also focusing on the student veterans' sense of community solely in the context of student veteran resource centers.

This dissertation has three overlapping purposes. First, this dissertation expands the existing scholarship and research on supports for student veterans in the form of student veteran resource centers, as well as how these supports illustrate others' understanding of the needs of student veterans. Second, this dissertation helps to better understand student veterans' sense of

community (SoC) in communities of practice (CoPs), and how student veterans are provided with varying levels of support. Third, I conclude by providing stakeholders in higher education with suggestions based on the findings and feedback from my two studies to take into consideration with regard to the creation and implementation of student veteran resource centers.

Problem Framing

There is limited research on the student veteran population with regards to their increasing presence in higher education and supports that are provided to them on university campuses (Cook & Kim, 2009). In addition, the effectiveness of programs that have been established for student veterans "is unknown, as very little data have been collected on a large-scale, consistent basis" (Evans, Pellegrino & Hoggan, p. 47, 2015). Without these data, it is difficult to develop an accurate understanding of what kind of impact these supports have on student veterans. As more veterans will decide to pursue higher education in the coming years as extended deployments continue to slow down and enlistments come to an end, many universities "are poised to serve as an academic starting point for many of these service members" (Evans et al., p. 47, 2015). Therefore, this dissertation and the questions I answer address this need for more research surrounding this demographic.

My motivation for engaging in this particular field of research stems from my experiences as a Marine, as an educator, and as a student at the undergraduate and graduate levels at two different universities. As a Marine, I felt an extremely strong sense of connection and community with those around me. Questions I had about resources, transitioning back into civilian life or jobs were easily answered due to the breadth of knowledge and experiences of those around me. When I made the transition to my initial university after my enlistment in the Marines, I assumed that there would be similarly effective supports in place for veterans. To my

surprise, the only real office or group at my university who had anything to do with veterans was the admissions office, led by a solitary employee who processed educational benefits for veterans.

This was further problematized when I pursued doctoral studies at another university, which, on paper, has received various awards and recognition for issues and supports related to veterans. I was surprised at the negative methods that other students, and even professors, used to shut my ideas down and devalue my perspectives. Fortunately, it was at this time that I discovered that a student veteran resource center existed on campus, allowing me to develop a sense of community that had been lost from those experiences. The fundamental worries that I have, along with countless other veterans, are how universities can capture the essential qualities of free speech and create communities where nobody's voice is restricted.

If, as researchers, we seek to create knowledge to improve the educational experiences of student veterans, it would be irresponsible to continue to ignore the role that these student veteran resource centers play on campuses, given their limited presence in research in higher education (Cook & Kim, 2009). In order to engage in research that provides more effective supports for student veterans, it is imperative to account for the influence and agency that these student veteran resource centers provide.

My dissertation adds to existing literature surrounding military veterans in higher education and the supports in the form of student veteran resource centers that are provided to them at some universities using qualitative and quantitative methodologies. In the next section, I describe these methodologies and identify my research questions.

First, I used cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) (Engeström, 2001) to qualitatively examine the objects of activity, or goals, of student veteran resource centers at different

universities to develop a more thorough understanding of how they are used and what their purposes are. I am interested in the object of these systems of activity as opposed to the other features of CHAT (Table 1) because the objects capture the overarching goal and direction of the system. It is the shared and collaborative work of what each system of activity recognizes what their object is that is of importance to this article. Identifying these possibly competing objects among activity systems will provide me with a better understanding of how different universities provide veterans with supports and resources, as the objects will show what the purposes of these resource centers are and if there is agreement about how they are used among student veterans and administrators. I used CHAT for this section to acquire insight into what people think, what people do, and the possible tensions that may exist among different groups. Additionally, CHAT is a practical and efficient mechanism to categorize various data into straightforward models (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010).

Second, I used sense of community (SoC) theory (Nistor, Daxecker, Stanciu, Diekamp, 2015) to quantitatively explore the predictors (time in CoP, socioemotional-interpersonal knowledge, social components of sense of community, and knowledge sharing acceptance) that influence student veterans' SoC in CoPs. This model been used to predict social components in academia (Nistor et al., 2015); furthermore, I argue that this model's essence of togetherness, experience and trusting in others mirrors the military culture that many student veterans have difficulty finding once they leave the military. Looking across at different student veteran resource centers in universities allows me to develop an understanding of the similarities and differences that may exist in these locations. More importantly, I am able to develop an understanding of how universities provide their student veterans with effective supports through these student veteran resource centers and the various reasons for this.

Third, I reflect on my experiences as a student veteran and as a researcher studying military veterans in higher education in light of the lack of comprehensive literature surrounding student veterans. As university administrators are ultimately the group tasked with making decisions on this scale, I provide university administrators with considerations for why literature addressing student veterans needs more attention and ways to provide student veterans with more support.

It is important to understand these locations to develop more generalizable themes that may lead to more efficient and useful student veteran resource centers for veterans. It is my hope that veterans, policymakers and administrators are able to use the data to improve existing practices from the following sets of questions:

1. What are the commonalities or differences with regard to the goals of student veteran resource centers at different universities, such as how they are used and what their purposes are? Additionally, how do these commonalities and differences in the objects of activity illustrate others' understanding of the needs of student veterans?
2. What are the predictors that have the strongest influence student veterans' SoC in CoPs, and given that each university in this study is the recipient of the same award for supporting student veterans, how does each university demonstrate this support and what are the possible differences?

Summary of Study Design

In this dissertation I explored supports in the form of student veteran resource centers that are provided to military veterans on some university campuses, an area of research that is currently limited. The findings from this dissertation are drawn from two different data sources.

First, I requested permission to engage in semi-structured interviews with administrators who operate student veteran resource centers, as well as student veterans who use them. These interviews were then transcribed and coded. The purpose of these semi-structured interviews allowed me to ask the participants specific questions while also adapting to and building questions off of some of their responses. Second, I collected data in the form of anonymous questionnaires from student veterans. These anonymous questionnaires identified descriptive and demographic data of the participants, while also capturing the degree to which the student veteran resource centers as CoPs impact their SoC.

Synopsis

This dissertation is composed of three separate sections written in the form of stand-alone articles. Consequently, readers of this dissertation may discover areas where concepts are given thorough treatment in one article but less exhaustive treatment in another. There may also be some repetitiveness as the ideas from one article may be summarized in another. My goal with this dissertation was to explore different aspects of my data and write about these for various audiences, such as policymakers and administrators seeking information about designing supportive and effective student veteran resource centers, researchers specific to military veterans in higher education looking to advance scholarship within the field, and for an audience within the military veteran research community looking to explore issues concerning research on military veterans and their experiences in higher education. Your flexibility as a reader is greatly appreciated. The structure of this dissertation is as follows:

Section 1: Understanding the difference in objects of activity in student veteran resource centers at different universities

Section 2: Understanding student veterans' sense of community in a university-based community

of practice

Section 3: Practical considerations for higher education literature addressing student veterans

CHAPTER 1:

Understanding the difference in objects of activity in student veteran resource centers at different universities

When veterans shift to environments where a shared foundation is replaced with autonomy, they lose the bonds and connections they once had (Kirchner, Coryell, & Yelich Biniecki, 2014). For example, universities may seem autonomous to veterans, as the community structure and cohesiveness may be different than what they are accustomed to. To help mitigate these transitional issues, as well as assist student veterans in developing connections with others, a number of universities have established student veteran resource centers on campus (Evans et al., 2015). Currently, it is unclear precisely how many universities have student veteran resource centers for veterans; however, the American Council on Education's (ACE) report in 2012 identified the services and resources of 700 institutions (McBain, Kim, Cook & Snead, 2012). While many universities have started to procure locations for student veterans on campus, "the effectiveness of those programs is unknown, as very little data have been collected on a large-scale, consistent basis" (Evans et al., 2015, p. 47). More sufficient data need to be collected to develop a better understanding of the purpose and effectiveness of these student veteran resource centers in terms of supporting student veterans.

With regard to supporting student veterans, one major goal of student veteran resource centers is to promote a community within a university. As Wlodkowski (1999) contends, "Connectedness in a learning group is perceived as a sense of belonging for each individual and an awareness that each one cares for others and is cared for" (p. 103). For veterans, this sense of connectedness is heavily relied upon and engrained during time in the military, as the sum is greater than the individual parts of a group. In an environment such as the military, there is a

strong sense of trust and loyalty shared among its members, creating a climate where members can share experiences and to learn from each other.

The term "veteran-friendly" is frequently used in research articles, but as Sutton (2015) argues, this can only truly be accomplished with the inclusion of "cultural transition opportunities such as a veterans association or built-in community" (p. 5). The student veteran resource centers allow for veterans to share a location where they understand each other's experiences. Even though student veteran resource centers exist at some universities, most of these universities do not have resources to provide staff or faculty with a deeper understanding of the culture of the military or the needs of student veterans (O'Herrin, 2011). Ackerman et al. (2009) found that satisfaction with supports for student veterans were received as positive and negative, even on campuses that provide student veterans with resources or student veteran resource centers. This demonstrates that even when student veterans are provided with spaces such as student veteran resource centers, it does not mean that they are used effectively. Having staff that are provided with appropriate training may increase the sense of connectedness and satisfaction that student veterans seek in these centers (Callahan & Jarrat, 2014).

Inclusion, as defined by Wlodkowski (1999) as "awareness of adults that they are part of a learning environment in which they and their instructor are respected by and connected to one another" (p. 102), is thus created. A sense of inclusion in these kinds of environments results in higher degrees of academic satisfaction (Webber, Bauer Krylow, & Zhang, 2013; Zhao & Kuh, 2004) as well as "continued achievement throughout baccalaureate studies" (Webber et al., 2013, p. 595). For example, after the creation of a student veteran resource center at Lee College, dropout rates decreased by 55%, while retention and degree completion rates increased by 10% (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013). Conversely, the threat of possible

sanction or humiliation may deter veterans from being open in environments such as the classroom or student veteran resource centers, as student retention rates are strongly based on the ability of students to integrate into the broader academic community (Cole & Griffin, 2013).

It is imperative that student veteran resource centers for veterans are staffed with adults who can create these engaging and tolerant learning climates. Learning environments that promote inclusion and community can enhance the experience of student veterans to learn and be successful in the broader context of the university (DiRamio et al., 2008).

Problem Framing

This study examined the student veteran resource centers at three different universities and identified how they are used and what their purposes are. In this study, I examined the student veteran resource centers from the perspectives of the student veterans who use them and the administrators who operate them. I chose these two groups because I wanted to get a sense of how these different people understand how student veteran resource centers support student veterans. All of the universities are recipients of the same award earned for providing student veterans with supports. Each university in this study has earned gold level recognition by the Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency's (MVAA) Veteran-Friendly School program, which "recognizes academic institutions of higher learning committed to supporting the needs of student veterans and dependents" ("Michigan's Veteran-Friendly Schools," n.d.). Gold level recognition is earned by meeting six out of seven of the following items:

- having a veteran-specific website
- a process for identifying student students
- having a student veterans organization operated by students
- providing veteran-specific career services

- possessing an on-campus veterans' coordinator
- a system to award credits based on military training
- monitoring student veteran transfer and graduation rates

However, how these supports in the form of student veteran resource centers are allocated to and used by student veterans on each campus differ. Thus, the experiences of student veterans at each university could vary significantly.

Research questions

I use a multi-case approach and cultural historical activity theory (CHAT). CHAT provides the object of activity as a lens through which to develop a broader understanding of the goal of systems of activity (Engeström, 1999; Engeström, 2001; Hegel, 1807; Leont'ev, 1978). I used CHAT (Engeström, 2001) to qualitatively examine the objects of activity, or goals, of student veteran resource centers at different universities to develop a more thorough understanding of how the student veteran resource centers are used and what their purposes are (Table 1). Additionally, I define supports as the student veteran resource centers that are located on some university campuses. Understanding these student veteran resource centers, such as how they are used according to the student veterans and administrators, the commonalities and differences that are found in them, what their purposes are and how they impact student veterans' sense of community can inform future practice and lead to the development of effective student veteran resource centers.

Specifically, I asked:

- What are the commonalities or differences with regard to the objects of activity in student veteran resource centers at different universities, such as how they are used and what their purposes are?

- How do these commonalities and differences illustrate higher education administrators' understanding of the needs of student veterans?

Background

In this section, understanding that the nature of student veterans may be foreign to some, I provide the reader with an overview of the experiences that student veterans in higher education may encounter, to include military culture, characteristics of nontraditional students, and transitional tensions when student veterans exit the military and pursue a degree. Lastly, I describe the cultural historical activity theory I use to study the different objects of activity found in the student veteran resource centers at three different universities.

As this section is predicated on supports in the form of student veteran resource centers that universities provide to a nontraditional population of students, it reasonable to begin with an observation of military culture that illustrates the differences between this group and non-military students. This provides a better insight as to who student veterans are and to provide justification for this research.

Today's student veterans are as unique as their experiences. According to the Pew Research Center (2011), only 0.05% of Americans have served on active duty in the last decade and 57% of the U.S. population knows a military veteran personally. Even though many people may have a broad understanding of what the military is, understanding the military experience, on the other hand, is a more challenging task (Sander, 2012). Prior to pursuing a degree, some veterans have operated million dollar equipment, protected dignitaries of foreign countries, and have mastered foreign languages. The military instills and requires high levels of discipline and attention to detail, and its members are provided experience in fast-paced, high-pressure, real-world situations, often as young as the age of 18. As a result, many veterans "have survived,

endured and excelled in artificial and real-world situations, leaving them both resilient and self-confident" (Hassan, Jackson, Lindsay, McCabe & Sanders, 2010, p. 31). With these different skills comes a different set of needs than are found in traditional, non-military, college-aged students. For example, traditional students may not have a similar work ethic, and they may come to universities with more cultural capital that makes the transition into higher education much easier for them (Collier & Morgan, 2008).

Defining military culture

In developing an understanding of the veteran population, it is important to take culture into consideration, as "social activity shapes and is shaped by culture" (Hinchion, 2017, p. 242). Culture has been defined by Simmel and Levine (1972) as "the cultivation of individuals through the agency of external forms which have been objectified in the course of history" (p. xix). In addition, Hinchion (2017) argues culture is "dynamic and generative and is created through participation in lived experiences" (p. 242). The norms that are established guide what is acceptable and appropriate behavior in these cultures.

Johnson and Christensen (2004) contend that individuals become part of a culture through processes that enable them to learn and function in a specific culture. Cultures, to include the military, possess various socialization processes that may include sanctioning members of a culture who do not follow the norms. Additionally, members may identify themselves so closely with a particular culture that the norms and behaviors of other cultures may appear to be unusual (Johnson & Christensen, 2004).

The U.S. military guides all of it members through an indoctrination process where members learn the norms and values of the military, as well as how they should behave in and out of uniform. This indoctrination process occurs in the form of basic training. Distinct from

individualistic society, the military functions through a collective effort (Naphan & Elliott, 2015). One of the strongest components of this indoctrination process is the loss of the focus on the individual in favor of a more collective identity in order to become part of a tight and cohesive group (Coll, Oh, Joyce, & Coll, 2009; Goffman, 1961). The education and time spent in basic training vary depending on the branch of service; however, a focus on the collective group over the individual is a concept embraced in each branch of the U.S. military (Janowitz & Wesbrook, 1983).

Goffman (1961) coins the U.S. military a total institution, where "large numbers of individuals live and work together and are physically separated from larger society for some period of time" (Naphan & Elliott, 2015, p. 37). Goffman (1961) identifies four components that total institutions consist of:

1. a single authority directs all aspects of life,
2. every aspect of activity is carried out with the company of others,
3. there is punishment for the breaking of rules and regulations,
4. decisions about what activities happen exclude members of the institution.

However, the military does differ from other total institutions as its members enlist voluntarily, they are paid for their service, and they are encouraged to work together to build cohesion in the group (MacCoun & Hix, 2010).

The hierarchical nature of authority in the military also requires its members to obey and respect a chain of command that is to be followed at all times. Direct obedience and compliance to orders are instilled in order to complete missions successfully. Hofstede (2001) contends the military possesses "high power distance" where members can, but rarely, refuse direct orders. Refusal to follow orders is generally followed by a punishment of some sort.

Having an understanding of military culture illustrates some of the characteristics and needs that differentiate veterans from traditional students, as some of the cultural norms and values of the military create dissonance when being applied to higher education.

Defining characteristics of nontraditional students

Proportionally, there are currently more students classified as part-time (39%) than full-time (29%), and more students are enrolled at two-year colleges (44%) than universities (31%) (Choy, 2002). Community colleges are witnessing a large influx of veterans due to their diversity, low tuition and open enrollment (Rumann, 2010). The majority of current undergraduate students are considered to be "nontraditional students" based on numerous characteristics (Dickerson & Stiefer, 2006; Evelyn, 2002; Horn, 1996). Conversely, traditional students are classified as students who begin college immediately after high school, receive financial support from parents, and who do not work or work part-time (Choy, 2002).

In describing nontraditional postsecondary students, Horn (1996) identifies seven characteristics: delayed enrollment, part-time enrollment, financial independence, full-time employment while enrolled, having dependents, single parents, and not having received a high school diploma. Wheeler (2012) found that these characteristics are also the most common factors that place students in high-risk categories. Based on these characteristics, many student veterans can be given the classification of being nontraditional. Such differences between traditional and nontraditional students may present student veterans with feelings of isolation (Dickerson & Stiefer, 2006).

Student veterans come to universities with a different set of needs than traditional college students, and while a majority of student veterans are white, heterosexual males (Cate, 2014), their status as veterans exposes challenges that many historically marginalized groups also

experience (Francis & Kraus, 2012). For example, veterans access and persist in college at lower rates than their nonveteran counterparts, and "they can encounter social dynamics on campus that are shaped by bias and stereotypes" (Francis & Kraus, 2012, p. 12). Kim and Cole (2013) also illustrate ways in which student veterans differ, such as student veterans being less likely "to have worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments" (p. 16) and student veterans being more likely to have "serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than their own" (p. 17). In addition, the majority of student veterans are also first-generation college students (Kim & Cole, 2013). Furthermore, student veterans have more of a struggle compared to traditional college students in regards to being prepared academically and social acculturation (Kirchner, Coryell, & Yelich Biniecki, 2014).

There are also a number of barriers that can impede student veterans' transition to higher education and their ability to fit into the larger campus community, such as how veterans are perceived by other students and the maturity level of traditional students (DiRamio et al., 2008; Elliott, Gonzalez, & Larsen, 2011; Norman et al., 2015). Integrity and honor are two significant values that the military culture instills, and the military teaches its members to take responsibility for their actions. Consequently, student veterans may not associate well with other students who act immaturely, fail to keep commitments, or challenge professors (Exum & Coll, 2008; Kato, Jinkerson, Holland, & Soper, 2016). In addition to other students, professors may contribute, unknowingly, to maintaining separation between traditional students and student veterans by asking student veterans to act as a spokesman for the military by discussing his or her experiences (Coll et al., 2009). These differences for student veterans result in transitional tensions and conflicts when institutions of higher education do not provide the student veterans with resources for how to manage these various characteristics (childcare, early registration,

financial assistance) (Ackerman et al., 2009).

With these varying and diverse skill sets than are typically found in most traditional students comes a different set of needs that higher education needs to recognize and be cognizant of in regards to student veterans as they transition to universities. When universities do not provide inclusive settings and position the student veterans as outsiders, student success decreased (Blimling & Witt, 1999). As a means of helping student veterans make the transition from the military to higher education, some universities have taken steps to help student veterans acclimate on campus, which leads to higher retention rates (Callahan & Jarrat, 2014).

Defining transitional tensions for student veterans

Even though making transitions are a part of everyday life, the process of making the transition from a structured military culture to civilian life can bring many challenges. For example, in a study of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, Demers (2011) identified high distress levels as veterans accounted being "caught between military and civilian cultures, feeling alienated from family and friends, and experiencing a crisis of identity" (p. 160).

Many of these challenges may be visible as veterans transition from the military to higher education. According to Ackerman et al. (2009), veterans experience significant difficulties when transitioning to an academic setting. My firsthand experiences as a veteran and working with veterans at numerous universities make it evident to me that administrators and stakeholders at the university level need to have a thorough understanding of these transitional issues in order to help student veterans adjust to higher education.

For example, college students have much more control and autonomy with regards to how they spend their time, whereas military service members lack much of this control and are more accustomed to roles where authority is unchallenged. Additionally, the culture of the

military requires service members to work together to meet goals and complete missions, whereas much of college is predicated on the individual completion of goals (Naphan & Elliott, 2015). Naphan and Elliott (2015) found that with higher levels of social cohesion that are found in the military, most commonly found among combat veterans, the transition to civilian life becomes more challenging. Their study supports earlier findings that examined the transition of combat veterans in Vietnam, who also experienced greater transitional struggles into civilian life (Borus, 1975).

Theoretical framework: Cultural historical activity theory

In order to unpack military culture, nontraditional students and transitional tensions that student veterans may experience, I use cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) to identify and develop an understanding of how student veterans and administrators perceive existing supports. Just as Frazier (1932) attempted to gain "insight into the meanings of the world to the migrant" (p. 32), I chose to apply this theory for this section because it acquires insight as to what people think, what people do, and the possible tensions that may exist among different groups. Additionally, CHAT is a practical and efficient mechanism to categorize various data into straightforward models (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). One of the conceptual tools of CHAT is the object of activity, and for this study it is the object of activity systems at different universities that is significant. The objects of activity identify the goal and purpose of these systems of activity. In this study, CHAT helps me by developing a better understanding of the military culture in the student veteran resource centers and how they assist student veterans transition to higher education. The following section draws on CHAT to identify tensions and areas of overlap between the objects of activity being investigated through the student veterans and administrators who operate them. I begin by providing a brief historical overview of CHAT, as

well as clarifying some of the framework's conceptual tools in order to make the learning between activity systems more visible for data analysis and reflection.

Grounded in Marxism, the original version of activity theory (Vygotsky, 1978) is able to be "traced back to dialectical materialism, classical German philosophy, and the work of Vygotsky" (Roth & Lee, 2007, p. 189) and focuses on the individual (Figure 1), and in particular the "actions and agency of individuals and the linkages between subject and object as mediated by cultural artefacts or tools" (Bloomfield & Nguyen, 2015, p. 28).

Adding complexity to Vygotsky, his teacher, Leont'ev (1978) created a second generation of activity theory to include the social nature of learning that "situated individual and group activity within a collective activity system" (Bloomfield & Nguyen, 2015, p. 28). Leont'ev's (1978) adaptation marked a shift from a focus on the individual to a focus on the social interactions that occur and the community, believing that "our knowledge of the world is

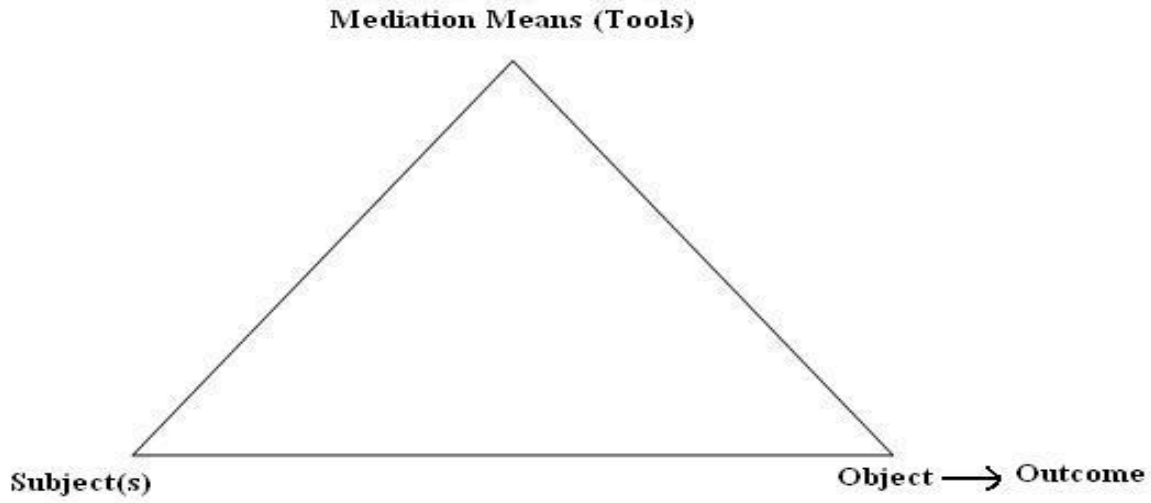

Figure 1: First-generation Activity System

mediated by our interactions with it" (Postholm, 2015).

The third and most recent generation of CHAT (Engeström, 2001) incorporates multiple

collective systems (Figure 2) to highlight "the role of contractions within and between activity systems" (Bloomfield & Nguyen, 2015, p. 30) and is regarded as "an activist and interventionist approach" (Sannino, Engeström, & Lemos, 2016). Furthermore, this conceptualization emphasizes "the agency of the individual learner and the understanding of learning as situated in social contexts" (Kilpatrick, Gallagher, & Carlisle, 2010, p. 161) in addition to the interactive nature of learning. CHAT also allows researchers to examine problems of practice and construct appropriate responses to these problems.

Similar to second-generation activity theory, CHAT uses "activity triangles" (Roth & Lee, 2007) to uncover the tools and social aspects that are significant in activity theory. Activity,

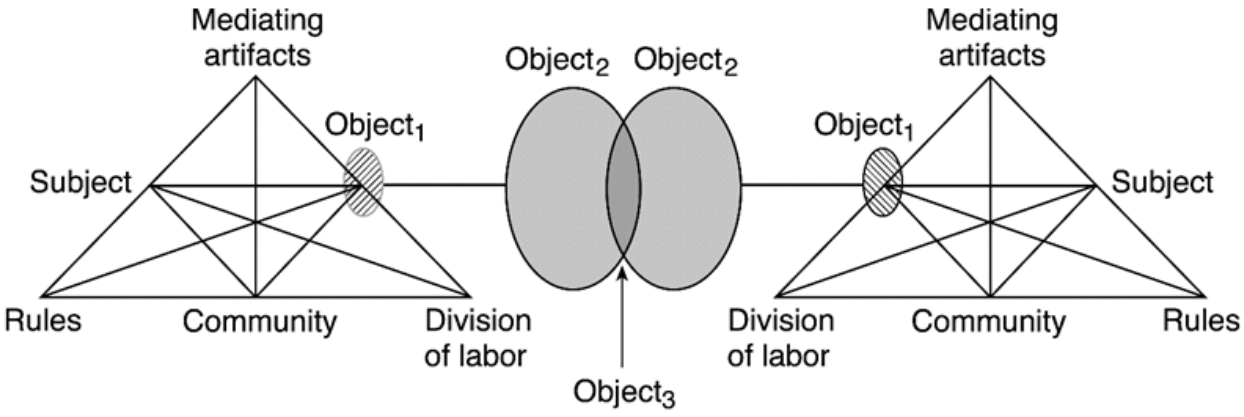

Figure 2: Two Systems of Activity for Third-generation CHAT (Engestrom, 2001, p. 136)

in this framework, refers not to events with clear beginning and end points, but to "an evolving, complex structure of mediated and collective human agency" (Roth & Lee, 2007, p. 198). These historically situated activity systems "contribute to the survival of society and therefore the survival of each individual, in and through whose actions society is realized and exists" (Roth & Lee, 2007, p. 201). The activity systems are comprised of subjects who are the participants engaged in the activity and who are attempting to reach the object of activity.

In his version of CHAT, Engeström (2001) presents two more components of analysis: rules and division of labor. The rules in this generation of CHAT refer to the ways and reasons why the subject being studied behaves the way they do. In other words, they are "the parameters of how a particular activity is or will be done" (DiSarro, 2014, p. 443). The division of labor represents the organization of roles and responsibilities the subject applies to meet its object, as "the benefits of working together provide them with greater room to maneuver and more possibilities for acting" (Roth & Lee, 2007, p. 194).

The object of activity in CHAT has been contested historically among scholars, as the translation from Russian to English does not clearly capture the difference between physical items and targets at which tasks are directed. The object is, however, regarded as existing twice (Hegel, 1807; Leont'ev, 1978) as both as physical entity and a vision, and is a continually evolving construct that is never completely attained (Sannino et al., 2016). Objects are also referred to as "runaway objects" (Engeström, 1999) due to their continuously changing nature. For example, a student learning astronomy may have the object of a better understanding of orbits, which will then be transformed into a new understanding. With multiple systems of activity, the shared object ($Object_3$) of the systems may not align perfectly. The intersection between these activity systems with different objects is of relevance in this study.

Engeström (2001) cites five principles to his generation of CHAT, one of them being his notion of contradictions between objects. This principle is significant to illustrate because these contradictions, or tensions, between activity systems play an important role for future intervention and change, as they serve as the location for development. According to Engeström (2001), contradictions are "historically accumulating structural tensions within and between activity systems" (p. 137). In an earlier study by Nuttal, Doecke, Berry, Illesca and Mitchell

(2007) it was concluded, “the assumption of a common object is highly unstable, or at least more complex than first thought” (p. 50-51). While this study does not use the notion of contradictions as a lens, I feel that it is important to highlight this as a way of understanding the significance of varying objects of activity.

With regard to this section, the two activity systems represent the student veterans as the subject in the student veteran resource center, and the administration as the subject in the university (Figure 3). For relationships between systems of activity to be productive, which in this case is with respect towards the needs and success of the student veterans, “it is the shared work of clarifying and communicating what each system perceives to be their core purpose or object which is of key importance” (Bloomfield & Nguyen, 2015, p. 32). It is necessary for overlap to exist between objects of these two activity systems; without it, the integrity and partnerships between them are jeopardized (Eppich & Cheng, 2015). Thus, CHAT does not exist as a means of informing the subjects in the activity system of what to do to in order to meet their object; rather, it allows contradictions to be identified so that they can be discussed by the subjects.

To help better understand tensions that exist between activity systems and creating places to reduce them, I drew on Tsui and Law (2007) as they investigated the tensions between mentor

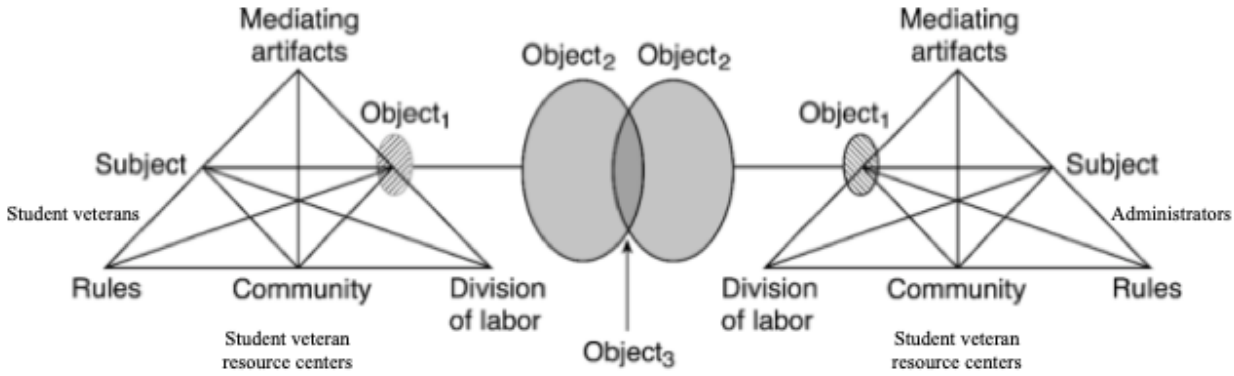

Figure 3: SVRC and University as Activity Systems (Adapted from Engestrom, 2001, p. 136)

teachers and supervising teachers. It was found that constructing a place where both systems of activity (mentor and supervising teachers) can share knowledge could help reduce these tensions. The Tsui and Law (2007) study serves as an effective example for this study, as the goal of this study is to identify the commonalities and differences that may exist in the objects of activity between student veteran resource centers in order to create a location where an agreed upon object can be established. As a framework, CHAT has the potential to identify ways that student veterans can negotiate tensions across contexts and communities. Using CHAT allows me to identify and unpack commonalities and differences among activity systems and existing contradictions among these activity systems. In addition, it provides me with a starting point for future interventions in regards to universities providing student veteran resource centers to meet the needs of the student veterans.

I drew on CHAT to develop an understanding of the objects of activity at different universities with regards to student veterans. Using a CHAT framework allows me to illustrate how different institutions provide supports for student veterans. Engeström (1987) explains that one of the primary purposes of CHAT is to provide researchers with participatory approaches.

Yamagata-Lynch (2010) builds on this, contending CHAT is useful for providing insight and solutions to work-based problems.

For example, Grossman, Smagorinsky, and Valencia (1999) argue that activity theory is useful for examining cultural and social aspects in a particular context. Sezen-Barrie, Tran, and McDonald (2014) used CHAT to analyze the reflections of preservice teachers on their microteachings. The use of CHAT in their study "helped to identify challenges" (p.675) and "contributes to how reflective practice can be enhanced through attention to the social and cultural dimensions" (p. 675). Edwards, Lunt, and Stamou (2010) draw on CHAT to "examine the historical conditions of the development of schools' practices and to analyse current practices" (p. 33), finding gaps between the roles and responsibilities of teachers and welfare managers. Postholm (2015) applies CHAT to develop a better understanding of school-based development with regards to the learning of teachers and students and determined that CHAT is effective for developing interventions between researchers and subjects. Additionally, Eppich and Cheng (2015) used CHAT to explore work activities and found that CHAT identifies "contextual factors" (p. 383) as well as how to "observe and interpret complex social interactions" (p. 383). These cultural and social aspects are important to keep in mind for this study: veterans generally come to universities shortly after, and sometimes during, their time in the military, possessing characteristics from a military culture that do not parallel those characteristics typically held by traditional students in higher education. Thus, student veterans may need supports in place during this transition.

For this study, it is the focus on the objects of activity systems at different universities that is significant. I am interested in the object of these systems of activity as opposed to the other features of CHAT (Table 1) because the objects capture the overarching goal and direction

of the system. It is the shared and collaborative work of what each system of activity recognizes what their object is that is of importance to this article. Identifying these possibly competing objects among activity systems will provide me with a better understanding of how different universities provide veterans with supports and resources, as the objects will show what the purposes of these resource centers are and if there is agreement about how they are used among student veterans and administration. More importantly, identifying these possibly competing objects will provide me with an understanding of the degree to which universities can improve the educational experiences and transitional aspects of shifting from the military to higher education.

In summary, CHAT is useful for answering and responding to this question in my study because it takes into consideration contextual and social factors in a given context, as well as identifying problem areas that can be addressed through intervention of the subjects in systems of activity. Additionally, CHAT is useful because it centers on developing an understanding of practices and transforming practices in context (Roth, Lee, & Hsu, 2009).

Table 1:

Components of Activity Systems

Component	Description
Object	Goal or motive guiding the activity
Subject	Individuals or groups who are part of the activity system
Tool	Artifacts or symbols that can serve as resources for the subject
Rules	Regulations or guidelines surrounding the activity
Community	Group or area that the subject of the activity system belongs to
Division of labor	How the tasks among the subjects and community are delegated and shared
Outcome	End result of the activity

Adapted from Yamagata-Lynch (2010)

Methods

In this study, I used a multi-case approach and cultural historical activity theory to develop a better understanding of places of supports that are provided to student veterans by universities. I felt that using a multi-case approach was an appropriate way to frame this study in order to develop an understanding of possible similarities and differences that may exist across multiple locations. I define places of supports as the student veteran resource centers that are located on some university campuses. Developing a better understanding of these student veteran resource centers, such as how they are used, the commonalities and differences that are found in them, what their purposes are and how they impact student veterans' sense of community can inform future practice and lead to the development of effective student veteran resource centers. Additionally, I identify the implications of these commonalities and differences. To do this, I collected data from interviews of the student veterans and administrators.

Participants and context

Table 2:

Study Participants

Participant	University	Role	Branch of Service
Orv	Hattey	Coordinator	n/a
Shamus	Hattey	Student	Army
Mildred	Hattey	Student	Marines
Nikolai	Cooper	Coordinator	Army
Carey	Cooper	Student	Army
Joela	Cooper	Student	Army
Ronnie	Marmot	Coordinator	Army
Marris	Marmot	Student	Army
Cornall	Marmot	Student	Army

I first interacted with all of the participants through email or phone conversations. After

these conversations, we met in person or decided to engage in interviews on the phone, depending on our locations and schedules. These introductory informal conversations and interactions with the administrators and student veterans allowed me to develop trust and rapport with all of the participants (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2003). Also, it may be reasonable to assume that my status as a student veteran may have given me a different kind of rapport than was possible if a non-veteran attempted to do similar work.

For this study, I selected participants based on three criteria: their location relative to my home university, their level of willingness to participate in the study, and each university in this study has earned gold level recognition by the Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency's (MVAA) Veteran-Friendly School program. First, even though there are multiple universities within a reasonable range of travel, not all of these universities possessed a student veteran resource center, thus limiting my options. Secondly, of those universities with whom I did make contact, some were resistant to engage in a study pertaining to student veterans. As a result, the universities that I ultimately chose for this study were those who I felt were staffed with a reliable administrator and who would provide me with the most data. Third, I used universities that have all received gold level status for supporting student veterans from the MVAA. This is valuable because it gives me a control variable that acknowledges that all of these universities are highly efficient at supporting student veterans. When I observed the student veteran resource centers of these universities, I looked at their location relative to the rest of the university, the materials and items that filled them, as well as what kind of support staff occupied them. The student veterans who were selected for interviews were those who were willing to participate. All of the universities and individuals participating in the study are provided with pseudonyms to protect their identity.

Hattey is a large public research university in the Midwestern United States that hosts over 50,000 students and 600 registered student organizations. This university has earned recognition by the Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency as a school that has programs and supports in place for veterans. There are approximately 400 student veterans who attend Hattey, based on feedback I received from the administrator.

Cooper is a public university in the Midwestern United States with an enrollment of over 21,000 students. It has eight satellite campuses and over 340 registered student organizations. *GI Jobs* ranked Cooper as one of the top ten universities in the country for student veterans in 2017. Cooper has approximately 500 student veterans on campus.

Marmot is a two-year public college with an enrollment of approximately 22,000 students. Marmot has a number of student organizations, such as the Gay-Straight Alliance and Young Americans for Liberty. Marmot has approximately 280 student veterans on campus.

In this study, I interviewed three administrators of three different student veteran resource centers at three different universities, as well as two student veterans from each university who use their student veteran resource center. These administrators were a mix of military and academic backgrounds. All of the student veteran participants were pursuing undergraduate degrees from large public universities in the Midwestern United States, possessing various skill sets and backgrounds from their respective experiences in the military. All of the universities and individuals participating in the study are provided with pseudonyms to protect their identity.

Data sources and collection

Qualitative research is dependent upon various sources of data, such as interacting with participants (Glesne, 2010). Accordingly, during the 2017-2018 academic year I collected and analyzed data from semi-structured interviews. In this section, I describe the data collection for

these interviews.

Data sources

Semi-structured interviews

To answer the first research question (are there commonalities with regards to the object of activity among different universities?), I collected qualitative data through semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews provided me with a prepared set of questions to ask, as well as reliable qualitative data that could be compared among interviews (Bernard, 1988). They also allow the researcher to develop insight into the perspectives of others (Patton, 2003). It is then the responsibility of the researcher to untangle the responses of the interview questions (Glesne, 2010). There are two sets of interview questions for the first article: one set is for the student veterans only, and one set is for administration only. By having separate sets of questions for both the staff and student veterans I was able to see how perspectives differ among groups in regards to the object of activity within the student veteran resource centers. Even though there were separate sets of questions, there were similar themes of questions embedded in them. These themes included the needs of student veterans, resources that student veterans use, the degree to which the needs of student veterans are met, being in contact with support staff within the student veteran resource center, the overall goal of the student veteran resource centers and suggestions for improving them. The unique narratives provided through these interviews elicited the beliefs and feelings of those being interviewed and assisted me in understanding the tensions and contradictions that exist. In addition, unlike structured interviews and questionnaires that limit the possible responses, these semi-structured interviews provided an opportunity for the themes to be explored more deeply (Fontana & Frey, 2005; Holstein & Gubrium, 2002).

To strengthen any claims that I made from the data, I intentionally interviewed multiple sources (Barone, 2011). Conducting interviews with those in and out of the student veteran resource centers at different universities give credibility to the evidence while also allowing for thematic saturation (Kato et al., 2016).

Data analysis

In the following section I describe my process for analyzing and answering the research questions that formed this study. The research questions are as follows:

- What are the commonalities or differences with regard to the objects of activity in student veteran resource centers at different universities, such as how they are used and what their purposes are?
- How do these commonalities and differences illustrate others' understanding of the needs of student veterans?

The first stage of data analysis for this research question involved open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2007) of the research question through interview questions that were provided to both administrators and student veterans. I coded these interviews to identify how the participants view, use, and make sense of their respective student veteran resource centers. To make better sense of these categories of codes with regard to how these resource centers are used and what their purposes are, I also identified codes that appeared in the responses of both student veterans and administrators who operate them.

The interviews were broken down into preliminary categories, and into sub-categories whenever necessary. For example, the category of how student veterans find out about their respective student veteran resource center includes codes such as networking, looking for employment and help with benefits. As a means of keeping the interview data organized and

easier to handle, I used qualitative data analysis software (MAXQDA) to help categorize and code the data.

After putting the codes into their respective categories, I looked for themes or discrepancies between the responses of the student veterans and the administrators (Table 3). I looked for themes such as how the student veterans find out about their student veteran resource centers, the supports that student veterans need, how the student veteran resource centers are used, the degree to which the student veteran resource centers meet the needs of student veterans, and the overall goal of the student veteran resource centers. I feel that these distinctions capture many of the issues student veterans experience on campus.

My role as a researcher

As a student veteran and as a previous board member of a Student Veterans of America chapter at a university, this study is meaningful for me in a number of ways. Not only do I want every student veteran to have the resources and tools needed to be successful in higher education, but also it is my hope for universities to be more cognizant of student veterans on campus. Additionally, this could potentially lead to further research and interventions surrounding student veterans in higher education.

During this study, I balanced my involvement in affairs surrounding student veterans on my campus and engaging in research. While I was not visible in monthly meetings, I was available to student veterans who had questions pertaining to their own research or who were interested in pursuing research regarding student veterans.

Table 3:

Themes and Examples

Theme	**Description**	**Most Common**	**Most Common**

Table 3 (cont'd):

Themes and Examples

		Response of Student Veterans	Response of Administration
How vets find out about their resource centers	Ways in which student veterans find out about their respective student veteran resource centers	Networking	Reaching out directly to student veterans
Supports that veterans need	Supports and tools that student veterans need	Having knowledge of supports	Having benefits taken care of
How resource centers are used	How the respective student veteran resource centers are used	To study	As a lounge area
The resource centers meeting needs	The extent to which student veteran resource centers are meeting the needs of student veterans	Positive (with being more visible as the biggest improvement needed)	Positive (with tracking programmatic change as the biggest improvement needed)
Overall goal	The overall goal of the student veteran resource centers	To address benefits	Having a place to go

Student veterans will continue to have a presence in higher education and it is the responsibility of universities to provide this demographic with the resources and tools to be successful. By having a better understanding of the needs of student veterans and what some of their struggles are on campus, universities can continue, or begin, to have conversations addressing these issues. The alignment of goals across campus can potentially serve as a means

of improving the academic and professional success of student veterans.

Findings

In this section, I describe the activity systems and clarify how I identify the activity system models for this research. Secondly, I identify and address the commonalities and differences with regard to the object of activity in the student veteran resource centers at different universities, such as how they are used and what their purposes are. Here are the major claims based on my analysis:

- There were strong disagreements about the object of activity between the student veterans and administrators at Hattey, leading to frustrations and confusion about the overall purpose of the student veteran resource center.
- Even when student veterans feel as though they are isolated and separated from other students, a shared agreement among the student veterans and administrators about the object of activity in the student veteran resource center can overcome these feelings to help the student veterans be successful.

Identifying activity systems

After collecting data from my interviews of student veterans and the faculty and administration, it was necessary to create and compare two activity systems based on this data to identify possible tensions as necessitated by CHAT. Drawing on an existing model (Figure 3, Yamagata-Lynch, 2010) I was able to create and identify two systems of activity. In step 1, I observed the data that came from the interviews. In step 2, I developed these experiences into narratives that help the reader have a better sense of the needs of student veterans.

In this model, steps 3-5 of identifying activity systems are based on analyzing these narratives in a way that capture the needs of student veterans. In step 3 I chose to focus on

activities that were focused on the object of work because these made more sense to answering my research questions. In step 4, I made comparisons between activity system models that I had created, and in step 5 I was able to finalize these two systems of activity.

Steps 6-8 involve identifying these findings and being able to share the data. Step 6 allowed me to observe tensions that exist between these two systems of activity, and step 7 helped me set up presenting the findings.

Activity systems analysis

In this study, each of the three sites had two distinct systems of activity. Two of the activity systems are at each site. These activity systems, to include their characteristics and locations relative to their university, will be discussed in the following order:

- Activity Systems A and B (student veterans and administrator at Hattey)
- Activity Systems C and D (student veterans and administrator at Marmot)
- Activity Systems E and F (student veterans and administrator at Cooper)

Setting up the activity systems in this order will allow the reader to make better sense of the components in each activity system and how the activity systems between student veterans and the administrators who operate them align or differ.

Hattey

This student veteran resource center is located in the corner of the basement of a building at the edge of campus and has extremely low visibility, meaning that student veterans at Hattey may not even know that a resource center exists for them. Conversely, other student groups, such as the Black Student Alliance, the North American Indigenous Student Organization, and the Asian Pacific American Student Organization, are provided with much higher visibility in a centrally located building on campus frequented by thousands of students each day. There is a

small parking lot connected to the building, but it is only for faculty. Students must park elsewhere and walk to this student veteran resource center. This student veteran resource center contains a small computer lab, couches, and a quiet area for veterans to study.

Activity system A – student veterans from Hattey University as subject

Activity System A, shown in Figure 5, places the student veterans from Hattey University as the subject of the system. This activity system represents the activities undertaken by the student veterans in order to meet their objective.

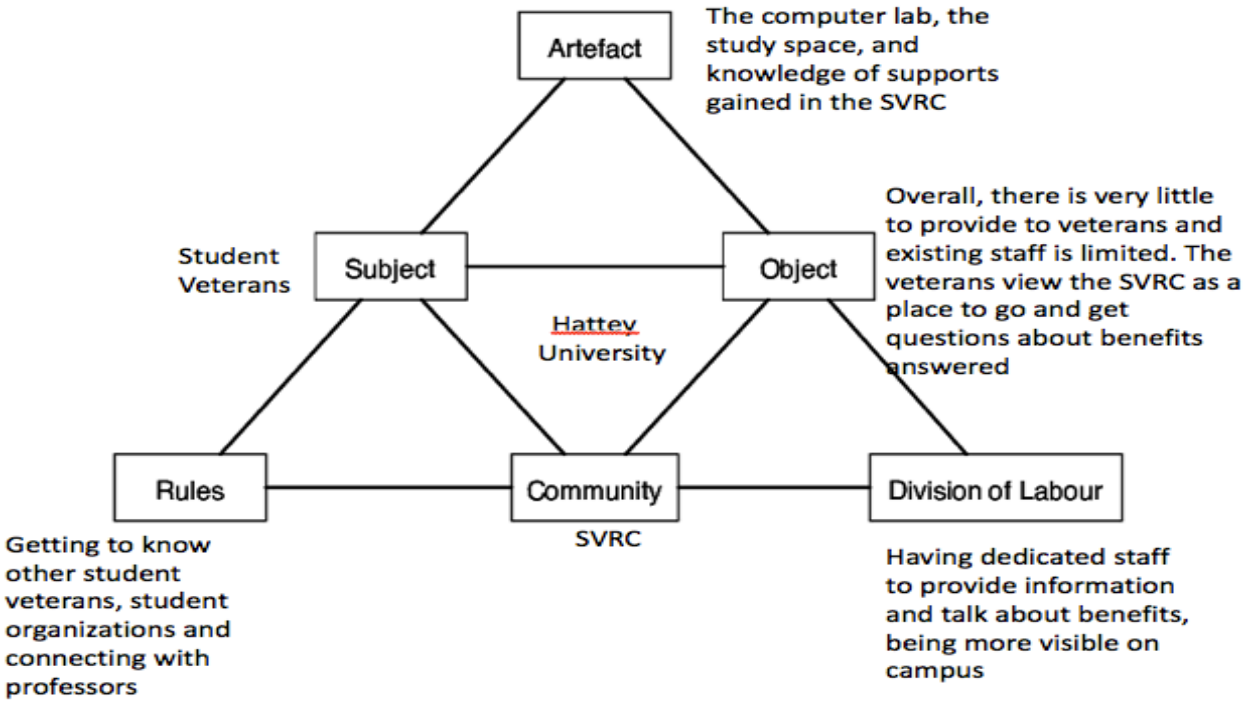

Figure 4: Activity System A

The subject and community of an activity system are mediated by rules that govern how they work. In this model, the rules that guided the student veterans in Activity System A were getting to know other student veterans, student organizations that make the student veterans feel less different, and being able to connect with professors. One student spoke about the importance of connecting with professors:

> I did have a professor, he passed away, and he was a veteran of the Navy and he was a great professor. I would talk to him before class, after class, I would go to his office hours, and I would see if he needed any help because he was older. I had a really good experience with him because I could relate to him and it was nice having a professor who understood what it was like being a veteran.
>
> [Mildred, January 2018]

It is important to the student veterans at Hattey University to work with other student veterans, in the context of learning from them to do better in school, because of the shared experiences of the student veterans. Shamus expressed to me why there is quick and easy connection to other veterans:

> Most of the time I talk with the veterans group because it's easier to talk to them and hang out with them. We probably have a lot of experience together so we can understand our jargon and language we speak, that's one thing, and the thinking process is the same thing.
>
> [Shamus, January 2018]

It is clear that connection to other veterans in the community of the student veteran resource center is helpful for the student veterans at Hattey. This sense of connection helps the student veterans feel less different.

The subject and object of an activity system are mediated by tools that are used by the subject. In this activity system, the student veterans of Hattey use the computer lab, study space

and knowledge of supports gained in the student veteran resource center as tools. However, Shamus expressed his need for more resources:

> So far we only have social things, just going out and hanging out. But, you come to the university to get a job and I don't think that this resource center has much to provide to the students. The university is not helping meet this need.
>
> [Shamus, January, 2018]

Mildred shares the same sentiments as Shamus with regard to the lack of tools available to the student veterans.

> I think there needs to be something more, more collaboration, more noticing that we are here and actually seeing what we need. People come down here and are like, "This need to change," but the people who make that decision aren't the people who are coming down. I know there have been conversations between individuals about things that need to change but it doesn't happen so I'm not sure where the conversation is getting lost.
>
> [Mildred, January 2018]

The community and object of an activity system are mediated by the division of labor. In this activity system, the division of labor becomes visible as the student veterans assert that they need dedicated staff to get them information and talk to about benefits, as well as being more visible on campus. The low visibility of the student veteran resource center at Hattey impedes various aspects of its functioning, from group membership to tasks in the student veteran

resource center being handled.

> Making the resource center more accessible to student veterans. I think that's really major. I think we would have a lot more participation in this office and it would be a better benefit to veterans if it were accessible.
>
> [Mildred, January 2018]

> First would be the accessibility and an office where can just see or enter easily. This place is actually not easy to locate. We are in a dungeon right now pretty much.
>
> [Shamus, January 2018]

In this activity system, the object, or goal guiding the activities of the subject, is for the student veterans to have the administrator help answer questions. The student veteran resource center here is used as a place for student veterans to go. However, the student veterans at Hattey claim that the student veteran resource center has very little to provide to student veterans. This could be a reflection of how student veterans feel that they are supported by the university.

> The fact that nobody can notice, the fact that veterans cannot even find this office, says that the university doesn't care much about the student veteran resource center.
>
> [Shamus, January 2018]

Outside of using the administrator to answer questions related to benefits, there does not seem to be a clear object, or goal, of this student veteran resource center based on the feedback provided

by the student veterans.

Activity system B – administrator from Hattey University as subject

Activity System B, shown in Figure 6, places the administrator from Hattey University as the subject of the system. This activity system represents the activities undertaken by the administrator in order to meet the object. It should be noted that there is only one administrator employed by Hattey University working in this student veteran resource center.

In this model, the rules that guided the administrator in Activity System B were attempting to connect student veterans to other student veterans and attempting to establish a community within the context of the student veteran resource center. The former aligns with one of the rules of the student veterans in Activity System A.

> The need for connection. So whether that is connection to the resource center or peers that can connect to resources. I see a lot through casual conversations. By getting to know someone on an individual basis we can assess where those individual needs are and making those connections.
>
> [Orv, January 2018]

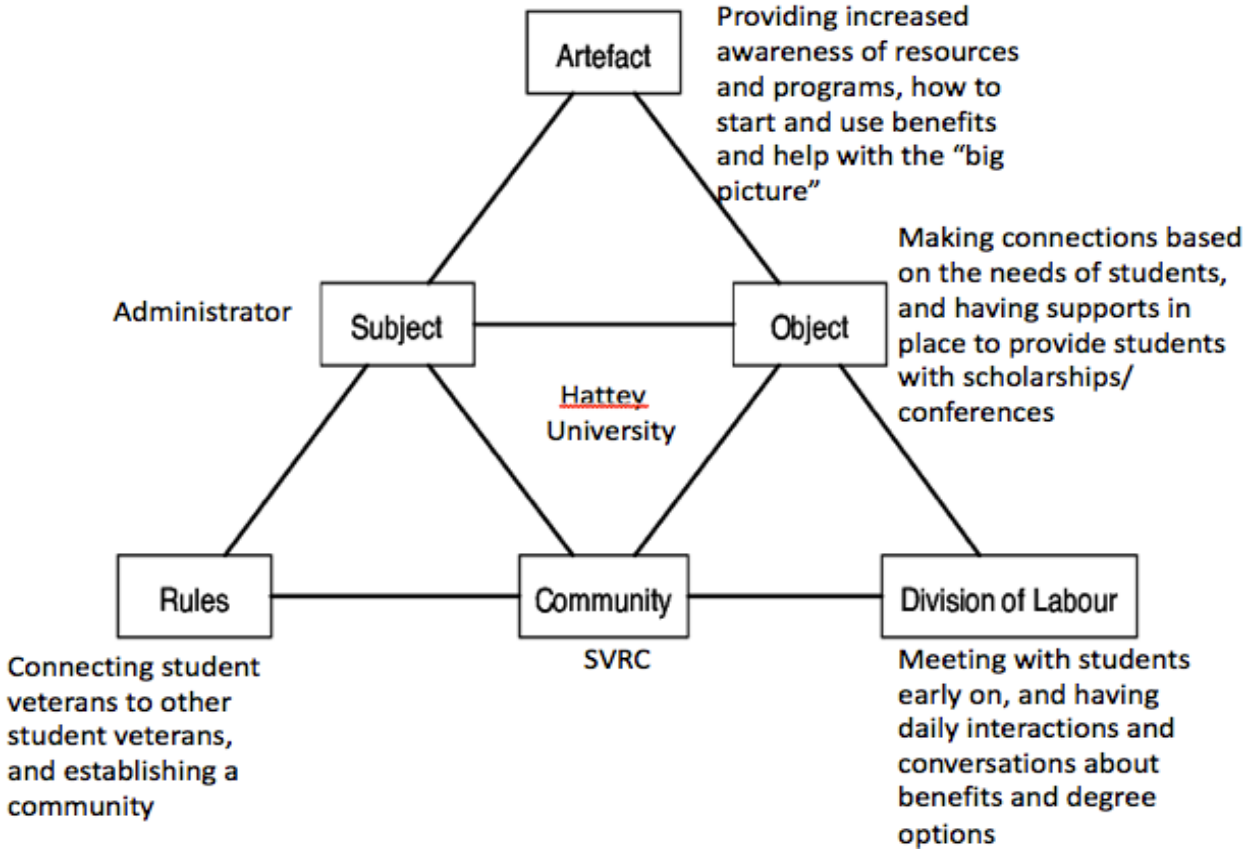

Figure 5: Activity System B

The tools used by the administrator in Activity System B are identified as providing increased awareness of resources and programs, how to start and use benefits and providing information on the big picture.

> I think one of the primary resources that I have available is a referral network, so whether that referral network is internal to other individuals within the campus departments, or peer to peer.
>
> [Orv, January 2018]

The division of labor of the administrator in Activity System B can be identified as meeting with students early on, daily interaction and constant conversations about benefits. In

this community, Orv is completely responsible for initiating these conversations and interacting with student veterans about benefits, as this individual is the only administrator of this student veteran resource center.

The object of activity system B is to make connections based on the individual needs of the student veterans and having supports in place to provide student veterans with scholarship and conference opportunities. However, the student veterans at Hattey did not make any reference to these. Rather, the student veterans expressed various frustrations and confusion about the lack of support and overall goal of the student veteran resource center. Consequently, the objects of activity system A and B do not align or share agreement.

Marmot

The building in which Marmot's student veteran resource center is housed is mostly dedicated solely to veterans, and there are also adjust faculty offices. The building has a convenient location with easy parking. It has a dedicated computer lab and lounge area, with a pool table and video games. It also has quiet study rooms and areas for tutoring.

Activity system C – student veterans from Marmot as subject

Activity System C, shown in Figure 7, places the student veterans from Marmot as the subject of the system. This activity system represents the activities undertaken by the student veterans in order to meet the object.

In this activity system, the rules identified by the student veterans consisted of interacting with like-minded students and interacting with other student veterans. One rules in particular that guides the behavior of student veterans in the community of the student veteran resource center stood out to me. According to one student veteran, the relationship of the student veterans to other students on campus resembles an "us versus them" scenario:

It seems almost like an "us" and "them." There are the people who are right out of high school and there is a smaller group that are veterans and other professionals that are coming back for their degrees. I would say we are definitely separated from other groups.

[Cornall, March, 2018]

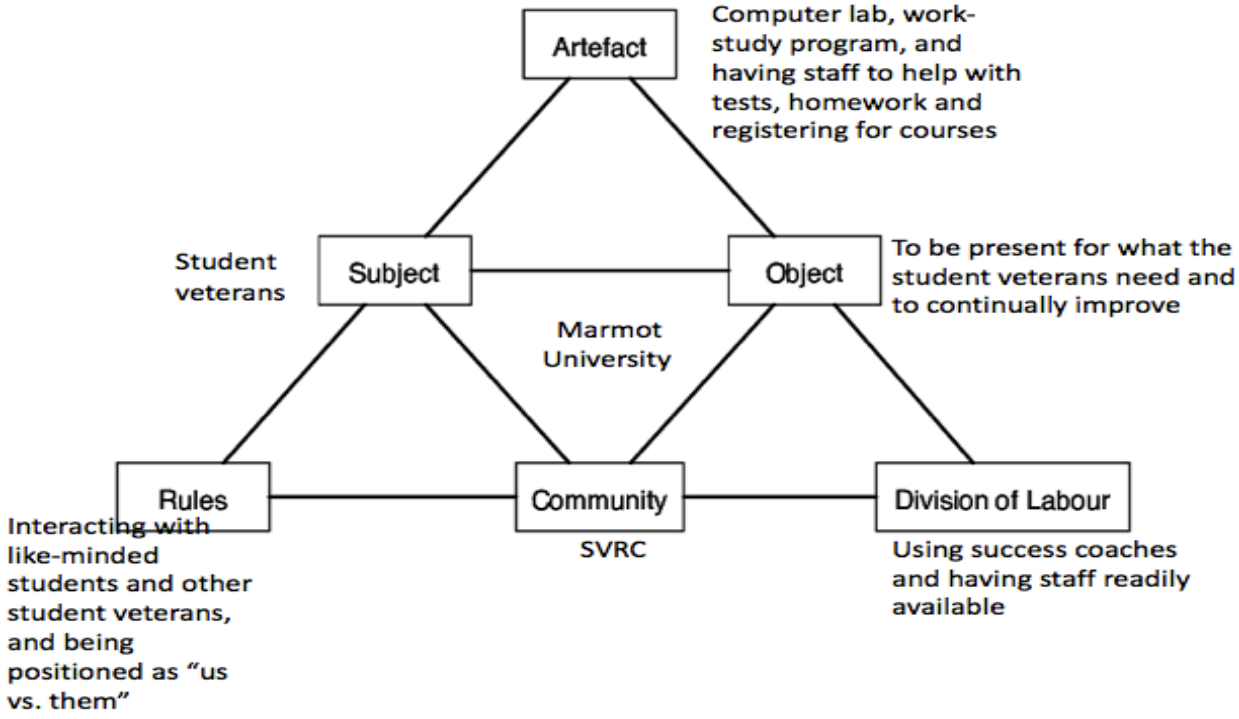

Figure 6: Activity System C

This separation between traditional and nontraditional groups of students may push the student veterans to seek other student veterans through the context of the student veteran resource center. One student veteran mentioned that he has more in common with traditional students from him athletic training classes:

I've interacted with a few students but a lot more from my athletic training classes. I get

along with those kids a lot more. They are more like-minded, with physical activity and being into that kind of thing.

[Marris, March 2018]

The tools provided to and used by the student veterans in the context of the student veteran resource center at Marmot are the computer lab, using work-study programs, staff to help with tests, homework, and registering for classes. These tools provided by the student veteran resource center allow the student veterans to do their assignments quickly without the hassle of finding computers elsewhere on campus.

Having the veteran resource center here is awesome. We have our own computer lab. With classes the way they are these days, you know everything is computer-based. Having computers that are always accessible to us and printers and things like that is very helpful.

[Cornall, March 2018]

The division of labor for the student veterans at Marmot is identified as using the success coaches and having staff available to help the student veterans. These success coaches are readily available to help the student veterans stay on track with their assignments and degrees.

The object, or goal, of activity system C is to be there for what the student veterans need, to be present, and to continually improve. The student veterans seemed very happy about the current state of their student veteran resource center.

> Just the fact that its here, I cant imagine much more. I'm just grateful that there is a place here for vets so they can come in and be themselves and chill.
>
> [Marris, March 2018]

> I think the goal of the resource center is to be here for whatever the student veterans need. I think we do a really good job here and not to sound like an ad campaign but when we are presented with a new student, we talk them through the resource center and tell them what's available.
>
> [Cornall, March 2018]

In activity system C, there seems to be a clear and shared understanding of the object of the student veteran resource center.

Activity system D – administrators from Marmot as subject

Activity System D, shown in Figure 8, places the administrators from Marmot as the subject of the system. This activity system represents the activities undertaken by the administrators in order to meet the object.

In Activity System D, the rule identified by the administrators put the focus back on the student veterans, as the student veterans must come in to the student veteran resource center if they want to use educational benefits. This, of course, is operating under the assumption that the student veterans have been made aware of the student veteran resource center at Marmot in the first place so they are able to use their benefits. Ronnie spoke about the challenge of informing student veterans about their benefits:

> We are challenged when it comes to ensuring student veterans are doing their part, to ensure their benefits are being certified and that they understand the rules related to their benefits and how they pertain to university processes. Not everyone wants to take the time to understand what benefits they are using. We are constantly reminding students of the policies and processes that they have to follow and that we have to follow.
>
> [Ronnie, March 2018]

The tools that the administrators have available to them and which are used for the student veterans share some commonality with the tools of the student veterans. These tools consist of being able to provide benefit maintenance, networking on and off campus, and having staff available for the students.

The division of labor in Activity System D also reflects that of the student veterans, as the administrators commented that there is top-down support provided to the student veterans. This support is distributed among the various staff members that occupy this student veteran resource center, such as a certifying official, advisor and counselor.

> Support here is top-down, meaning that we have supports starting with the president and going down to our adjunct faculty and support staff across the entire college. Within this resource center, we provide advising, counseling support, we are capable of providing one-on-one and group tutoring support, we have a full-time school certifying official who is able to meet with students and answer questions, and we utilize VA (Veterans Affairs) work-study students who are able to guide other students through the process.
>
> [Ronnie, March 2018]

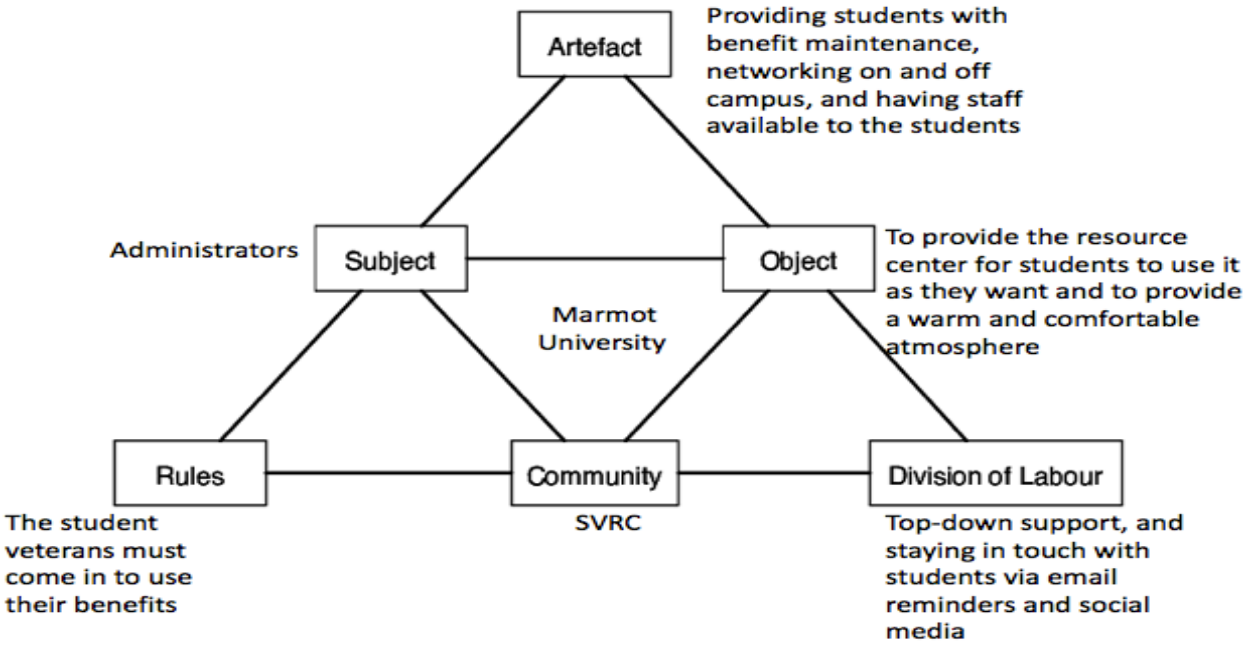

Figure 7: Activity System D

This division of labor from the administrator mirrors that of the student veterans, whose division of labor is composed of having success coaches and staff available to them. The division of labor here also consists of the staff sending out email reminders to stay in contact with students, as well as having a presence on various social media platforms.

The object of activity in activity system D is to provide a comfortable atmosphere for the student veterans, to be present and for them to use the resource center as they see fit. The object here shares commonality with the object of activity system C, which is to be present for the student veterans, provide them with what they need, and to continually grow and develop with the needs of the student veterans. This positive feedback and shared agreement with regard to the object of activity could be the result of having numerous staff to work directly with the student veterans at Marmot. Also, the administrator of the student veteran resource center at Marmot is a veteran, which may allow the administrator to develop a strong rapport with the student veterans at this institution.

Cooper

Cooper's student veteran resource center is conveniently located directly across from where all students obtain identification cards, and is also in the same building where students can get transcripts and diplomas. This location gives Cooper's student veteran resource center high visibility, allowing a very high number of students to know where it is and showing that student veterans have a presence on campus. Parking is quite easy at this student veteran resource center, as there is a large parking lot for students and visitors directly across the street. Cooper's student veteran resource center has a large lounge area and computer lab for student veterans to use, and also has an area with cots where student veterans can take naps.

Activity system E – student veterans from Cooper University as subject

The final set of activity systems (E and F) is from Cooper University. Activity System E, shown in Figure 9, places the student veterans from Cooper University as the subject of the system. This activity system represents the activities undertaken by the student veterans in order to meet the object.

In activity system E, the rules surrounding the activities of the subject consist of talking to other student veterans in the student veteran resource center, using staff and other student veterans to help keep them pointed in the right direction, and recognizing the differences in age between the student veterans and traditional students on campus.

> It is interesting seeing kids fresh out of high school and not in a military setting. We would always get privates fresh out of high school and even they had a very different mentality. There is a certain way they think that comes with that.
>
> [Carey, February 2018]

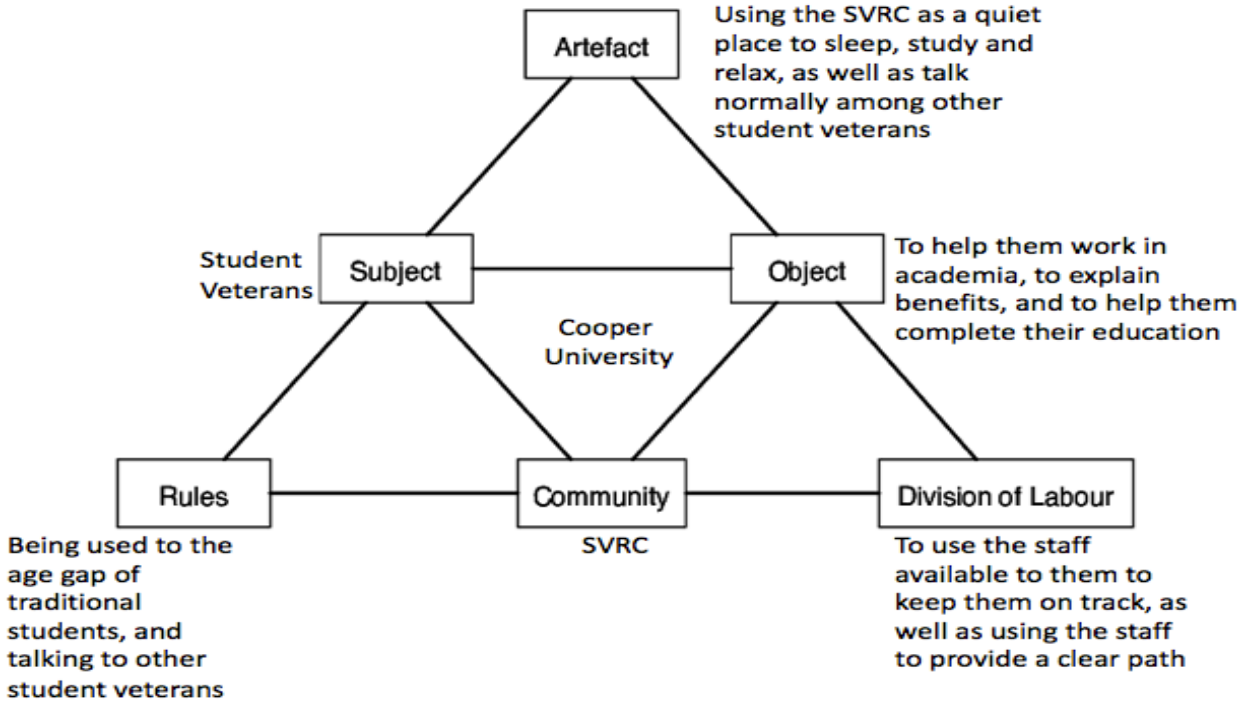

Figure 8: Activity System E

The tools that are provided to and used by the student veterans through the student veteran resource center at Cooper University consist of the center being used as a quiet space to study, sleep and relax, the group of student veterans who use the resource center, and being able to talk normally.

> It is nice to be around people that I can have similar styles of conversation with. Obviously in the military we have our own way of speaking about things in general and sometimes that doesn't blend too well with normal people, so its nice to have a place to relax and not worry about self-censoring as much.
>
> [Carey, February 2018]

The division of labor consists of using the staff in Cooper's resource center to help the student veterans stay on track and to give the student veterans direction. This is distributed

among the various staff housed within the student veteran resource center at Cooper University.

The object of activity in activity system E is defined as an all-encompassing spot to help student veterans work in academia, to help them use their benefits, to help them complete school and to explain how the university is managed. The student veterans at Cooper view the student veteran resource very positively, which was a feeling that I easily picked up on during my visit.

> It is my first semester here. But going off of this semester alone, I feel pretty good about it because I feel like the way the university is and the way that the student veteran resource center is, I feel like I can really focus on myself here without having to worry about other things that detract from my ability to focus on my academic pursuits.
>
> [Carey, February 2018]

Activity system F – administrators from Cooper University as subject

In Activity System F, the rules surrounding the activity of the administrators in the community of the student veteran resource center are comprised of educating the student veterans to be stewards of their benefits and to run their student veteran resource center similar to the military.

> If we get a phone call on a Sunday morning from a veteran, we are going to handle it. We aren't going to not answer the phone and let them wait. We are going to handle it. We kind of run it like the military, where if you have an issue, text us or call us any time of the day. That's how we were in the military and that's how we run things here.
>
> [Nikolai, March 2018]

Some of the tools used by the administrators that serve as resources are also the tools used by the student veterans. These include providing the student veteran resource center as a place where student veterans can meet other student veterans and providing networking opportunities on campus. Other tools used by the administrators include using the staff available to help the student veterans get registered for courses and for financial issues that may arise.

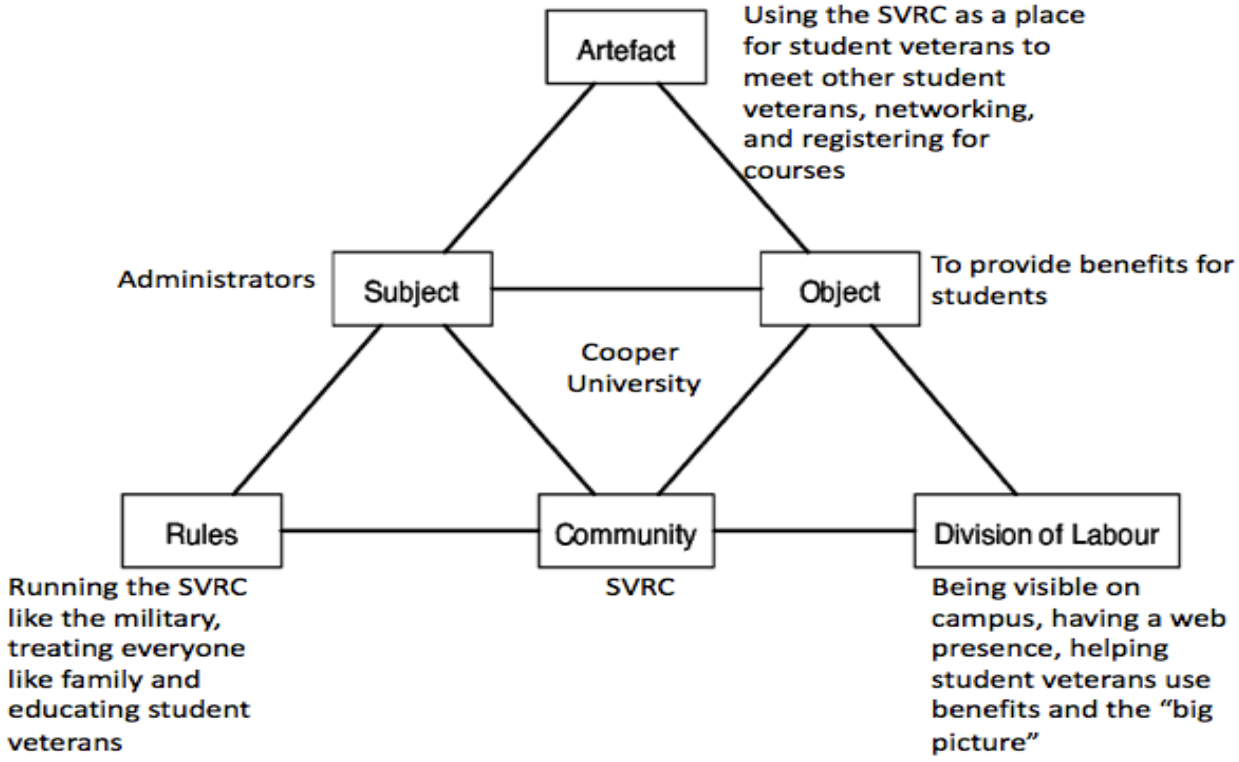

Figure 9: Activity System F

The division of labor, or how the tasks are delegated among the administrators in the student veteran resource center, consist of calling the student veterans and making sure they are on track, as well as providing constant support to students in the form of information on benefits and the big picture of how college works. The student veteran resource center has a web presence and the administrator makes sure that their office is visible on campus.

> We have an outreach process. Every department on campus, to include the colleges and the deans, know who we are. We reach out to them frequently to ask them for their support and thank them for their support. We have really made it a good network on campus so that people know if we have a veteran who is struggling or a veteran who needs information, they know where to send them.
>
> [Nikolai, March 2018]

The object of activity system F is to help student veterans use their benefits, to remind student veterans of how the university operates and to fall in line with the mission statement of the university, which is based around student success, engagement, and innovation. Although this does not seem to neatly overlap with the object of activity in activity system E, there is some shared agreement with regard to providing assistance to student veterans in the form of benefits, as well as reminding them of how a university works.

There were strong disagreements about the object of activity between the student veterans and administrators at Hattey, leading to frustrations and confusion about the overall purpose of the student veteran resource center. The student veterans at Hattey were consistent with their sentiments that there is an overall lack of support and unclear goal with regards to the student veteran resource center. The administrator at Hattey is also placed in a difficult position to navigate these frustrations when there is only one administrator who works with the student veterans at the university. The other two universities, on the other hand, have multiple people working with the student veterans to help address these challenges and work on providing a clear purpose for the student veteran resource centers.

Lastly, even when student veterans feel as though they are isolated and separated from other students, a shared agreement among the student veterans and administrators about the

object of activity in the student veteran resource center can overcome these feelings to help the student veterans be successful. Student veterans at each university in this study suggested that they felt cut off from other students on campus to some degree. However, as was demonstrated at Cooper and Marmot, having some level of agreement of the object of activity between the student veterans and administrators can help alleviate feelings of isolation. At Cooper and Marmot, the student veterans are able to work with multiple staff within the student veteran resource centers and receive daily support, which are led by veterans themselves.

Discussion

While there was some overlap and agreement in regards to the object of activity of the student veteran resource centers, there were a number of tensions and discrepancies that were uncovered. It is important to note here that while the administrators of the student veteran resource centers are concerned with supporting student veterans, there are clearly differences in the overall objects of the student veteran resource centers based on my observations and data. First, this section will invoke CHAT to identity these tensions that exist among these systems of activity, and will unpack the commonalities or differences with regard to the objects of activity in student veteran resource centers, such as how they are used and what their purposes are. Second, I address the implications of these commonalities and differences, such as how they illustrate others' understanding of the needs of student veterans.

The six preceding activity systems will be discussed in the following pairs:

- Activity Systems A and B (Hattey)
- Activity Systems C and D (Marmot)
- Activity Systems E and F (Cooper)

Hattey

Using CHAT as a lens to observe different systems of activity, the major tension that presents itself between these two activity systems is the differing object of activity that exists between the student veterans and the administrators. Due to differing tools, rules, and community, CHAT helps explain how the objects of activity do not align (Engeström, 2001). Engeström (2001) argues that the lack of a shared object serves as the location for future development. There are implications that result from a lack of alignment in the objects of activity, such as a deficiency in the understanding in the needs of student veterans.

Based on the feedback of the administrator, the object, or goal, of the student veteran resource center at Hattey is to make connections based on the individual needs of the student veterans themselves, and to have supports in place that provide the student veterans with conference and scholarship opportunities. Conversely, the object of activity according to the student veterans seemed a bit more ambiguous. The student veterans at Hattey contend that the student veteran resource center has very little to provide, outside of the administrator, who the student veterans spoke very highly of. Furthermore, the overall attitude of the student veterans toward their student veteran resource center was fairly negative, which was attributed to the lack of support, awareness, and visibility from the university itself.

Similar to one of the components of the division of labor in activity system B (connecting student veterans with other offices and departments), part of the object is to make connections based on the individual needs of student veterans. On the other hand, the student veterans maintained that student veterans on Hattey's campus are invisible and that more training is needed for advisors, faculty and staff. I interpret this as lacking the ability to make connections, and when there are connections, they are tenuous at best, given the recommendation that more

training is needed for everyone. This student veteran resource center has extremely low visibility and is currently located in the basement of a building on the edge of campus that gets very little traffic throughout the day. Taking into account the consistent feedback of the student veterans who assert that more needs to be done to make the student veteran resource center on this campus more visible and accessible to everyone, as well as the student veteran resource center having very little to provide, there is clearly a discrepancy with regard to the object of activity in the student veteran resource center at Hattey.

As noted earlier, Hattey has earned gold level recognition by the Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency's (MVAA) Veteran-Friendly School program. Gold level recognition is earned by meeting six out of seven required items, such as having a veteran-specific website, providing veteran-specific career services and possessing an on-campus veterans' coordinator. In the light of Hattey's recognition for having supports for student veterans, prospective student veterans may decide to attend Hattey, only to find that these supports exist at a very surface level.

The lack of a shared object of activity in the activity systems at Hattey may indicate tensions elsewhere in the university (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). For example, Hattey's student population is significant with over 50,000 students. Having such an immense and diverse student body on a considerably large campus may not provide student groups with equal access, hence the student veteran resource center's current placement in the basement of a building with extremely low visibility. Additionally, a large campus such as Hattey may be more prone to networking and communication issues due to the sheer size of the student body and multiple offices.

Hattey is a clear example that just because a university possesses resources for student veterans, such as a student veteran resource center designated for them, it does not guarantee that

there will be a shared understanding of its object of activity or how the student veteran resource center will be used.

In multiple activity systems, the shared object may not align perfectly, and in some cases it may not align at all (Engeström, 1999). This lack of a shared object of activity in the community of the student veteran resource center, in addition to various frustrations, a lack of visibility and leadership, and a need for more training for advisors, faculty and staff, illustrates what appears to be a very limited understanding of the needs of student veterans. This supports what Engeström (2001) contends are "historically accumulating structural tensions within and between activity systems" (p. 137). The student veteran resource center at Hattey is framed in such a way that the students veterans seem to have to figure things out for themselves, after they find out that a student veteran resource center exists for them in the first place. It is essential for agreement to exist among systems of activity to maintain the integrity of the activity systems (Eppich & Cheng, 2015). CHAT is helpful for identifying these problem areas that can be addressed through intervention, while also developing an understanding of various practices and how to transform these practices in context (Roth, Lee, & Hsu, 2009). Bearing in mind the various accolades that Hattey uses to demonstrate their prowess in supporting student veterans, I find the lack of understanding with regard to the needs of student veterans to be very contradictory.

Marmot

Looking at the object of activity at Marmot, CHAT (Engeström, 2001) can explain how there seems to be a relatively shared understanding from both groups of subjects, as well as an overall positive outlook about the student veteran resource center. Marmot has received recognition from the MVAA and received gold level status.

According to the administrators, the object of activity of the student veteran resource center is to provide the center to student veterans to be used however they like, as well as providing them with a comfortable atmosphere. Similarly, the student veterans maintain that the object of activity is to be present and to be there for what the student veterans need.

To develop an understanding of why the object of activity at Marmot is shared between the two groups of subjects, it is necessary to observe the existing elements within the activity systems and how they may be aligned (Engeström, 1987). First, there seems to be a shared understanding of the tools that are used and provided. The student veterans at Marmot emphasize that the tools they use within the community of the student veteran resource center are the staff who are there to help with tests and enrolling in courses, the existence of a computer lab, and as a place to relieve stress. In the same way, the administrators affirm that the tools provided to the student veterans include providing a space to get away, staff to assist with advising, counseling, academic advising and tutoring.

There is also commonality through the division of labor in the activity systems of Marmot. This commonality allows all subjects in the activity systems with "greater room to maneuver and more possibilities for acting" (Roth & Lee, 2007, p. 14). The student veterans assert that having the various staff members help them stay on track and allow them to focus on academics. The administrators support this, noting that the staff within the student veteran resource center are in constant contact with the student veterans. When the staff reaches out to the student veterans, they assist them with benefits and issues with coursework, allowing the student veterans to maintain focus on academics without the distraction of worrying about benefits.

These commonalities in the object and other components of the activity systems may

reflect other factors at Marmot. Marmot is a two-year public college with an enrollment of approximately 19,000 students, and has a building designated solely for the student veterans. Ronnie, the administrator of the student veteran resource center at Marmot, also indicated that there is top-down support for the student veterans, starting with the president. A smaller campus such as Marmot may be able to provide student veterans with more support and visibility, as well as having on-site staff to help student veterans with various issues.

In many ways, Marmot seems to be the polar opposite of Hattey when looking at the student veteran resource centers. The commonalities found in the two competing systems of activities, as well as how the student veteran resource center is situated and framed at this institution, represent what appears to be a strong understanding of the needs of the student veterans at Marmot. Bloomfield and Nguyen (2015) contend, "communicating what each system perceives to be their core purpose or object which is of key importance" (p. 32), and this is demonstrated at Marmot, leading each activity system to be productive. At Marmot, the student veterans are given the tools they need to be successful, and they are delighted with their experiences and the supports they receive as student veterans. Additionally, the president of Marmot is involved with the affairs of student veterans, whereas the leadership seems to be invisible at Hattey.

Cooper

The final set of activity systems being investigated for commonalities and differences in objects of activity is at Cooper. Cooper is similar to Hattey in terms of the size of the campus, and similar to Marmot in terms of student population. Cooper is also similar to Marmot in that the office allocated to student veterans is highly visible and receives abundant foot traffic throughout the day. Similar to Hattey and Marmot, Cooper has also received recognition from

the MVAA and received gold level status. More importantly, the student veterans at Cooper also spoke positively of their student veteran resource center and there was positive energy buzzing through the office, as I observed a number of student veterans being helped with various issues simultaneously.

There was some degree of overlap with regard to the object of activity at Cooper, allowing both activity systems to be productive (Engeström, 2001). The administrator contends that the object of activity in the student veteran resource center is a location to provide benefits to students and to fall in line with the mission statement of the university. Somewhat similarly, the student veterans assert that the object of the student veteran resource center is to help student veterans work in academia, to help the student veterans understand and use their benefits, and to help complete their degree programs.

CHAT (Engeström, 1999) helps unpack why there was some overlap in the objects of activity of these systems of activity by identifying the elements within each activity system to check for alignment. Observing the rules that exist for both the student veterans and administrator, there appears to be some congruency in how the student veterans are treated. For example, the student veterans emphasize that having staff help the student veterans get on their feet and point them in the right direction is helpful, as it makes the transition from the military to the university easier. In the same way, the administrator stressed how important it was to treat everyone like family and to operate the office similar to the military. One student admitted that without the student veteran resource center, he would not be pursuing a degree.

There is also commonality through the division of labor across the two systems of activity, which represents a shared organization of roles and responsibilities (Engeström, 2001). The student veterans acknowledge that having someone to talk to about the big picture and

options after graduation is helpful. Furthermore, the administrator shared that he and his staff in the resource center are reaching out to student veterans daily to discuss issues of academic life.

There are also similarities in the tools of the activity systems, allowing for a shared understanding of the resources that the student veterans can use (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). For example, the student veterans assert that one of the tools frequently used within the context of the student veteran resource center is having the ability to relax, meet with other veterans and talk normally without self-censoring. Likewise, the administrator maintains that a valuable tool within the student veteran resource center is the ability for student veterans to network with others and a place to relax.

Observing the commonalities in the objects of activity at Cooper and how the student veteran resource center is situated within the broader university, it appears that there is a strong understanding of the needs of student veterans.

Conclusion

This study was an attempt to better understand the commonalities or differences with regard to the objects of activity in student veteran resource centers at three different universities, such as how they are used and what their purposes are. By observing and understanding these different objects of activity within the context of student veteran resource centers, this study identifies ways that universities can provide more effective supports for student veterans, as well as why tensions may exist. Additionally, it addresses the implications of these commonalities and differences, such as how the commonalities and differences illustrate others' understandings of the needs of student veterans. I provide three concluding thoughts:

- Data indicate that having a visible and multifunctional student veteran resource center lead to both student veterans and administrators having a shared

understanding of its purpose.

- Data also indicate that providing student veterans with multifunctional student veteran resource centers can lead to a shared object of activity.
- A lack of a shared object of activity can lead to frustration among the student veterans who occupy the student veteran resource center.

Taking into account that all of the universities in the study are recipients of the same award from the MVAA, I expected to observe a relatively consistent object of activity at each site. However, based on the data, there are clearly differences in the objects of activity and purposes of these student veteran resource centers. The data from Marmot and Cooper indicate that having a visible student veteran resource center lead to both student veterans and administrators having a shared understanding of its purpose. At Hattey, a shared object was absent between the student veterans and administrator. Marmot and Cooper provide student veterans with very visible student veteran resource centers on campus. Hattey's student veteran resource center, on the other hand, is tucked away in the corner of a basement on the edge of campus, completely lacking visibility. I attribute this discrepancy in the object of activity to the size of each university and the degree to which resources at each university are distributed. For example, Marmot and Cooper are significantly smaller and have less than half of the student population at Hattey.

Secondly, data indicate that having a multifunctional student veteran resource center lead to both student veterans and administrators having a shared object of activity. Hattey's student veteran resource center is occupied by only one administrator for the entire university, whereas Marmot and Cooper have multiple staff available to work directly with student veterans. Having multiple staff available in one location allows the student veteran resource centers of Marmot

and Cooper to provide advising, counseling, and peer tutoring for its student veterans; these are not available for the student veterans at Hattey. Additionally, even though the campuses and student population of Marmot and Cooper are significantly smaller than Hattey, Marmot and Cooper have much larger student veteran resource centers where the student veterans can utilize these resources, as well as using these areas as a place to lounge and socialize with other student veterans.

Third, a lack of a shared object of activity can lead to frustration among the student veterans who occupy the student veteran resource center. The student veterans at Marmot and Cooper spoke of their student veteran resource centers very positively, whereas the student veterans at Hattey shared frustration with the lack of supports that should be provided to student veterans. It is also worth noting that the administrator of the student veteran resource center at Hattey resigned from this position in June, 2018, and the position was not filled until October, 2018, leaving the student veterans at Hattey without any node of support or point of contact for four months, leading to more frustrations. I argue that these frustrations largely stem from having a lack of shared understanding with regard to the object of activity at Hattey, indicated by the data.

CHAPTER 2:

Understanding student veterans' sense of community in a university-based community of practice

Hundreds of thousands of student veterans, mostly from Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), are pursuing higher education in the United States (Miles, 2010). Many of these student veterans have experienced various features of war, such as combat, deployments in harsh conditions, and have been away from family for extended periods of time. Given their wartime experiences, it is possible that many veterans may experience a number of obstacles as they transition from the military into campus life, such as alienation on campus (Ackerman et al., 2009; DiRamio et al., 2008) and not understanding how to participate in the university community.

If military veterans feel excluded from the university community, then they might remain on the periphery of what scholars call a "community of practice." A community of practice (CoP) (Lave & Wenger, 1991, Wenger, 1999), which is defined as "participation in an activity system about which participants share understandings concerning what they are doing and what that means for their lives and for their communities" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 98), has been applied extensively in the fields of business and education; however, even though scholars have used the CoP lens in other fields, CoP has yet to be used with student veterans. A lack of research about student veterans in CoPs may limit the extent to which universities are able to provide support. Furthermore, participating in CoPs may allow student veterans to feel more supported. According to "legitimate peripheral participation" (Lave & Wenger, 1991), learning is a social construct and inexperienced members move from the periphery to become experts through participating in CoPs, first through simple tasks and gradually onto more advanced

tasks. Legitimate peripheral participation may be a construct that explains the shift of student veterans on the periphery to more central roles. However, due to the lack of research, not understanding student veterans and CoPs may result in student veterans being stuck on the periphery. A novice, in terms of a student veteran within a student veteran resource center, may be a student new to the university or new to that particular CoP, seeking minor, if any, roles or responsibilities. On the other hand, an expert may be a student veteran who has spent considerable time in that CoP, has filled leadership positions within the group, and has extensive knowledge of veteran issues and networks built around campus. For this study, moving from a novice to an expert means that student veterans will gradually shift from being inexperienced members of a community to experts who engage in more challenging responsibilities through participating with other members in that CoP.

One way that some universities are providing student veterans with a CoP is to give them a physical space in which a CoP can exist, such as student veteran resource centers. According to Francis and Kraus (2012), "When asked what the university could do to be more 'vet-friendly,' the majority of respondents recommended the opening of a specific student center" (p. 12) for veterans. Supportive public places, according to Francis, Giles-Corti, Wood and Knuiman (2012) are "supportive, democratic and meaningful, and address basic human needs, such as comfort, passive and active engagement, and discovery" (p. 402). However, Gehl (2006) points out that just because a public place exists does not mean it will be used by those for whom it is intended and in the ways in which it was intended. For example, a university creating a student veteran resource center does not necessarily mean that student veterans will use it or even know it exists. It also means that the designers of the place may not understand the needs of veterans, and may make the place something that student veterans do not want to use or feel

that they can use. In addition to existing literature that identifies a need for more research on student veteran resource centers (Ackerman et al., 2009; DiRamio et al., 2008; Naphan & Elliott, 2015), my experiences as a student veteran and working with other student veterans with similar experiences have made it apparent that more work needs to be done with regards to developing a CoP for student veterans.

Similar to other studies (Dornbush & Brenner, 2013; Robinson & Wilkinson, 1995), I utilize the notion of community as a spatially defined group. Using existing literature, I define student veteran resource centers as their own communities of practice (CoPs): a "system of relationships between people, activities, and the world" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 98). These CoPs contain their own unique set of discourse and tools to share knowledge among the members within its boundaries. A community can be supported and shaped by the physical space, which, in terms of this study, refers to the student veteran resource centers and their components, such as members with varying levels of expertise and knowledge. The CoP here, then, is a physical space that contains conceptual features typically found in CoPs.

As student veterans move from the periphery to more central positions of the CoP or shift from being a novice to an expert, they may develop a sense of community (SoC) within the context of the CoP. SoC is defined as "a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together" (McMillan & Chavis, p. 9, 1986). Novices may initially have a low SoC, as they have little knowledge of a particular SoC, while experts may have a higher SoC. In terms of this study, I focused on the student veterans' time spent in CoP and their socioemotional-interpersonal knowledge as a measure of their SoC within the CoP, rather than their leadership positions. Ackerman et al. (2009) contend that many veterans

express a strong desire to return to the military and combat to recapture that SoC. According to Nistor et al. (2015), SoC plays a significant role in academic CoPs, as group interaction is "the strongest predictor of group performance" (p. 258). A strong SoC also leads to improved wellbeing and a sense of security (Francis et al., 2012). Some universities have provided supports in the form of student veteran resource centers, where student veterans may have a range of SoC. However, increased participation, moving from a novice to an expert, or shifting from the periphery to more central roles does not mean that student veterans will develop a high SoC. Instead, increased participation may lead to a lower SoC, as initial excitement of the CoP wears off or as student veterans become frustrated with the lack of support on campus.

Problem Framing

Student veterans will continue to transition from the military to higher education (Griffen & Gilbert, 2012). Given that research in the field of student veterans in higher education is still emerging (DiRamio, Ackermann & Mitchell, 2008; Vacchi & Berger, 2010), more work needs to be done regarding student veterans and their SoC in CoPs. Therefore, this study has two purposes. First, I examined the predictors of SoC to develop an understanding of their influence on SoC. Second, I identify how SoC is represented in university-based CoPs.

Looking across the three universities, this study examined student veterans' SoC in the student veteran resource centers. I chose to examine student veterans' SoC at three different universities to better understand the predictors that have the strongest influence on student veterans' SoC and to see if commonalities or differences appeared between student veteran resource centers at different universities. All of the universities in this study are recipients of the same award earned for providing student veterans with supports. Each university in this study has earned gold level recognition by the Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency's (MVAA) Veteran-

Friendly School program, which "recognizes academic institutions of higher learning committed to supporting the needs of student veterans and dependents" ("Michigan's Veteran-Friendly Schools," n.d.). Gold level recognition is earned by meeting six out of seven of the following features:

- Having a veteran-specific website.
- Having a process for identifying student students.
- Having a student veterans organization operated by students.
- Providing veteran-specific career services.
- Possessing an on-campus veterans' coordinator.
- Having a system to award credits based on military training.
- Being able to monitor student veteran transfer and graduation rates.

However, even though the universities in this study provide student veterans with these items, it does not guarantee that student veterans will feel a high SoC. Even though the universities may

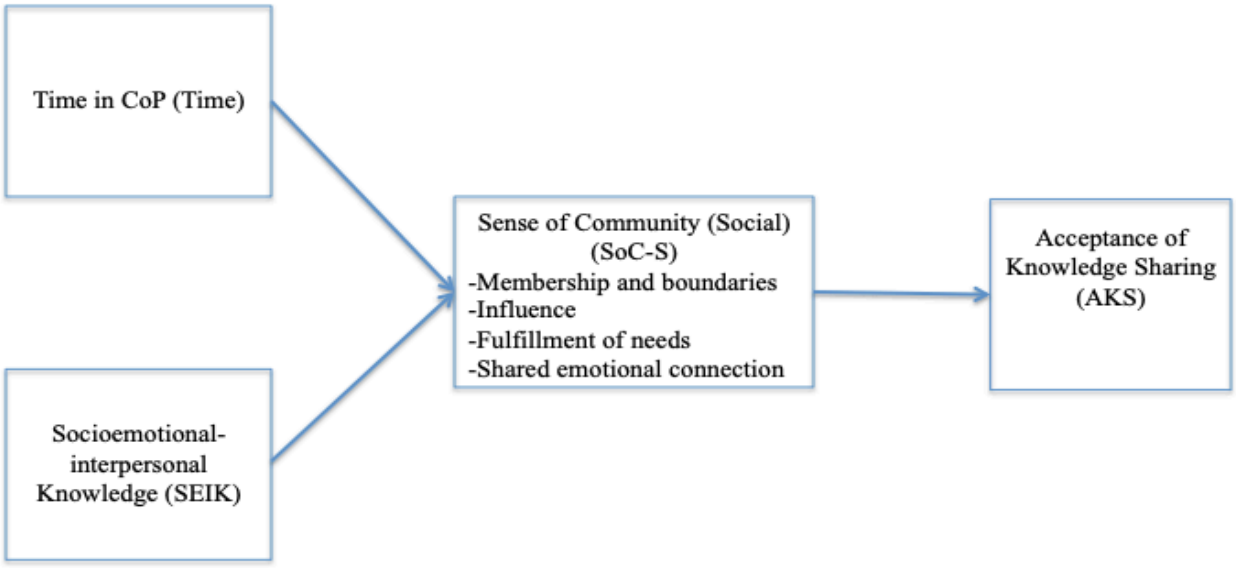

Figure 10: SoC Model (Adapted from Nistor et al., 2015, p. 266)

think they are providing support, SoC data may show something different if the student veterans

do not feel supported.

In this study, I used quantitative data from anonymous questionnaires of student veterans to measure these predictors of SoC: the amount of time spent in a CoP (Time), socioemotional-interpersonal knowledge (SEIK), social components of sense of community (SoC-S), and the acceptance of knowledge sharing (AKS) (See Figure 11). The variables used in this model have been used in previous studies (Diekamp, 2007; Diekamp, Kopp and Mandl, 2008; Huang, Finkelstein & Rostan, 2014; Nistor et al., 2015) (See Background and Conceptual Framing section for a more complete description of these constructs). In this study, I used these variables to measure the SoC of student veterans across three different universities to understand which have the strongest influence on SoC.

Research questions

Using quantitative data from anonymous questionnaires given to student veterans at three different universities, I examined the possible influence of time spent in CoPs and socioemotional-interpersonal knowledge on the social components of SoC (SoC-S) and the acceptance of knowledge sharing (AKS) at three different universities (Figure 11) to develop an understanding of how student veteran resource centers are able to help student veterans develop a SoC in CoPs. While I am interested in how other factors, such as student status and relationship status, may impact student veteran's SoC, I specifically focus on time, socioemotional-interpersonal knowledge and knowledge sharing acceptance, as these are the variables used in the SoC model (Nistor et al., 2015). Understanding socioemotional-interpersonal knowledge and knowledge sharing acceptance will provide the field with a much better understanding of the degree to which student veterans feel a SoC. Furthermore, understanding these predictors and their effects on student veterans' SoC may lead to a deeper awareness of how universities can

construct and shape student veteran resource centers to help student veterans develop a SoC in this CoP.

Specifically, I asked:

- Using student veteran resource centers as CoPs, what are the predictors that have the strongest influence on student veterans' SoC?
- Given that each university in this study is the recipient of the same award for supporting student veterans, how does each university demonstrate this support and what are the possible differences?

Background and Conceptual Framing

In this section, I theorize and define the CoP construct that I discuss in this article. Second, I describe the SoC framework (Nistor et al., 2015) and its components I use to investigate the predictors and effects that student veteran resource centers have on student veterans' sense of community. Lastly, I provide the conceptual framing to illustrate how the components fit together. These components are related to and influence each other in the SoC framework (Nistor et al., 2015).

Communities of practice

Communities of practice (CoPs) are groups of individuals who share goals, activities and different kinds of knowledge in a particular context (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1999). According to Nistor et al. (2015), individuals in CoPs "construct, acquire and share knowledge that they reify by developing artifacts; artifacts in turn allow participation at a higher level" (p. 259). The participants in the CoP of the student veteran resource center may share their knowledge through increased participation. In the context of this CoP, participation varies and can be exhibited through active involvement in the student veteran organization, such as taking

on leadership positions. Contributing to fundraisers and attending events designated for student veterans may also represent participation.

Just as the level of participation varies, the level of individual expertise within CoPs also varies, as individuals can be described as novices, intermediates or experts (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Lave and Wenger (1991) describe the process of being a novice to becoming an expert through peripheral learning, where novices are provided the opportunity to learn through increasingly difficult tasks and responsibilities. Experts are those individuals who have been in a particular CoP for longer amounts of time and who tend to take on more complex tasks and teach novices, while novices engage in easier tasks (Shacham & Od-Cohen, 2009). There are also varying levels of participation within these communities, as members move from the peripheral to central (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Similarly to these components described by Lave and Wenger (1991), the student veterans within the student veteran resource centers exhibit different levels of expertise in different areas, there is a wide range of ages, and there are various levels of participation. However, moving from a novice to an expert may not represent higher levels of SoC. As novices spend more time in a CoP and develop more knowledge, they may also become frustrated with the slow processes of a university or become less excited about what a particular CoP has to offer. Conversely, increases in SoC may not represent a shift from novice to expert. Members may feel a high SoC from limited interaction and knowledge gained from a CoP.

Rather than defining CoP for this study as the university itself, I defined CoPs as the student veteran resource centers that student veterans utilize and use on campus, as they contain their own set of discourse and tools to share knowledge (Dornbush & Brenner, 2013). How these individuals interact in groups is considered to be the best predictor of group performance (Nistor et al., 2015), while the cohesion of the group motivates those in the group (Cohen, 1994).

There are cognitive effects of participating in CoPs, such as the sharing and creation of knowledge (Lave & Wenger, 1991: Wenger, 1999). The knowledge that is shared among members of CoPs "are needed to substantiate the socio-cognitive structures that make up the academic CoP" (Nistor et al., p. 259, 2015). This suggests that student veteran resource centers, being part of a university, serve as an ideal location for the transmission and creation of new knowledge.

While CoPs are generally used in qualitative research to examine the features of a community, I chose to observe the notion of community through a quantitative lens to be able to identify particular areas where universities are strong and where improvements can be made.

Predictors of SoC-S

SoC is defined as "a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together" (McMillan & Chavis, p. 9, 1986). SoC plays a significant role in academic CoPs (Nistor et al., 2015), as group interaction is "the strongest predictor of group performance" (p. 258). A strong SoC also leads to improved wellbeing and a sense of security (Francis et al., 2012) and may represent a shift from novice to expert status, as well as a shift from peripheral to more central roles in a CoP. Conversely, a lack of SoC may lead student veterans to experience some degree of homesickness, but unlike traditional students, this homesickness is the result of the loss of community found in the military. However, the lack of a high SoC does not necessarily indicate novice status. In this study, the independent variables are time spent in the CoP (Time) and socioemotional-interpersonal knowledge (SEIK), as these are the variables that are used in the SoC model (Figure 11). These variables are discussed in the following section.

Time spent in CoP

Members in CoPs shift from being novices to experts, while also progressing to the core from the periphery (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Nistor et al. (2015) maintain, "SoC should increase in time" (p. 262) as relationships of members within the CoP progress. One study (Robinson & Wilkinson, 1995) indicates a positive correlation between time spent in a CoP and SoC-S. However, it is also worth noting that some studies indicate SoC-S decreasing over time (Weiss, 2009), as the initial excitement and enthusiasm for a new atmosphere and environment may dissipate. Student veterans may initially feel a strong SoC as they meet other student veterans on campus. Conversely, if student veterans feel frustrated or that there is a lack of support, their SoC may decrease over time.

Socioemotional-interpersonal knowledge

McMillan (1996) argues that the existence of interpersonal knowledge is a central component of human interaction. Nistor et al. (2015) define interpersonal knowledge as "all the knowledge that people, who interact with each other, have about each other" (p. 263). In this study, socioemotional-interpersonal knowledge refers to the "knowledge of the personal beliefs, values, personality, emotions, and personal environment of other group members" (Nistor et al., p. 263-264, 2015). Socio-emotional knowledge "is inherent in the social mode of interaction and hence is likely to be connected to the development of SoC" (Nistor et al., p. 264, 2015). Thus, high levels of socioemotional-interpersonal knowledge may lead to the development of SoC.

A number of studies support the findings that socioemotional-interpersonal knowledge affects SoC with regards to group interaction and the sharing of knowledge. Gruenfeld, Mannix, Williams and Neale (1996) established a positive relationship among socioemotional-interpersonal knowledge and the openness of members within a CoP to learn from others through

knowledge sharing. Diekamp et al. (2008) found a positive relationship between socioemotional-interpersonal knowledge and the ability of members within a CoP to ask questions of one another. Additionally, Janssen, Erkens, Kirschner and Kanselaar (2009) found a positive relationship between socioemotional-interpersonal knowledge (SEIK) and collaboration in CoPs. In terms of this study, this means that student veterans' SEIK will have a positive influence on their acceptance of knowledge sharing (AKS).

Social components of SoC (SoC-S)

Next, I present the four social components of SoC (SoC-S): membership, influence, fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection. It is important to address these components because they help illustrate the importance of student veterans' SoC. These social components also illustrate the social and emotional features of CoPs, and are found in Appendix D. Based on earlier research (Diekamp, 2007; Eberle et al., 2014; Lave & Wenger, 1991; McMillan, 1996; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Wenger, 1999), the social components of SoC (SoC-S) are influenced by time spent in a particular CoP (Time) and socioemotional-interpersonal knowledge (SEIK) (Figure 11).

To summarize, time spent in a CoP and socioemotional-interpersonal knowledge influence SoC-S (Nistor et al., 2015). Based on earlier studies (Collins, 2006; Eberle et al., 2014; Henrich & Attebury, 2010; Lesser & Fontaine, 2004), it also seems reasonable that SoC-S may positively influence the acceptance of knowledge sharing (AKS) in CoPs (Figure 11). By looking at student veterans' time spent in this CoP and their socioemotional-interpersonal knowledge, I was able to understand how these impacted their SoC and the degree to which student veterans shared knowledge in these CoPs. Consequently, I was able to determine the predictors and effects of student veteran resource centers on student veterans' SoC, as well as

how universities can cultivate a stronger SoC among its student veterans.

Using quantitative data from anonymous questionnaires, communities of practice (CoPs) and sense of community (SoC), I examined the possible influence of CoP variables (time spent in CoPs, socioemotional-interpersonal knowledge) on the social components of SoC (SoC-S) and the acceptance of knowledge sharing (AKS) at three different universities. Not only has the SoC model (Figure 11) been used to predict social components in academia (Nistor et al., 2015) but I argue that this model's essence of togetherness, experience and trusting in others mirrors the military culture and community that many student veterans have difficulty finding once they leave the military. Looking across at different student veteran resource centers in universities allows me to develop a deeper understanding of the similarities and differences in SoC that may exist in these locations. More importantly, I am able to identify how universities provide their student veterans with a SoC and how universities can foster the sharing of knowledge in student veteran resource centers.

Methods

In this study, I used sense of community (SoC) theory (Nistor et al., 2015) to look specifically at different predictors to develop an understanding of how student veteran resource centers are able to help student veterans develop a SoC in CoPs. Looking across three different student veteran resource centers allows me to develop an understanding of the similarities and differences that may exist in these variables. More importantly, the data from the anonymous questionnaires will identify the degree to which universities provide their student veterans with a SoC through these CoPs and the various reasons for these varying levels of SoC. It is important to understand how universities develop a SoC through these CoPs in the practice of higher education, as the members within these CoPs are present for a limited amount of time and may

only rely on collaborative learning and the sharing of information in these areas.

University contexts

For this study, I selected sites based on four criteria: their location relative to my home university, their level of willingness to participate in the study, having earned gold level recognition by the Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency's (MVAA) Veteran-Friendly School program, and possessing a student veteran resource center. First, I chose sites based on a reasonable range of travel and their location relative to my home university. Secondly, of those universities with whom I did make contact, some were resistant to engage in a study pertaining to student veterans. As a result, the universities that I ultimately chose for this study were those who I felt were staffed with a reliable administrator and who would provide me with the most data. Third, I used universities that have all received gold level status for supporting student veterans from the MVAA. This is valuable because it gives me a control variable that operates under the assumption that all of these universities are highly efficient at supporting student veterans. Fourth, the selected site needed to possess a student veteran resource center. The student veterans who provided data in the form of anonymous questionnaires were those who were willing to participate. All of the universities and individuals participating in the study are provided with pseudonyms to protect their identity.

Hattey is a large public research university in the Midwestern United States that occupies over 50,000 students and over 600 registered student organizations. This university has earned recognition by the Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency as a school that has programs and supports in place for veterans. This student veteran resource center is located in the corner of the basement of a building and has extremely low visibility. Visibility, in this sense, refers not only to whether or not the students know it exists, but also its physical location on campus, the hours

it is staffed, as well as the number of staff working there. This means that student veterans at Hattey may not even know that a resource center exists for them, possibly impacting their SoC. Conversely, other student groups, such as the Black Student Alliance, the North American Indigenous Student Organization, and the Asian Pacific American Student Organization, are provided with a resource center in a highly visible part of campus. This student veteran resource center contains a small computer lab, couches, and a quiet area for veterans to study. There are roughly 400 student veterans on Hattey's campus.

Cooper is a public university in the Midwestern United States with an enrollment of over 21,000 students. It has eight satellite campuses and over 340 registered student organizations. *GI Jobs* ranked Cooper as one of the top ten universities in the country for student veterans in 2017. Cooper's student veteran resource center is conveniently located directly across from where all students obtain identification cards, and is also in the same building where students can get transcripts and diplomas. This location gives Cooper's student veteran resource center high visibility, allowing a very high number of students to know where it is and showing that student veterans have a presence on campus. Cooper's student veteran resource center has a large lounge area and computer lab for student veterans to use, and also has an area with cots where student veterans can take naps. There are approximately 500 student veterans on Cooper's campus.

Marmot is a two-year public college with an enrollment of approximately 22,000 students. Marmot has a number of student organizations, such as the Gay-Straight Alliance and Young Americans for Liberty. The building in which Marmot's student veteran resource center is housed is mostly dedicated solely to veterans, and there are also adjust faculty offices. It has a dedicated computer lab and lounge area, with a pool table and video games. It also has quiet

study rooms and areas for tutoring. There are approximately 280 student veterans on Marmot's campus.

Data sources and collection

Anonymous questionnaires are useful tools to collect data from a small sample size to help define a larger population (De Vaus, 1991; Fink, 1995). Additionally, survey data allows researchers to observe how different variables, such as age and sex, may relate to other variables. Accordingly, during the 2017-2018 academic year I collected and analyzed data from anonymous questionnaires. In this section, I describe the data collection for these anonymous questionnaires.

Data sources

Anonymous questionnaires

The data source I used for this study involved anonymous questionnaires that were distributed by the administrators of the student veteran resource centers to the student veterans at each university. These questionnaires were kept anonymous to protect the identity of the respondents while also enabling me to designate the respective university for each respondent. I provided 100 surveys to each university, and the response rate for each university is provided:

- Hattey: 31%
- Cooper: 36%
- Marmot: 34%

As a result, I used the first 30 surveys from each university to have an equal sample size from each university.

In addition to demographic data, such as age, race, and where the respondents were born, these questionnaires measured the values of four different variables. First, the variable *Time in*

CoP was measured using a single item ("Please indicate time (in months) that you have used your student veteran resource center"), where the student veterans answered. The next three variables, socioemotional-interpersonal knowledge (SEIK), social components of sense of community (SoC-S), and acceptance of knowledge sharing (AKS) (Nistor et al., 2015), were measured using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). SEIK was measured using five items. SoC-S was measured using eight items. AKS was measured using three items. These specific items can be found in Appendix C.

The criteria for participating in this particular study are defined as follows. First, the student must be a veteran of the United States Armed Forces. Second, the student must be enrolled at one of the three universities used in this study. The level of enrollment, such as full or part-time, of the student was not a factor.

Data Analysis

In the following section I describe my process for analyzing my data for my research questions. First, I used descriptive statistics to examine the data (Table 4). In order to determine which predictor variables have the strongest influence on student veterans' SoC in these CoPs, I conducted multiple regression analysis in SPSS. Using the SoC framework (Nistor et al., 2015) (Figure 11) for this analysis, the independent variables were time spent in CoP (Time) and socioemotional-interpersonal knowledge (SEIK), and the dependent variable was the social components of sense of community (SoC-S). Additionally, a simple regression was conducted in SPSS to determine if SoC-S had an influence on the acceptance of knowledge sharing (AKS), as indicated by other studies (Collins, 2006; Eberle et al., 2014; Henrich & Attebury, 2010; Lesser & Fontaine, 2004).

My role as a researcher

It is important to develop an understanding of the positionality of the researcher to better understand the study being investigated. Having a sense of the researcher's positionality is can help the reader understand how the research is being investigated and how the findings and data are interpreted. My positionality and interest in engaging in student veterans and their SoC stem from my experiences as a student veteran in the context of higher education. As a student veteran who completed three degrees at two large universities, my SoC has varied tremendously. Even though each of the universities where I studied were large and have received awards for providing supports to student veterans, I found that not only did these universities have very few supports to provide, but I also was not given the opportunity to feel that I was part of a community. The choice of this topic, therefore, is an extension of my desire to help universities cultivate a strong SoC in the student veterans.

Findings

In this section, I provide overall characteristics of the student veterans in this study. Specifically, I include their age, sex, relationship status, parental status, highest level of education they have completed, and employment status. Secondly, I identify the means for time spent in CoP (Time), socioemotional-interpersonal knowledge (SEIK), social components of SoC (SoC-S), and knowledge sharing acceptance (AKS) across each university. Third, I identify the predictors that had the most influence on student veterans' sense of community within the CoPs. Lastly, I unpack the major claims based on my analysis of the data:

- Socioemotional-interpersonal knowledge (SEIK) was determined to be the strongest predictor of SoC-S. Additionally, unexpectedly, there was a negative relationship between time spent in CoP (Time) and SoC-S.

- Hattey's student veterans spent the most time in their respective student veteran resource center compared to the other two universities; however, Hattey's student veterans reported the lowest scores for socioemotional-interpersonal knowledge (SEIK), social components of SoC (SoC-S), and acceptance of knowledge sharing (AKS), and all of these scores were significantly under the mean for the entire group.
- Even though each university in this study is the recipient of various awards for supporting student veterans, the large discrepancies in the data indicate varying levels of support and areas in which universities can improve how student veterans feel a part of a community.

Background

The goal of this study was to identify the predictors of SoC and how SoC may influence the acceptance of knowledge sharing in communities of practice. This study was equal in terms of how many participants represented each site (N = 30 for each site). Table 4 includes the descriptive statistics for each of the universities separately as well as the overall sample. Although there were significantly more men than women who participated in this study, such a discrepancy in sex is common in the military, where men make up roughly 85% of active duty personnel. This discrepancy also closely resembles the breakdown of sex found in higher education, where 79% of student veterans are male (Molina, 2015). Additionally, there are significantly more full-time students than part-time, as well as those reporting high school as the highest level of education completed.

The student veterans who participated in this study represented ages ranging from 21 to 58 years old, with a mean age of 29.82. Of the 90 participants in the study, 97.8% of the student

veterans were born in the United States, and 97.8% spoke English as their first language. A majority of the student veterans in this study were male (81.1%), while 18.9% were female. In terms of the races of the student veterans, most indicated their race as White (84.4%), and the second largest group was African American (7.8%). The smallest groups were South Asian and East Asian, each representing 1.1% of the student veteran participants.

Regarding the relationship status of the student veterans in this study, 47.8% of the respondents reported their relationship status as being single. The second largest group was married (36.7%). In terms of parental status, 57.8% of the student veteran participants reported as being non-parents, to 42.2% being parents. Observing the highest level of education completed by the student veterans, those having completed high school (61.1%) represented the largest group, followed by having completed an undergraduate degree as the second largest group (16.7).

Table 4:

Descriptive Statistics

	Hattey (N=30)	Cooper (N=30)	Marmot (N=30)	Overall (N=90)
Age				
Min	22	22	21	21
Max	44	57	58	58
Mean	29.9	29.1	30.5	29.8
Sex				
Male	24	24	25	73
Female	6	6	5	17
Relationship Status				
Married	8	12	13	33
Single	16	16	11	43
Divorced	5	2	6	13
Widowed	1	0	0	1
Parental Status				
Parent	8	13	17	38
Non-parent	22	17	13	52
Student Status				
Full-time	24	24	22	70
Part-time	6	6	8	20
Highest Level of Education Completed				
GED	0	5	2	7
High School	14	17	24	55
Undergraduate	8	4	3	15
Graduate	4	4	3	15
Doctoral	1	0	0	1
Employment Status				
Full-time	6	13	14	33
Part-time	15	10	8	33
Unemployed	9	7	8	24

Variables of the investigated sample (Time in CoP, SEIK, SoC-S, AKS)

Time

The measured values for this study indicated that student veterans had spent between 0 and 72 months in their respective student veteran resource center CoPs (M = 13.43 months, SD =

12.75) (Table 5). Even though men (N = 73) significantly outnumbered women (N = 17) in this sample, there was no statistical difference between how much time men and women spend in the CoP.

SEIK

Overall, the student veterans' mean socioemotional-interpersonal knowledge (SEIK) was identified as high (M = 3.33, SD = 1.32) (Table 5). To distinguish between low and high scores, I used SPSS to create a histogram of the scores across the entire sample. Based on the distribution of the data, I created categorical variables of 2.99 and below as being low and scores of 3.0 and above as high. As a group, men (M = 3.34, SD = 1.3) reported having a higher SEIK than women (M = 3.27, SD = 1.51) in this study. While men reported a slightly higher SEIK than women, the difference was not statistically significant. The highest SEIK reported for men occurred at Cooper (M = 3.98, SD = .83), and the lowest SEIK reported for men was at Hattey (M = 2.63, SD = 1.17). For women, the highest SEIK was also reported at Cooper (M = 4.5, SD = .64), while the lowest SEIK reported was at Marmot (M = 2.21, SD = 1.26).

SoC-S

Observing the social components of SoC (SoC-S) of the student veterans, the overall mean (M = 3.85, SD = 1.13) was identified as high (Table 5). To distinguish between low and high scores, I used SPSS to create a histogram of the scores across the entire sample. Based on the distribution of the data, I created categorical variables of 2.99 and below as being low and scores of 3.0 and above as high. As a group, men (M = 3.89, SD = 1) reported having a higher overall SoC-S than women (M = 3.65, SD = 1.2). The test comparing sex and the social components of SoC (SoC-S) was not proven to be statistically significant. The highest SoC-S reported for men (M = 4.24, SD = .59) was at Cooper, and the lowest SoC-S reported for men (M

= 3.21, SD = .98) was at Hattey. These two sites were the same for women (M = 4.54, SD = .52), as the highest SoC-S reported was at Cooper, while the lowest SoC-S (M = 2.9, SD = 1.5) was reported at Hattey.

Table 5:

Variables of the Investigated Sample

	Min.	Max.	M	SD	Hattey		Cooper		Marmot	
					M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Time in CoP (months) (Time)	0	72	13.43	12.75	16.77	15.03	15	10.22	8.53	11.40
Socioemotional-interpersonal knowledge (SEIK)	1	5	3.33	1.32	2.69	1.37	4.08	.96	3.21	1.63
Sense of Community (social) (SoC-S)	1	5	3.85	1.13	3.15	1.29	4.3	.75	4.09	1.36
Acceptance of Knowledge Sharing (AKS)	1	5	4.15	1.03	3.8	1.2	4.33	.8	4.33	1.08

AKS

Lastly, the overall acceptance of knowledge sharing (AKS) in this study was identified as high (M = 4.15, SD = 1.03) (Table 5). To distinguish between low and high scores, I used SPSS to create a histogram of the scores across the entire sample. Based on the distribution of the data, I created categorical variables of 2.99 and below as being low and scores of 3.0 and above as high. This was the highest mean of the variables being investigated. As a group, men (M = 4.16, SD = .97) scored slightly higher than women (M = 4.14, SD = 1.25). The test comparing sex and AKS was not proven to be statistically significant. The highest AKS reported for men (M = 4.43, SD = 1.06) was at Marmot, and the lowest AKS reported for men (M = 3.83, SD =

1.05) was at Hattey. For women, the highest AKS reported was at Cooper (M = 4.83, SD = .41), while the lowest AKS for women was at Hattey (M = 3.67, SD = 1.57).

Predictors of SoC-S

In this study, the independent variables are time spent in the CoP (Time) and socioemotional-interpersonal knowledge (SEIK). The dependent variable is the social components of SoC (SoC-S). The first major claim based on my analysis of the data through multiple regression analysis indicated that SEIK was the strongest predictor of SoC-S ($\beta = .48$, $p < .000$) (Figure 12), meaning that as a group, higher SEIK scores lead to higher SoC-S. Looking across universities, SEIK was statistically significant at Hattey ($\beta = .6$, $p < .005$). Cooper ($\beta = .2$, $p = .07$) and Marmot ($\beta = .29$, $p = .06$), on the other hand, did not have statistically significant values in regards to SEIK. Socioemotional-interpersonal knowledge (SEIK) as the strongest predictor of SoC-S implies that when members within this CoP have knowledge of others' values, emotions, character and living conditions, they will consequently develop stronger SoC-S. When controlled for sex, the influence of SEIK on SoC-S was statistically significant for men ($\beta = .47$, $p < .000$) and not for women ($\beta = .59$, $p > .005$).

Data indicated that SEIK was the predictor with the strongest influence on SoC-S ($\beta = .48$, $p < .000$) (Figure 12). Even though Cooper (M = 4.08) and Marmot (M = 3.21) had much higher mean scores for SEIK than at Hattey (M = 2.69), SEIK was only statistically significant at Hattey ($\beta = .6$, $p < .005$), which can be explained by Hattey having the highest amount of students who reported a low SEIK score (23 out of 30 responses). Additionally, the influence that time in CoP (Time) had on SoC-S was negative ($\beta = -.03$, $p > .05$) (Figure 12), meaning that as a group, increases in the amount of time spent in the CoP contribute to lower SoC-S. One explanation for this is that those who are new to this CoP may be enthusiastic about meeting

other student veterans and the environment of this CoP, which then fades over time. Looking across universities, the beta coefficients at Cooper and Marmot were both negative and only positive at Hattey. All of these were statistically insignificant. When controlled for sex, the influence of Time on SoC-S was statistically insignificant for both men ($\beta = -.07$, $p > .05$) and women ($\beta = .19$, $p > .05$).

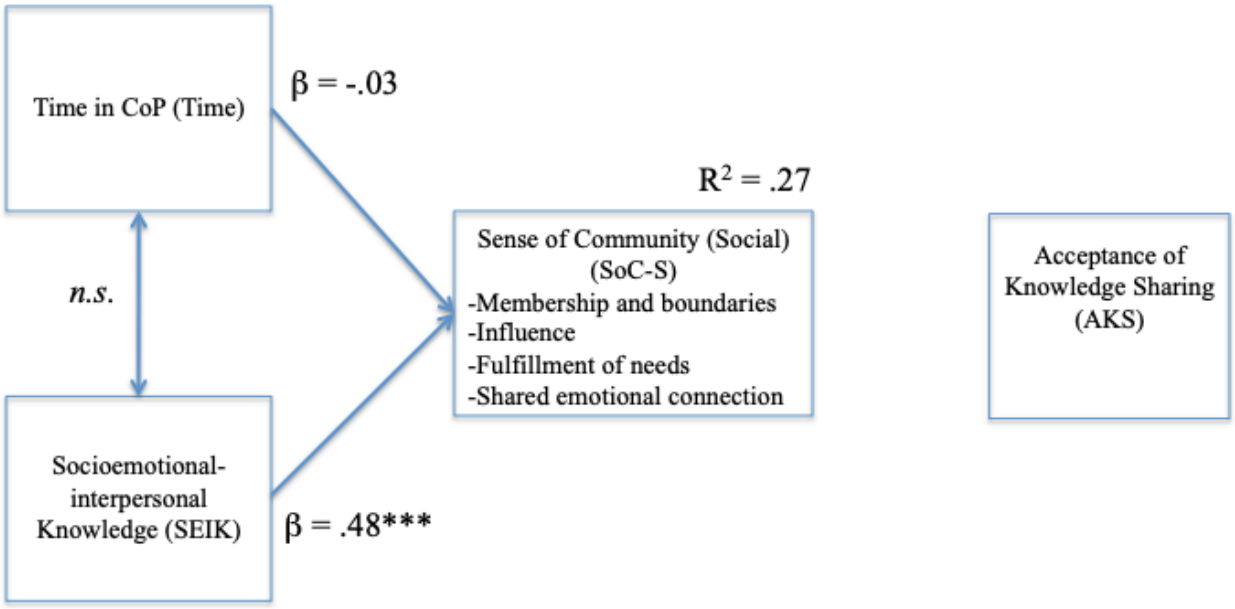

Figure 11: Results of the First Regression Analysis

Much to my surprise, the student veterans' time spent in CoP (Time) did not have a positive influence in SoC-S. Instead, SoC-S decreased with increases in time ($\beta = -.03$, $p > .005$) (Figure 12). One way to explain this is that student veterans may initially be excited about being a part of this new community, only to become less enthusiastic about the student veteran resource center over time or find that it does not meet their needs. An alternative way of explaining this inverse relationship with Time and SoC-S is that a negative relationship exists between the age of the student veterans and their SoC-S based on the correlation coefficients that were obtained (Pearson r coefficient = -.161, $p > .005$). In other words, as student veterans' age increases, their SoC-S decreases. Older student veterans having families, wanting to spend less

time on campus, or working full-time may not have the same level of interest or time to spend in this particular CoP and may help explain this negative relationship.

Lastly, the R^2, which is the measure of the amount of variance in the dependent variable that the independent variables account for when taken as a group, can be explained to $R^2 = .27$. In other words, the predictor variables Time and SEIK account for 27% of the variance in SoC-S. Overall, the regression model was statistically significant, $F(2, 87), = 16.04$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .27$.

The effects of SoC-S on the acceptance of knowledge sharing

Based on earlier studies (Collins, 2006; Eberle et al., 2014; Henrich & Attebury, 2010; Lesser & Fontaine, 2004), it seemed reasonable that the social components of SoC (SoC-S) may

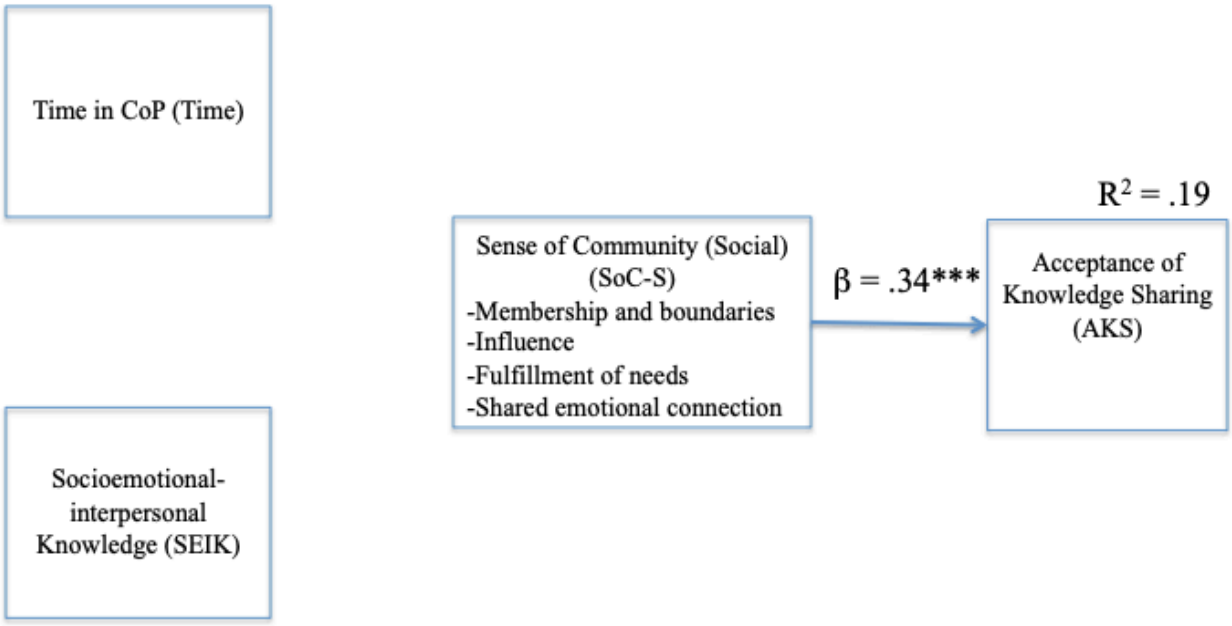

Figure 12: Results of the Second Regression Analysis

influence the acceptance of knowledge sharing (AKS) in a CoP. Based on the data from this model, the effect of SoC-S on the acceptance of knowledge sharing (AKS) is statistically significant ($\beta = .34$, $p < .000$) (Figure 13). Even though this is statistically significant, SoC-S only accounts for a limited amount of the variance of AKS ($R^2 = .19$). Taken together with

SEIK, SoC-S accounts for an increased amount of variance ($R^2 = .21$). Taken with Time, SoC-S accounts for slightly less of the amount of variance ($R^2 = .2$). Looking across universities, SoC-S was only statistically significant at Marmot ($\beta = .57$, $p < .001$). On the other hand, the negative beta coefficient at Cooper ($\beta = -.11$, $p > .005$) implies that increases in SoC-S lead to decreases in AKS at Cooper. When controlled for sex, the influence of SoC-S on AKS was statistically significant for both men ($\beta = .29$, $p < .005$) and women ($\beta = .6$, $p < .005$).

The second major claim based on my analysis of the data is that Hattey's student veterans spent the most time in their respective student veteran resource center (M = 16.77 months) compared to the other two universities. This was significantly higher than the overall mean for the group (M = 13.43 months), and was nearly double the mean of time the student veterans spent at Marmot (M = 8.53 months). Results of the post hoc test confirmed a statistically significant relationship in the time spent in CoP between Hattey and Marmot ($p = .04$). However, even though the student veterans at Hattey spent more time in this CoP compared to the other two universities in this study, they also reported the lowest scores for socioemotional-interpersonal knowledge (SEIK), social components of SoC (SoC-S), and acceptance of knowledge sharing (AKS). All of these scores were significantly lower than the mean for the entire group. Post hoc test analysis confirmed a statistically significant relationship in SEIK scores between Hattey and Cooper ($p = .000$), as well as a statistically significant relationship in SoC-S scores between Hattey and Cooper ($p = .000$) and Hattey and Marmot ($p = .001$).

Table 6:

Lowest SEIK/SoC-S/AKS scores

	Min.	Max.	M	SD	Hattey		Cooper		Marmot	
					M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Time in CoP (months) (Time)	0	72	13.43	12.75	16.77	15.03	15	10.22	8.53	11.40
Socioemotional-interpersonal knowledge (SEIK)	1	5	3.33	1.32	**2.69**	**1.37**	4.08	.96	3.21	1.63
Sense of Community (social) (SoC-S)	1	5	3.85	1.13	**3.15**	**1.29**	4.3	.75	4.09	1.36
Acceptance of Knowledge Sharing (AKS)	1	5	4.15	1.03	**3.8**	**1.2**	4.33	.8	4.33	1.08

The last major claim based on my analysis of the data is that even though each university in this study is the recipient of various awards for supporting student veterans, the large discrepancies in the data indicate varying levels of support and areas in which universities can improve how to make student veterans feel a part of a community (Table 6). These discrepancies were particularly visible at Hattey, where student veterans reported the lowest scores for three of the four variables. Additionally, even though the student veterans at Marmot spent the shortest amount of time using their respective student veteran resource compared to the other two universities, they reported the highest AKS scores for the group.

These claims fit together by demonstrating that simply providing a student veteran resource center as a means of creating a support mechanism for student veterans does not mean it will be a community. Additionally, these claims illustrate varying levels of opportunity provided to student veterans and areas where universities can focus on improving.

Discussion

In this section, I discuss how CoPs can help explain why SEIK has the strongest

influence on SoC-S. Second, I revisit my initial research questions and data analysis to provide deeper insight into the predictors that influence student veterans' SoC. Here, I discuss why the participants responded as they did. These explanations involve descriptive data of the respective student veteran resource centers in this study. Lastly, I describe why varying, and the sometimes lacking, levels of support that student veterans are provided, hidden under awards the universities have received, shape opportunities for student veterans in these CoPs.

How CoPs can help explain SEIK

The concept of CoPs (Lave & Wenger, 1991) helps explain socioemotional-interpersonal knowledge (SEIK) as the predictor with the strongest influence on SoC-S. CoPs are rooted in the idea of contributing knowledge, goals and ideas to others in a particular context (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1999), which is similar to the definition of socioemotional-interpersonal knowledge provided by the authors of the SoC framework (Nistor et al., 2015). Nistor et al. (2015) define SEIK as the "knowledge of personal beliefs, values, personality, emotions, and personal environment of other group members" (p. 263-264). Based on the data, the student veterans identified these components as significant to them.

Furthermore, Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion of peripheral learning in CoPs, where novices are provided the opportunity to learn through increasingly difficult tasks and responsibilities, supports how student veterans learn and share knowledge with others. The student veterans, possessing varying levels of expertise in different areas and initially having little knowledge about this particular CoP, gradually advance towards expertise as they learn from other members and take on roles and responsibilities. The results of this study demonstrate that CoPs and their components can help explain why SEIK has the strongest influence on SoC-S.

Revisiting predictors of SoC

All of the participants in this study were provided with the same set of survey questions that were situated around different predictor variables. The responses of the participants were driven by their experiences and by what these CoPs provide. SEIK proved to be the predictor with the strongest influence on SoC-S ($\beta = .48$, $p < .000$), as well as acceptance of knowledge sharing (AKS) ($\beta = .24$, $p < .001$). This finding is consistent with similar studies (Diekamp, 2007; Diekamp et al., 2008; Nistor et al., 2015), where SEIK was the strongest predictor of SoC-S and AKS. This also supports other studies (Norman et al., 2015) that posit student veterans have a positive experience and feel a stronger sense of belonging to the group and university when provided with physical locations on campus. In other words, student veterans in this CoP who know other student veterans on a personal level, who know how other student veterans use the student veteran resource center, who know the emotions, feelings, and living situation of other student veterans and who use other student veterans to mediate challenges developed a higher SoC-S.

These also led to student veterans developing a higher acceptance of knowledge sharing (AKS) in this CoP. This finding is supported by studies (Wenger, 1996; Wenger & Snyder, 2000) that suggest strong CoPs encourage the sharing of ideas and knowledge through relationships where trust and respect are found.

The influence of Time on SoC-S was negative ($\beta = -.03$, $p > .005$), suggesting that as student veterans spend time in their respective student veteran resource centers, their SoC-S decreases. This finding was supported by other studies (Nistor et al., 2015) that suggest increases of time spent in CoP lead to a decrease in SoC. Considering the respective student veteran resource centers, what they provide, and the nontraditional status of student veterans

(Dickerson & Stiefer, 2006; Evelyn, 2002; Horn, 1996) allows me to understand this negative relationship. Hattey's student veteran resource center, for example, is difficult to get to and lacks visibility to other student veterans. Also, even though it was led by an administrator during my data collection, it was unstaffed from May, 2018 – November, 2018, leaving the student veterans with little, if any, support during this time. As a result, student veterans who initially use this student veteran resource center may lose excitement about it and may stop being involved with it. Some of the components of their nontraditional status (Horn, 1996), such as being enrolled part-time, being employed full-time while enrolled, having dependents, and being single parents may dictate the student veterans spending increasingly less time in this CoP.

Varying opportunities for student veterans

All of the universities providing student veteran resource centers in this study are recipients of the same award. When I first learned of this, I automatically assumed that all of the student veteran resource centers would very similar; however, the clearly varying levels of support found in these CoPs identify a large gap in the opportunities that student veterans are provided.

The opportunities for student veterans ultimately depend on the extent of resources provided within these respective student veteran resource centers. From simple observation alone, the student veteran resource center at Hattey was only staffed by one administrator during my interview and data collection (while lacking an administrator from May, 2018 – November, 2018), whereas the student veteran resource centers at Cooper and Marmot had multiple staff serving various roles. The administrator of Hattey shared a frustration regarding her limited involvement due to a lack of time during our interview:

> I wish I had the time to sit down with every veteran and get to know them on a one-on-one basis to know what brought them to the university, what their goals are, what their prior experiences are, just to open up that conversation.
>
> [Orv, January 2018]

Conversely, Cooper and Marmot possessed a larger body of knowledgeable staff working with student veterans that allowed them to receive more one-on-one support, help with coursework, benefits, social gatherings and feeling like a part of a group. The student veterans at Cooper and Marmot have significantly more opportunities than the student veterans of Hattey simply due to the amount of staff available to them, which could be reflected in the lower scores at Hattey. The administrators and various staff at Cooper and Marmot were also veterans themselves, whereas the sole administrator at Hattey was a civilian. As a result, the student veterans at Hattey may not have felt the same level of community being represented on campus by a civilian, whereas the student veterans at Marmot and Cooper were represented on campus by veterans. I do not entirely believe that someone's civilian status should preclude them from being an authority figure with regard to veteran issues; however, those sentiments may not be shared by others and may raise the question of why veterans are not placed in leadership positions to support other veterans on campus.

Conclusion

This study was an attempt to develop a better understanding of how predictors influence student veterans' SoC in a particular CoP. Specifically, I wanted to use a quantitative methodology to identify which predictors have the strongest and weakest influence on student veterans' SoC in the student veteran resource centers across three different institutions.

Additionally, I wanted to investigate and draw conclusions around the award that each of these universities has received regarding the level of support they provide for student veterans on their campus.

It is my intention that this study can begin generating conversations around what is actually taking place in the student veteran resource centers that some universities provide. This study demonstrated that giving awards to universities based on the supports they provide to student veterans is an inaccurate and useless practice. Just because a student veteran resource center physically exists on campus does not mean that it supports student veterans, or in Hattey's case, that anyone is even working there. If such absence of support, coupled with negative feelings and experiences, are found in a student veteran resource center whose university *has* received various awards for supporting student veterans, I am then left to wonder what the experiences would be of student veterans whose university has not received similar awards. This provides the opportunity for further research in the field of student veterans in higher education and how universities support student veterans on campus.

Another issue that this study raises is the level of expertise of the administrators of these student veteran resource centers and the amount of support given to them by the broader university. It was made clear to me through multiple conversations that each of the administrators were extremely knowledgeable in how to perform their jobs; however, very few of the departments and colleges on Hattey's campus were on the same page regarding student veterans, and the administrator at Hatty did not have access to the various reports and student data needed to do her job more effectively. It seems counterproductive to ask someone to do a job and not give them the tools necessary for doing that job.

Furthermore, the administrator at Hattey was a civilian, while the administrators of

Cooper and Marmot were veterans. I am curious about the value of support staff learning to work with veterans compared to veterans learning to be support staff. I can confidently attest to student veterans being grateful for any kind of support they are provided on campus; unfortunately, the overwhelming lack of veterans working in higher education makes this challenging.

For future studies, it would be worth developing research questions investigating the possible relationship between the number of staff available to the student veterans and its influence on SoC, as well as how student veterans interact with civilian and veteran staff members. Additionally, it would be valuable to explore how student veterans navigate career exploration and the degree to which student veterans are able to find employment that relates to their degrees given such varying levels of opportunity.

CHAPTER 3:

Practical considerations for higher education literature addressing student veterans

Much of the literature surrounding student veterans is seemingly framed in a deficit perspective that highlights them as a vulnerable population, rampant with mental illness and substance abuse (Baker & Siryk, 1986; Bergerson, 2007; Cavote & Kopera-Frye, 2007; Kinser & Deitchman, 2007; McCleary-Jones, 2008; Richardson & King, 1998; Tierney, 1992). For example, it requires only a glance at a daily newspaper to learn of new statistics on rates of veteran suicide and homelessness. While I concede that these are important issues in the veteran community, it is equally important to challenge this limiting narrative and give attention to other issues that veterans experience. Even though veterans and active-duty service members represent 4% of all undergraduates in postsecondary education (Radford, 2009), very little literature exists on the transition student veterans experience as they shift from the military to higher education, and to my knowledge, no studies exist that are sensitive to the student veteran resource centers that some universities provide to student veterans.

In this section, I reflect on my experiences as a student veteran and as a researcher studying military veterans in higher education in light of the lack of comprehensive literature surrounding student veterans. As university administrators are ultimately the group tasked with making decisions on this scale, the purpose of this paper is to provide university administrators with considerations for why literature addressing student veterans needs more attention and ways to provide student veterans with more support:

- Given the significant revenue that student veterans consistently generate annually, it is the sole responsibility of universities to provide resources for student veterans.

- Ensuring faculty receive proper training
- Ensuring student veterans are provided with a comprehensive introduction to the university through an orientation

The purpose of this paper is to provide recommendations to university administrators for supporting student veterans. Here, I will use my experiences, feedback from other student veterans and evidence from my previous two studies to inform how and why administrators should better support student veterans on campus.

Generating significant revenue annually

One of the most enticing aspects of the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 (more commonly known as the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill) is that it will pay up to 100% of public university tuition based on a tiered system of a veteran's time spent in the military. Additionally, for veterans who have been out of the military for less than three years, public universities must charge in-state tuition rates. Veterans Affairs (VA), rather than paying the student veterans individually, pays university tuition directly to the university. This allows the veterans to pursue higher education without the worry of taking out student loans to pay for tuition and other living expenses. The Post-9/11 G.I. Bill also provides veterans with a housing stipend and annual stipend for books. To provide a better sense of tuition rates (Table 7), I provide the tuition rates for the most recent academic year (2018/2019) for each university in this study based on in-state tuition and full-time status (12 credit hours):

Table 7:

Tuition Rates

University	Cost (per credit hour)	Tuition Per Academic Year
Hattey	$482	$11,568
Cooper	$413	$9912
Marmot	$210	$5040

Student veterans act as cash cows, as their tuition is paid directly to universities in full. Table 8 illustrates approximately how much money each university receives annually directly from VA for student veteran tuition. Clearly, student veterans generate significant annual revenue for universities.

Table 8:

Annual Income Generated by Student Veterans Based on Tuition

University	**Number of Student Veterans (approximate)**	**Total Student Population**	**% of Student Veterans on Campus**	**Tuition Per Student (annually)**	**Income From Student Veterans (annually)**
Hattey	400	50,344	.79%	$11,568	$4,627,200
Cooper	500	21,105	2.37%	$9912	$4,956,000
Marmot	280	21,969	1.27%	$5040	$1,411,200

Based on these data, the student veterans at Cooper generate the most income for their university, while also being the largest percentage of student veterans of the universities in this study. When compared to data from the previous two studies, the data on tuition rates and annual income generated by the student veterans illustrate tensions in these universities.

Data indicate that the student veterans at Hattey generate roughly $4.6 million each year. Given this significant annual revenue, particularly in light of the fact that Hattey also boasts recognition of various awards for supporting student veterans, it would be quite reasonable to think that Hattey has strong and effective supports in place. Instead, the student veterans at Hattey consistently had negative responses to share with me during my interviews with them.

It's kind of like we're not here.

[Mildred, January 2018]

> The fact that nobody, not even veterans, can find the veterans' office, says that the university doesn't care much about the SVRC [student veteran resource center].
>
> [Shamus, January 2018]

> It's kind of weird. It just seems like they could probably do a lot more to support us, especially being, you know, a Yellow Ribbon School and the fact that there are over 400 veterans on campus. Probably every one of them is using the G.I. Bill, which I assume is pretty lucrative for the school because that's cash in pocket. That's a guarantee.
>
> [Shamus, January 2018]

In addition to the negative feedback contributed by the student veterans, it is important to demonstrate that the student veterans at Hattey reported the lowest scores for socioemotional-interpersonal knowledge (SEIK), social components of sense of community (SoC-S), and acceptance of knowledge sharing (AKS) (Table 6), leading me to wonder if that $4.6 million/year is allocated effectively. Furthermore, it is important to remember that not all universities provide student veteran resource centers, even though they collect large amounts of money annually from their student veterans.

The awards that Hattey has received in recognition of supporting student veterans and significant annual income produced by student veterans, taken with the negative feedback and low scores, clearly indicate discrepancies between what the university says and does with regard to student veterans.

Student veterans will continue to have an increased presence in higher education, meaning universities will continue to receive considerable funds annually. It is unethical for a

university to tout itself as "veteran-friendly" and to boast of receiving recognition for providing supports to student veterans when these supports clearly lack and when student veterans are cut off from the larger university. I have attended various functions for student veterans at multiple universities where high-ranking officials make a point to highlight their "veteran-friendly" and "gold-level" statuses early in their speeches, which is immediately followed by snickering and eyes rolling from significant portions of student veterans in attendance. This leads me to think that administrators perceive these awards as conclusive proof of success, and that administrators are either blind to what is really going on or they choose to not get involved. Given the services and sacrifices that student veterans have made to their country prior to pursuing higher education, as well as the significant income student veterans generate for universities, the onus is on higher education as an institution to provide student veterans with supports in the form of effective student veteran resource centers that have a well-qualified administrator who is knowledgeable about student veterans.

Next, I provide recommendations for how university administrators can provide effective supports for student veterans on campus.

Ensuring faculty receive proper training

According to the findings of a survey including 14,673 faculty and staff across 20 universities in the United States, upwards of 70% of faculty and staff feel unprepared to recognize when a student veteran displays signs of distress (Albright & Bryan, 2018). Additionally, 44% of faculty and staff indicated that they did not have sufficient knowledge of challenges that student veterans face (Albright & Bryan, 2018), and alarmingly, 43% of faculty reported that they felt unprepared to guide a classroom discussion around issues that may be sensitive to student veterans (Albright & Bryan, 2018). Based on the results of this study, it is

apparent that faculty need to receive more training with regards to student veterans.

Faculty, particularly course instructors, will have the most contact with student veterans at a university. Having faculty who are knowledgeable about challenges that student veterans experience can assist student veterans in the context of the classroom; additionally, knowledgeable faculty will be able to make referrals to other departments and offices on campus that can support student veterans further. However, Ryan, Carlstrom, Hughley and Harris (2011) report that few universities provide faculty and staff with training on veterans and the culture of the military. Kim and Cook (2009) also revealed that less than 50% of universities with student veterans provide opportunities for faculty to obtain information about the various needs of student veterans and resources available for them campus. Thus, the degree to which faculty, staff, and administrators are able to provide support and referrals to student veterans is currently limited.

Fortunately, 97% of faculty and staff agreed that part of the responsibility of faculty, staff and administrators "is to help create a supportive environment for the student veteran population" (Albright & Bryan, 2018, p. 6), indicating that faculty are genuinely interested in creating positive and supportive environments for student veterans to learn. Institutions can create a supportive environment for student veterans by providing their faculty with necessary training through webinars.

One way that some institutions provide virtual support is through Kognito webinars ("Veterans on Campus for Faculty & Staff," 2019). In these webinars, led by avatar-like characters, faculty are able to observe conversations that take place between a student veteran and faculty member. When asked a question by the student veteran avatar, faculty are given a range of possible responses to the question. For example, if a faculty participating in the webinar

chooses, “I don’t know,” to a question, they are given feedback and resources for how to answer the question more effectively. This webinar was easy to follow, was relatively quick and provided valuable information. Furthermore, faculty can be recognized and provided with a certificate for participating. However, it focuses heavily on the mental health aspect of student veterans, rather than addressing issues related to the classroom or where student veterans and locate resources. Additionally, its ease of use and ability to watch from anywhere does not allow for dialogue with other faculty who may be engaging in the same webinar. Having such dialogue would increase the effectiveness of this webinar in particular.

Ensuring that staff within the student veteran resource centers are trained is also paramount to the success of student veterans. In terms of this study, the student veteran resource centers at Cooper and Marmot possess a school certifying official who is able to work directly with the student veterans. This individual is trained to work directly with student veterans and the VA to provide information on credit hours, term dates, what courses count towards benefits, and to ensure the student veterans receive reimbursement. The student veteran resource center at Hattey, on the other hand, did not have anyone trained to do this, requiring the student veterans to work with someone who was not fully trained in VA or student veteran affairs.

This lack of support at Hattey is reflected in the first study, as there was no clear purpose of the student veteran resource center. The administrator at Hattey is also placed in a difficult position to work as the school certifying official when there is only one person working in the student veteran resource center. The other two universities, on the other hand, have multiple people working with the student veterans to help address these challenges and work on providing a clear purpose for the student veteran resource centers.

Ensuring student veterans are provided with a comprehensive introduction to the

university through an orientation

As a student veteran who attended two large universities, both of which having received awards and recognition for supporting student veterans, I was somewhat surprised that I did not receive any sort of introduction to the university or information regarding resources for veterans on campus. Student veterans at my current institution are equally bewildered, as no introduction to the university or information for resources are provided to student veterans upon being accepted for enrollment. Due to military obligations, many student veterans at my current institution were not able to attend the orientation program that took place because this orientation was held several weeks before the beginning of the semester. This resulted in these student veterans missing a very general orientation to the university that other students received. Thus, in this way student veterans are treated in the same fashion as every other student. As equitable as this may be in principle and on paper, being politically correct does not equate to effective practice. Furthermore, it seems ineffective and unproductive to have supports in place for student veterans, such as student veteran resource centers, if the student veterans aren't going to be made aware of them.

Horn (1996) describes nontraditional postsecondary students as having the following characteristics: delayed enrollment, part-time enrollment, financial independence, full-time employment while enrolled, having dependents, single parents, and not having received a high school diploma. Based on these characteristics, many of today's student veterans can be given the classification of being nontraditional, whereas traditional students are classified as students who begin college immediately after high school, receive financial support from parents, and who do not work or work part-time (Choy, 2002). These differences between traditional and nontraditional students may present student veterans with feelings of isolation (Dickerson &

Stiefer, 2006) and create the need for student veterans to be provided with a comprehensive introduction to the university.

Establishing inclusion for adult learners in the context of higher education is an essential condition for learning (Wlodkowski, 2008). Inclusion encourages participants to be connected to one another and "invites adults to access their experience, to reflect, to engage in dialogue, and to allow their histories to give meaning to particular academic or professional knowledge" (Wlodkowski, 2008, p. 13). While Wlodkowski (2008) argues that establishing inclusion occurs most effectively at the beginning of lessons, I argue that establishing inclusion for student veterans would be best accomplished at the beginning of an academic year through a comprehensive introduction to the university in an orientation.

In addition to regular orientation programs, one strategy for establishing inclusion for student veterans is having a separate orientation program held early in the semester that is led by faculty who can answer veteran-specific questions. These orientations could be held on multiple days and times, thus increasing the likelihood that student veterans would be able to attend. Here, student veterans would be able to establish points of contact with various offices around campus and meet other student veterans, while also receiving information and resources for benefits and other VA-related items. These face-to-face student veteran-specific orientations would build rapport and trust among student veterans. Wlodkowski (2008) contends that the tasks of interacting and developing connections serve a significant purpose by helping to facilitate learning for long periods of time. While the universities in this study provide orientation programs for their students, they do not address student veterans or include information for where student veterans can start the process of receiving benefits, resulting in unnecessary confusion and stress.

Conclusion

For many military veterans, the choice to enroll in and pursue higher education will be the next logical step for career advancement, as educational benefits increase and as employers continue to seek applications with degrees. These veterans will bring with them skills and experiences that are typically not found in traditional students, and it is up to the institution of higher education to provide the necessary supports.

Through countless interviews and surveys from men and women of all ages, backgrounds, and branches of the United States military, I have developed a strong understanding of their experiences and the degree to which universities provide support. All of the participants in this study were generous to share with me their feelings about higher education and how their needs are met or not met. I concede that the information and knowledge gained from my research are only from a few universities, and may not be relevant to others. However, while the individual needs of student veterans vary to some extent, the underlying conclusion is that support varies tremendously and can be hidden under awards and bureaucracy.

In this study, student veterans were adamant that they need a designated and easily identifiable location on campus to meet other veterans. My recommendations are for stakeholders in higher education, to include administrators and professors, to work with student veterans on campus to develop a visible and fully functional student veteran resource center. These student veteran resource centers should serve as a one-stop shop where student veterans can work with faculty trained to work with student veterans and the VA, instead of being shuffled all over campus. Additionally, I contend that providing thorough orientation programs designed for student veterans will promote communication and engagement across campus, and will also result in student veterans feeling a sense of community on campus.

Limitations of the dissertation

One of the biggest hurdles and methodological issues I came across in this dissertation was data collection. Specifically, getting people to respond to surveys was just as challenging as I had been told it would be. Even at my home university, where I know many of the student veterans and have had many of them to my house, getting responses was difficult. This was my first attempt with a quantitative study, and my initial goal was 30 surveys per institution. While I met this mark, getting all of those was tedious at times. Given what I think is a relatively small sample size (N = 90), future studies would benefit from having much larger sample sizes to increase levels of accuracy and predictability. However, as this study was the first to my knowledge that incorporates SoC and student veterans, I did not have a baseline study to compare mine to in terms of number of respondents. In some ways, the difficulty in getting student veterans to respond to surveys may reflect their lack of attachment to the larger university.

Secondly, using a questionnaire survey did not make it possible to follow up with student veterans as to why they responded the way they did. Furthermore, this survey data represents a snapshot of time during the student veterans' educational pursuits, rather than a progression over time. A longitudinal study over multiple years and through the course of a degree would provide rich data that could address student veterans' SoC in CoPs more effectively.

Lastly, I was taken aback by the unwillingness of some universities to participate in a study regarding student veterans, particularly in light of the facts that each university I used in this study are recipients of the same award from the MVAA and each receives millions of dollars in annual income directly from student veterans. In addition to being averse to participate, I was surprised by how secretive some of my points of contact at universities were about engaging in

conversations and being a part of this dissertation. Even when administrators were aware of my identity as a veteran, this was immediately trumped by my temporary status as a researcher. I did not feel comfortable pursuing interviews and data collection at sites where my identity as a veteran and/or researcher raised suspicion. My initial reaction was that I was only going to be told what I wanted to hear and that it was completely plausible that these sites would pull out of the study at some point if I asked the right questions. It should also be noted that I only experienced this with civilian administrators within these universities. Thus, I did not use as many universities as I thought I would, and what is really going on in those cautiously guarded sites that I opted not to use will remain a mystery unsolved. While my usage of three universities in this study may be viewed as a limitation, this research is somewhat exploratory in nature because it has not been done before.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A:

Questionnaire for administration

1. What are the needs of student veterans you work with?
2. Can you tell me about the history of this resource center, such as how long it has been operational, why it is here and who approved of its creation?
3. What resources and supports do you have to meet the needs of student veterans?
4. Can you talk about an experience with a specific veteran that you have helped with regard to how you helped them?
5. What are some of the rewards and challenges you encounter when working with student veterans?
6. How do you inform student veterans that this resource center exists?
7. Do you know of other places where student veterans go to help them feel supported?
8. How do student veterans on this campus use this resource center?
9. How frequently are you in contact with veterans on campus?
10. How do you think student veterans are perceived on this campus?
11. Are there common items that you find yourself talking about veterans with?
12. Are you successful in meeting the needs of student veterans in this resource center, and if so, how do you know?
13. What do you see as the overall goal of this resource center with regard to meeting the needs of student veterans, and does the university help meet these needs?
14. What are suggestions you have for this university to improve the overall experience for student veterans, if you have any?

APPENDIX B:
Questionnaire for student veterans

1. What has been your experience as a student veteran on this campus?
2. As a student veteran, what are your needs and some of the supports that you need?
3. Do you interact with other students, and if so, what have those experiences been like and what kinds of students do you find yourself interacting with?
4. Do you interact with professors, and if so, what have those experiences been like and what kinds of professors do you find yourself interacting with?
5. How frequently are you in contact with support staff?
6. What are some of the tools (resources, groups, etc) you use to navigate the university and succeed in the classroom, and what makes these tools stand out?
7. Have you experienced any academic challenges that you would like to share?
8. How do you think student veterans are perceived on this campus?
9. How did you find out about your resource center?
10. How do you use your resource center?
11. To what degree does this resource center meet your needs as a student veteran?
12. What do you see as the overall goal of this resource center with regard to meeting the needs of student veterans, and does the university help meet these needs?
13. To what degree has this university met your expectations with regard to being a student veteran?
14. What are suggestions you have for this university to improve the overall experience for student veterans, if you have any?

APPENDIX C:
Survey

Demographic information (please check or write your response)

1. Please indicate your age: _____
2. Please indicate your sex:
    a. Female ☐
    b. Male ☐
3. Please indicate your race:
    a. Non-Hispanic White or Euro-American ☐
    b. Latino/Hispanic ☐
    c. Middle Eastern ☐
    d. African American ☐
    e. East Asian or Asian American ☐
    f. South Asian or Indian American ☐
    g. Other _____
4. Please indicate where you were born:
    a. U.S. ☐
    b. Other _____
5. Please indicate if English is your first language:
    a. Yes ☐
    b. No ☐
6. Please identify your relationship status:
    a. Married ☐
    b. Single ☐
    c. Divorced ☐
    d. Widowed ☐
    e. Other _____
7. Please identify your parental status:
    a. Parent ☐
    b. Non-parent ☐
8. Please select your current student status:
    a. Full-time ☐
    b. Part-time ☐
9. Please select the highest level of education you have completed:
    a. GED ☐
    b. High school ☐
    c. Undergraduate ☐

d. Graduate ☐
e. Doctoral ☐
f. Other _____

10. Please select your current employment status:
    a. Full-time ☐
    b. Part-time ☐
    c. Unemployed ☐
11. Please indicate the branch of military in which you served: _____
12. Please indicate how long you served in the military (in months): _____
13. Please indicate your rank when you left the military (E-?, O-?): _____
14. If you were deployed, please indicate where you were deployed to and time in country (in months): _____
15. Please indicate time (in months) you have used your resource center: _____

The following questions ask about your student veteran resource center on campus. Please answer on a scale of 1 to 5 (strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, neutral, somewhat agree, strongly agree).

IK1. I know the veterans who use the resource center on a personal level. _____

IK2. I know the veterans who use the veteran resource center with respect to how they use the resource center. _____

IK3. I know the veterans who use the resource center with respect to their emotions/feelings. _____

IK4. I know the veterans who use the resource center with respect to their living situation. _____

IK5. Knowing other veterans in the resource center has helped me with some of the challenges I have experienced on campus. _____

SoCS1. The resource center on campus provides me with what I need to succeed. _____

SoCS2. I am satisfied with the support I receive in this resource center. _____

SoCS3. Using the resource center has provided me with a better educational experience. _____

SoCS4. I feel like a part of a community in the resource center. _____

SoCS5. I feel a sense of connection to the resource center. _____

SoCS6. I have a bond to the other veterans who use the resource center. _____

SoCS7. I trust the veterans who use the resource center. _____

SoCS8. The resource center is conveniently located, allowing me to access it regularly. ____

AKS1. I am comfortable with sharing my knowledge to the other veterans who use the resource center. _____

AKS2. I am happy to learn from the experiences of other veterans who occupy the resource center. _____

AKS3. Learning from other veterans in the resource center has positively impacted my educational experience. _____

APPENDIX D:

Social components of sense of community (SoC-S)

	Definition	Example
Membership and boundaries	CoP members become willing to share knowledge and take on more responsibilities within a CoP when other members within that CoP acknowledge them. Even though members of the student veteran resource center may not know one another, student veterans all share a deeply ingrained and often emotional experience through the military. Furthermore, membership in close-knit CoPs such as student veteran resource centers may result from student veterans seeking to avoid isolation on campus (Gourlay, 2011).	Feelings of belonging and intimacy that its members experience (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; McMillan, 1996).
Influence	According to McMillan (1996), a CoP influences its members just as the members influence a CoP. CoPs shape the members by conforming how they act within a CoP (McMillan & Chavis, 1986), as Aronson, Wilson and Akert (2010) found that in order to be liked by other members of a CoP, some members may change their behavior. Members of CoPs can become leaders and apply influence on other members of a CoP by acknowledging the influence of others (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).	Peer-mentoring programs (Eberle, Stegmann & Fischer, 2014), such as Peer Advisors for Veteran Education (PAVE) ("Peer Advisors for Veteran Education," 2018).
Fulfillment of needs	According to McMillan (2011), members in a particular CoP will trust each other more as they continually get to know others better, while at the same time leveraging the other members as resources. Studies illustrate how members in a particular CoP use peers as resources for learning (Fischer & Makitalo-Siegl, 2011).	Using other student veterans as resources to succeed. The need for interpersonal knowledge to exist is essential among members of a CoP (Diekamp, 2007), particularly in a student veteran resource center.
Shared emotional connection	Meaning is created in student veteran resource centers through the unique experiences that have been shared by the veterans who occupy these CoPs, as space becomes place through experience (Wise, p. 922, 2015).	The bonds shared among student veterans.

APPENDIX E:
Sense of Community Variable Measures

Sense of Community Variable Measures

Time in CoP - Continuous measure of time spent in community of practice [from TIME)
Socioemotional-interpersonal Knowledge – Dummy coded measure of student veterans' socioemotional-interpersonal knowledge in community of practice, 0=Low, 1=High [recoded from SEIK]
Sense of Community-Social – Dummy coded measure of student veterans' social components of sense of community in community of practice, 0=Low, 1=High [recoded from SOC-S]
Acceptance of Knowledge Sharing – Dummy coded measure of student veterans' ability to share and accept knowledge from others in community of practice, 0=Low, 1=High [recoded from AKS]

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