

12-2021

## Advising Student Veterans in Higher Education

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Advising Student Veterans in Higher Education

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Higher Education

by

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## **Abstract**

Student veterans are a growing population in higher education with over 650,000 veterans using education benefits in 2018. Student veterans are enrolling in colleges of all types, and many institutions have support services designed for them specifically. In most cases these support services are limited to veteran centers where officials certify credit hours for financial benefits and do not offer services to help them fully assimilate into higher education. Student veterans bring a wide range of life experiences, culture, and work ethic to college campuses which serves to build and diversify the student body. However, veterans have reported feeling isolated and disconnected from other students, staff, and faculty due to differences in life experiences.

This mixed methods study was conducted in three phases. The first phase focused on differences in cumulative grade point averages between student veterans enrolled Reserve Officer Training Corps programs and student veterans not enrolled in Reserve Officer Training Corps programs. The second phase consisted of interviews with military and college advisors to determine methodological differences used to advise student veterans. The third phase involved a survey to obtain student veteran perceptions of academic advising on campus. The data analysis reviewed quantitative differences in grade point averages and themes describing advising practices and student veteran perceptions of advising practices.

The results of the study indicated that there were statistically significant differences in cumulative grade point averages between three out of five groups tested. College and military advisors had differences in total number of students they were responsible for, personal connections made, and total number of student contacts. Of the student veterans who participated in the survey, student veterans want to be advised by people with a military background. Student

veterans also want an advisor who can connect with them over shared experiences, or at a minimum want advisors who try to relate to their experiences as student veterans.

## **Acknowledgments**

What a journey this has been! This has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. I've been challenged academically, emotionally, and mentally throughout my studies. I must thank several people who have encouraged and motivated me throughout this challenging experience. Dr. Michael Miller, thank you for serving as my dissertation chair and for all your insight. You are a consummate professional, and I am not quite sure how you manage all your responsibilities. You have served as a bright, shining light for me and many others in higher education. Thank you so much for giving me your most valuable resource, your time. To Dr. Michael Hevel, you taught one of my first classes in this doctoral program and I was fully impressed by your candor, benevolence, and expertise in higher education. I have always valued your critiques and acumen. We are all lucky to have you as a leader in the higher education department. Dr. G. David Gearhart, you are a remarkable leader and professor. I am thankful that I had the opportunity to meet you and take part in our discussions. You are a treasure to this state and this university, thank you for your service.

To Dr. Leslie Jo Shelton, you took the time to answer my questions about this program over three years ago as I sat in traffic on I-5 in California. My head was spinning as I was trying to make sense of my future path. I am thankful that you took the time to talk with me. You welcomed me with open arms to this campus and you helped make my dream come true, thank you for your support. To Dr. Trevor Francis and Dr. Stephanie Adams, you are both outstanding leaders in the world of higher education. I fully appreciate the opportunities you gave me – I absorbed so much from working with you and am indebted to you both. You are both great examples of what it means to lead in higher education.

To my classmates, thank you for lively discussions and opening my eyes to the everchanging landscape that is higher education. I am grateful I had the opportunity to listen and learn from you all. To all the student veterans across higher education, thank you for everything you have done and continue to do for our country. I could not imagine a more meaningful topic for my dissertation. A fraction of our society will ever know the challenges that comes with serving in the armed forces. It is, and always will be, a band of brothers and sisters.

Finally, to my family. Thank you for your patience, love, and support throughout this program. To my wonderful, amazing wife, Lindsay. I love you so very much. Thank you for your encouragement and wisdom. You were the one constant I knew I could count on, you never wavered during this process. Even when you were completing your master's program, and working, and taking care of our tribe. Your indefatigable spirit is a wonder to behold. I am beyond blessed to have you as my wife. To my amazing daughters – Taylor, Mollie, Peyton, and Madylinn, thank you for your understanding and for being so self-reliant. Thank you for loving me even when my attention was diverted. To my sons, Caleb and Charlie, you are both Marines now and this study brings a whole new level of importance to me personally. I hope at some point you seek out a college education and if you do, I hope you find the support that you deserve. Lastly, to my mother and father – thank you for all you did for our family. My greatest fear was that I would never live up to the example you were for our family. I am forever grateful for you both.

## **Dedication**

My study and doctorate are dedicated to all student veterans across higher education. My own experiences as a student veteran pushed me to investigate this topic further. I remember starting my undergraduate degree as a non-traditional student veteran and I felt like a fish out of water. The environment was different, the people were different, the challenges were different. I really did not know if I had what took to succeed academically. I had been out of high school for a decade and while I had been successful in the military, I was unsure about my academic skills.

I am fortunate that I had a great mentor who was also a Marine and I had an academic advisor who made a great impact on my undergraduate experience. My mentor offered so much advice in many different areas and always made himself available to me. I think the most important trait he possessed was the ability to listen. My academic advisor went beyond the standard advising standards of developing a degree plan and choosing classes. She sought to understand me as a person and as a veteran. Fast forward to my master's degree and I had a similar experience with the Director of Graduate Programs. She took the time to get to know me as a person and made a rather lengthy process manageable.

I think a good education is critical to personal development. I also think service that extends to the greater good is equally important. I have sought both throughout my adult life. I have always enjoyed a quote that is attributed to Thucydides, "The society that separates scholars from its warriors will have its thinking done by cowards and its fighting done by fools." I hope that this study helps frame best practices for supporting student veterans as they enter higher education and that future studies help advance the mark. Our veterans have sacrificed more than most people will ever know and they have earned the very best support we can give them.

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## **Chapter 1. Introduction**

### **A. Context of the Problem**

Active duty students, Reservists, National Guardsmen, and student veterans are a unique subgroup in higher education. Since 2002, almost one million student veterans have pursued higher education after completing their military service (Dillard & Yu, 2018). Griffin and Gilbert (2015) reported over 600,000 veterans entered higher education in the past 10 years which has resulted in a growing population of student veterans on college campuses of all types. Student veterans bring their life experiences, culture, and work ethic to college campuses which serves to build and diversify the student body.

Student veterans are largely successful in higher education. Alschuler and Yarab (2016) found a 50.5% six-year graduation rate for student veterans at one urban, research university, a rate that was only 1.2% lower than the national benchmark for all students (Cate, 2014). The Million Records Project reported student veterans had a national average graduation rate of 51.7% in public four-year institutions, and 44% of all student veterans took longer than two years to complete an associate's degree and 39% took longer than five years to complete a bachelor's degree (Alschuler & Yarab, 2016; Cate, 2014). In 2017, the Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) reported a 53.6% student veteran completion rate compared to a national completion rate of 52.9% and student veterans posted an average grade point average of 3.34 (on a 4.0 scale) compared to the average traditional student grade point average of 2.94, showcasing higher academic performance than the traditional college student. Further, once student veterans complete their bachelor's degree, they earn approximately \$15,000 more than their non-veteran peers.

The 53.6% completion rate reported by the IVMF included attainment of postsecondary certificates or a degree of some kind. However, only 20% of student veterans who began postsecondary education in 2009 earned a bachelor's degree in six years (Cate et al., 2017; Jenner, 2019). The IVMF reported that over half of all military members join the military to gain educational benefits and that 73% of military members reported that their military service increased their interest in education. However, Ginder-Vogel (2012) reported that student veterans were much more likely than traditional students to drop out of higher education. Some studies identified a four-year graduation rate for student veterans as low as 3% and a dropout rate as high as 88% in their first year (Ginder-Vogel, 2012; Parks et al., 2015).

Military students enrolled in higher education often face challenges that traditional students do not. For example, student veterans still serving on active duty or the reserves may encounter requirements that send them on deployment or on a temporary assignment for training (Ginder-Vogel, 2012). Also, some student veterans might be first generation students with no experience or family tradition in higher education. Jones (2017) reported that 66% of student veterans are first generation students or that they may have psychological or physical injuries associated with their military service that can make academic work challenging (DiRamio et al., 2008).

Student veterans face unique challenges while attending college because the type of support that higher education institutions provide them varies widely. Today's student veterans must consider several factors when they enter higher education. They must decide what school is best for them and their families and they must factor veteran services available, financial aid benefits, campus culture, their transition from service to higher education, their level of academic

preparedness, and how to persist in college (Schimmel et al., 2009; Pampaloni 2010; Stephenson, Heckert, & Yerger 2016).

The Millions Records Project found that almost half (47%) of student veterans were married and raising dependent children, and many work at least part-time while they attend college (Alschuler & Yarab, 2016; Cate, 2014). Research has also indicated that many student veterans work full-time while attending school part-time (Wheeler, 2012). Additionally, student veterans may also struggle with psychological feelings of isolation, disconnectedness, and anxiety in academic settings (Persky & Oliver, 2010). As a result of the range of challenges they face, student veterans may benefit from focused support to assist them in their transition from active military service to higher education. For example, military-connected students often have challenges associated with their military service, and having consistent access to advisors/mentors on a college campus can be a great resource for their success (Miller, 2015; Richardson et al., 2015; Parks et al., 2015). Additionally, this support should focus on helping student veterans navigate financial aid, student veteran GI Bill benefits, and integrate with the university and other student veterans.

In the last several years, researchers of student veterans' transitions to higher education have challenged college professionals with investigating the connections veterans make between their military service and their experiences as college students to better serve them as they complete their education (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009; Boettcher, 2017; DiRamio et al., 2008; Jenner, 2019; Jones, 2013; Ryan et al., 2011; Wheeler, 2012). Alshuler and Yarab (2016) reported some universities have made a concentrated effort to help student veterans with their higher education experience by providing Veterans Resource Centers that may offer meeting spaces, a student lounge, computer access, financial aid and academic advising assistance, and

peer mentoring. Other services can include waiving student fees, transcript review for military transfer credit, and early registration (Alshuler & Yarab, 2016; Bauuman, 2009; Ford et al., 2009).

## **B. Statement of the Problem**

Although most universities have provided dedicated personnel to assist student veterans using their financial aid benefits gained from service, little has been reported on the actual benefits from engaged academic advising from active or prior service mentors. Academic advising involves the process of teaching students how the higher education system works, enabling effective decision making, adapting life skills and experiences to academia, and how to develop the academic skills to succeed in higher education (Drake, 2011). Student veterans are unique in that they bring life experiences and a world view that few academic advisors can relate to. Student veterans often retain their military cultural identities and values that can conflict with the cultural values they encounter in higher education (Durdella & Kim, 2012). As a result, advisors often resort to stereotypes of student veterans that can negatively affect how they advise them, resulting in possible further isolation from peers and faculty members (Parks et al., 2015). This isolation may contribute to a student veterans' desire to dropout, stop out, or transfer to another institution. Without engaged advising practices focused on student veterans, this subpopulation of students may not realize their full academic potential or complete their academic program of choice.

## **C. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose for conducting the study was to compare the academic success of student veterans with limited to no access to academic advisors with military experience to student veterans in Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) programs who have access to advisors with

military experience. Differences were explored between these two groups of student veterans due to the advising support, mentoring, and understanding of student veterans' military experiences. Parks et al. (2015) explained how student veterans must overcome several obstacles when transitioning to higher education and perhaps the most significant challenge was navigating the administrative offices and structure of higher education. ROTC programs have assigned military personnel from their respective branches that help student veterans, cadets, and midshipmen navigate the higher education environment. Officers in ROTC programs are responsible for teaching, advising, and mentoring student veterans throughout their college experience that may have an impact on grade point averages.

#### **D. Research Questions**

1. Were there significant differences in grade point averages between student veterans in ROTC programs and student veterans not in ROTC?
2. What were the advising practices for student veterans in different ROTC programs on the University of Arkansas campus?
3. What were the advising practices for student veterans on the University of Arkansas campus who are not in ROTC?
4. How did student veterans perceive advising practices on the University of Arkansas campus?

#### **E. Definitions of Terms**

There have been a variety of different types of active duty and former service members who serve and have served in the military, and it is necessary to define and explain the different types of student veterans included in the study.

1. Student veteran: a former member of any military service (including active duty, Guard, or Reserve units) whose service obligations have concluded and who are actively pursuing a postsecondary education.
2. Military connected undergraduate student: any student who is on active duty, a reservist, a veteran, or a member of the National Guard (Molina & Morse, 2015).
3. Active duty: a member of any military service who is currently serving in the armed forces on a full-time basis.
4. Reservist: a member of any military service is currently serving in the armed forces on a part-time basis.
5. National Guard: a state militia force, equipped by the federal government and subject to the call of either government (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).
6. Veteran-friendly: campus efforts to identify and remove barriers to the educational goals of veterans, to create smooth transitions from military life to college life, and to provide information about available benefits and services (Lokken et al., 2009).

## **F. Assumptions**

1. Student veterans in the study were non-traditional students undergoing a significant transition by attending the University of Arkansas campus as undergraduate students.
2. Results from surveys were not to be generalized to other populations of student veterans on similar campus types. For example, challenges for student veterans at the University of Arkansas might have been similar or different to the challenges that student veterans encounter at other four-year research-based institutions. Elements such as campus culture, services for non-traditional students, community support, etc. all have the potential to impact a student veteran's acceptance on campus and community.

3. Differences among grade point averages between student veterans in ROTC and those student veterans not in ROTC cannot be directly attributed to dedicated advising efforts from advisors with military experience or a military background.

4. Student veterans on campus felt more comfortable with advisors from a military background and desired to be advised by a military connected advisor.

### **G. Delimitations and Limitations**

1. The study examined student veterans at the University of Arkansas, a four-year research-based institution located in the mid-southern, medium sized community of Fayetteville, Arkansas. Due to the range of different institutions that student veterans attend, the results of the study may not be generalizable to smaller four-year institutions, private institutions, or community colleges.

2. The results of the study might not be generalizable to online institutions because student veterans likely face different challenges in these settings.

3. The study examined student veterans that included active duty, reservists, and national guard students from various branches of service. The results from the study can be generalized to student veterans across the branches of military service.

4. The study was limited by the degree of student veteran participation in the study. Some student veterans may be reluctant to share their true feelings on academic services.

### **H. Significance of the Study**

The number of student veterans returning from Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom, and Operation New Dawn has steadily increased with military students making up 6.1% of the undergraduate population as of 2015-16 (NCES, 2020). As a result, there has been an uptick in the amount of research that has focused on student veterans. With over one million veterans attending postsecondary education as undergraduate students, the importance of



connecting with and assisting them has become even more important. Since the number of student veterans in higher education has increased, so has research; however, much of this research has been anecdotal and qualitative in nature (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). DiRamio and Jarvis (2011) reported that even with the increase of research on student veterans in higher education there has been little empirical data added to existing scholarship. The current study helps to fill a void in the existing literature on the quantitative impacts of engaged advising for student veterans.

In 2017 the University of Arkansas, the University of Arkansas Strategic Plan and student success is at the top of that list. This principal priority is focused on

maximizing the success of our students is our highest priority starting with their recruitment and ending with their transition to careers or further education. We will work to maximize the success of our students, with special attention to first-generation college-going Arkansans, by increasing financial assistance for those who need it, easing the transition into the university, improving retention and graduation rates, and providing career planning and career transition assistance. (Para. 4)

The National Survey of Student Engagement (2010) identified that 66% of student veterans are first-generation students. Many of these first-generation students are not academically prepared (Engle, 2007) and lack access to information on college resources that has resulted in student veterans who are not prepared for postsecondary curriculum compared to continuing-generation students (Kinney & Eakman, 2017; Wurster, Rinaldi, Woods, & Liu, 2013). Student veterans are a growing population across the realm of higher education. Since 2002 over one million veterans have attended postsecondary education and several studies have predicted that over two million service members transitioning from the military will enroll in postsecondary education in the next decade (Cook & Kim, 2009; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Lange et al., 2015; Madaus et al., 2009).

The University of Arkansas has invested \$45 million to build a student success center as part of an initiative to "provide one-stop comprehensive academic support for our students and allow us to expand our student success initiatives" (UARK News, 2019, para. 3). Advisors working in the student success center are planning to use analytics to predict student success and to establish proactive academic, financial and personal advising, and tutoring. Further, the student success center has a goal to "unify, enhance and fully realize the alignment of a personalized academic, financial and social support system for all students at the university" (UARK News, 2019, para. 4). However, there are a variety of untested advising programs and methods for student veterans that leaves faculty, administrators, and student affairs professionals ill-equipped to assist this subgroup of students. Research has suggested that these students will benefit from having access to advisors with a military background or an understanding of how the military works and how these differences between the military and higher education are the same, different, and how their personal skills can be effectively applied to their new environments (DiRamio et al., 2008; Parks et al., 2015; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010).

There has been no existing research to quantify the effectiveness of using advising methods specifically tailored for student veterans or using advisors with knowledge of military processes or that come from a military background. Evidence from across the higher education community suggests that many student veterans do not make use of resources and support services on campus (Molina & Morse, 2017). In an attempt to answer how student veterans view advising services, the current study will explore how different types of advisors interact with student veterans and what impacts advising sessions have on academic outcomes.

Durdella and Kim (2012) also found that academic preparation, interaction, and collaboration were not related to positive outcomes for student veterans even though they

exhibited higher levels of these traits. Further, the authors found that student veterans have unique experiences both academically and socially while leaving college with a lower sense of belonging and lower grade point averages. The US Department of Education's (2009) Beginning Postsecondary Student (BPS) Longitudinal Study indicated that 44% of student veterans reported never meeting with an academic advisor and another 44% of student veterans reported they never met with faculty member outside of the classroom (US Department of Education, 2009). The current study concentrated on the impacts of engaged advising to provide colleges and universities across the nation with academic data to make changes to advising methods in order to better support student veterans.

The most recent enrollment numbers for student veterans have increased from approximately 4% undergraduate enrollment (Molina, 2014) to 6% overall undergraduate enrollment as of 2015-16 with over 7% graduate student enrollment (Fain, 2020) and the population of student veterans in higher education will continue to grow over the next several years. As a result, administrators, faculty, and staff must identify best advising practices to better support student veterans. There have been several studies involving student veterans and transition experiences (Pascarella, Terenzini, and Wolfe, 1986; Tinto, 1988; Rumann & Hamrick 2010; Livingston et al., 2011; & Jones, 2017), identity development (Abes et al., 2007; Jones, 2013; Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989), college selection (Schimmel et al., 2009; Pampaloni 2010; Stephenson et al., 2016), and disability impacts on student veterans in higher education (Elliott et al., 2011; Hunt et al., 2010; Kessler et al., 1995). The current study assessed the academic impacts of interactions between student veterans and advisors with a focus on grade point averages, advising practices, and student veteran perceptions of advising practices in higher education.

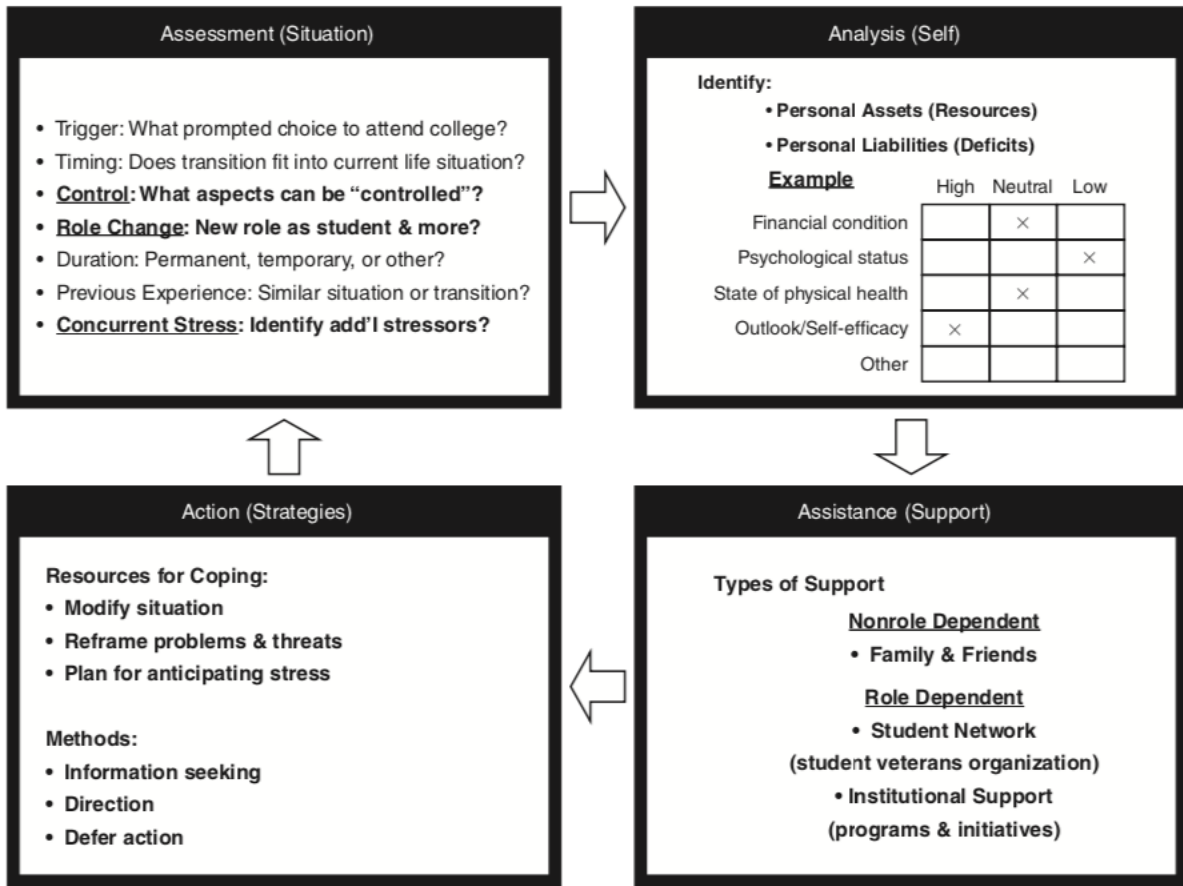
The research has the potential to positively impact student veterans at colleges throughout higher education, by examining the impacts of engaged advising from advisors with knowledge and experience of the military. Additionally, data from the study will provide faculty, staff, admissions officials, and administrators with recommendations on how to refocus advising efforts specific to student veterans as well as what traits advisors should possess when working with student veterans.

## **I. Theoretical/Conceptual Framework**

There are several theoretical frameworks researchers have used to analyze student veterans' experiences in higher education, Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory (Griffin & Gilbert, 2016; Heitzman & Somers, 2015; Pellegrino & Hogan, 2015; Schiavone & Gentry, 2014), identity theories (Hammond, 2015; Jenner, 2017, Meiners, 2018; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010), and self-authorship theories (Boettcher, 2017; Stone, 2014; Stone, 2017) have all been used as frameworks for studies on student veterans in higher education. Perhaps most common to student veterans' transitions, Schlossberg's transition theory (1981) has been used by professionals to assist transitions across a variety of life events including marriage, death, career changes, attending or leaving college, or changes in military status (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). Schlossberg's (1981) theory considers three aspects that include moving in, moving through, and moving out of a transition experience. Other features of the model include changes that are prompted by anticipated or unforeseen events or non-events while other transition theories explore change that relate to age and life stage. Schlossberg (1984) asserted that transitions are significant when they challenge and transform roles, relationships, beliefs, or the customary manner in which things are done that applies directly to military members when they transition from service, either active or reserve, to higher education.

Schlossberg's theory has also been widely used in many studies on student veterans in higher education with a focus on "4S" model. This model incorporates four fundamental coping factors for students that include situation, self, supports, and strategies (Pellegrino & Hogan, 2015). Schlossberg's (1981) model defines situation as the type of situation occurring with an emphasis on if the individual had a say in how, when, or why the transition occurred. Self is the second "S" and is centered on what strengths, weaknesses, and experiences factor in the transition while also considering the individual's expectations and motivations. Support refers to the people and/or systems involved in the transition along with what type of influence they have on the life change, positive, negative, helpful, or hindering. The final "S" involves the individual implementing strategies after assessing the transition, accepting the transition, and lastly, controlling the transition process. DiRamio and Jarvis (2011) noted that one severe limitation of Schlossberg model is the "prescriptive and linear nature" of the model "which suggest that all veterans should undertake a homogenous academic experience, or process, in order to succeed in college" (p. 24). As a result of the model's limitation with student veterans, DiRamio and Jarvis (2011) offered a modification.

The DiRamio and Jarvis (2011) adaptation of Schlossberg's "4S" model to provided administrators, staff, and faculty an opportunity to better understand students who have served or who are serving in the military (Figure 1).



**Figure 1**

*Note.* Adapted 4S model for college personnel working with student veterans

With the student veteran in mind, DiRamio and Jarvis (2011) built this framework specifically for military students in higher education. This model does not have to be applied in a linear or directional fashion because each student veteran's transition is unique. This nonlinear framework allows the practitioner and as well as the student veteran to conduct an evaluation and start at the appropriate location in the model.

DiRamio and Jarvis (2011) opened with the *Assessment* stage that allows the college professional to examine the factors that have contributed to the student veteran's transition. This step is highlighted by identifying how the student veteran's role has changed, what can and cannot be controlled, and what stressors exist in the life of the student veteran. Once the

assessment has been completed, the next step is typically *Analysis*. This step requires the student veteran to conduct a self-reflection on personal assets and liabilities that will help them understand their strengths and weaknesses related to the transition. The third step, *Assistance*, requires the student veteran to recognize assistance available to them either through family and friends who support them outside of their role as a student and support systems available through their institution such as student success programs, advisors, tutors, and student veteran organizations. *Action* is the fourth step in the adapted "4S" framework and requires a plan or strategies to cope with stressors and challenges identified earlier in the process.

Although the student veteran may develop an initial plan for transition challenges, it is important to note a framework such as this should be used to reevaluate changes in the transition that the student veteran may experience while completing coursework and as new challenges emerge. Ultimately, there are several situations where stressors may occur during the student veteran's transition to higher education. A strength of using this adapted model is being able to help both practitioners and student veterans identify the source(s) of stress to lessen negative impacts (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). The adapted Schlossberg model for student veterans (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011) drives the research questions for the study and will allow for a clearer understanding of how student veterans view relationships with advisors and their transition from the military to higher education. The nonlinear nature of the model also provided an opportunity to examine to what extent and how deeply student veterans connect with their academic advisors.

## **J. Chapter Summary**

While student veterans are largely successful in higher education, often posting grade point averages that are higher than traditional students (IVMF, 2017). However, they still are much more likely than traditional students to drop out of higher education (Ginder-Vogel, 2012).

Many student veterans must overcome obstacles that traditional students do not encounter. For instance, student veterans may be called away from school due to military service requirements such as training assignments or deployments. First generation student status is another challenge many student veterans must overcome, Jones (2017) reported that 66% of student veterans are first generation students. Additionally, student veterans may struggle with psychological or physical injuries from their military service that make higher education more challenging due to the nature of their injuries (DiRamio et al., 2008).

This chapter also explained that the purpose of the study was to compare the academic success of student veterans in ROTC programs who had access to advisors with military experience to student veterans not in ROTC programs who do not have access to advisors with military experience. Differences were explored between these two groups of student veterans due to the advising support, mentoring, and understanding of student veterans' military experiences. Definitions of terms, assumptions, delimitations and limitations, the significance of the study, as well as the theoretical framework were also discussed.



## **Chapter 2. Review of the Related Literature**

Active duty students, reserve students, and student veterans all face significant challenges when leaving the military environment for higher education. First, the college selection process can be overwhelming when considering tuition costs, admissions requirements, geographic location, veteran services available, and financial aid benefits. Second, the transition from a military setting with set standards of rules and regulations to a college campus where the academic culture seems unbound can be unnerving to many veterans (Durdella & Kim, 2012). Third, to ensure overall academic success, veteran students must attempt to excel in their classes. However, many student veterans are first generation college students and may lack the confidence needed to succeed in their academics (Wurster, Rinaldi, Woods, & Ming Liu, 2012). Lastly, military connected students often have challenges including physical and psychological injuries associated with their military service and having consistent access to military connected advisors/mentors on a college campus can be a great resource.

Although there have been some quantitative and qualitative studies conducted regarding the transition of military students to the higher education environment, there is little literature on the impacts of academic advising on student veterans' academic success when compared to their ROTC student veteran counterparts. Williams-Klotz and Gansemer-Topf (2017) reported that veterans complete a degree at approximately the same rate as their non-military peers (approximately 50%). However, other findings by Ginder-Vogel (2012) and Parks et al. (2015) identified a four-year graduation rate for student veterans as low as 3% and a dropout rate as high as 88% in the first year. The disparities in research findings warrant further investigation into the academic successes of student veterans in higher education. Active duty, reserve, and national guard service members are often enrolled in commissioning programs with ROTC units

at higher education institutions across the United States. As a result of their ROTC status, they are given dedicated advising and mentoring sessions to assist with their academic progress. This additional support system may provide an accountability standard that helps ROTC students stay focused on their academic goals and maintain higher grade point averages and overall academic success.

This literature review explored the published works on the challenges student veterans face when selecting their school of choice, transition challenges, overall academic success, and the impacts of academic advising. The literature search was conducted using EBSCOhost, ProQuest, and ERIC through the University of Arkansas research guide and university library system. Google Scholar was also used to locate materials inaccessible through the library system and yielded useful publications for inclusion. Search words were used in several different combinations including: "veteran and college choice," "military student and college selection," "student veteran advising and higher education," "military and transition," "student veteran and transition," "military student or student veteran and advising," "veteran and advising and higher education and persistence," and "student veteran and first-generation."

### **A. College Selection**

Higher education institutions consistently focus on student enrollment because the number of enrolled students directly and indirectly influences the financial resources available to them. Moreover, enrollment is directly related to tuition revenue and often increases the ability to attract private and public funding (Schimmel et al., 2009). With over one million student veterans attending higher education institutions since 2002, there is a vast sum of money available that colleges could benefit from (Dillard & Yu, 2018). This unique population of students brings experience, maturity, life skills, leadership, and mentorship to campus, not to

mention education financial benefits from the GI Bill. Student veterans returning to higher education from war zone deployments noted perceived strengths with respect to heightened maturity, goal commitment, appreciation for cultural diversity, and eagerness to work for their goals (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). However, the college selection process can be a burdensome task with several factors to consider. Although there is a strong body of research on college selection factors for traditional students, there is less written on college selection factors for non-traditional undergraduate students. Further, there is currently no research on college selection factors for active-duty students and military veterans resulting in a need to support research on the college selection process that student veterans undergo when they transition from the military to higher education.

College bound students consider factors such as reputation, word-of-mouth recommendations, programs offered, costs and availability of aid, extra-curricular activities, location, setting, and overall atmosphere as reasons to select attending an institution (Pampaloni, 2010). These selection factors are contemplated throughout a process that Chapman (1986) described as a method with five stages: pre-search behavior, search behavior, application decision, choice decision, and matriculation. Schimmel et al. (2009) pointed out pre-search behavior is described by a student contemplating attending college and a cost benefit analysis of higher education. The search behavior step is characterized by an active search and fact gathering process about specific attributes the student deems important. The application decision step begins with the student's decision to apply to schools based on the probability of acceptance into the institution and the choice decision step occurs when the student evaluates the expected utility of each school selecting the institution with the highest utility. Finally, the matriculation step happens when the student actually enrolls in and attends the school of choice. Over the last

decade (2007-2013) 25 of 50 states had a decline in the number of high school graduates (Stephenson, Heckert, & Yerger, 2016), and given these lower rates, there has been an increase in “branding” in higher education in an effort to attract or influence potential students’ college selection. More importantly, the lower rate of graduating high school students provides an opportunity to focus on another segment of potential college students, active duty students and veterans.

Stephenson, Heckert, and Yerger (2016) conducted a qualitative, mixed-methods study looking at college selection criteria of first year, first-time students at a midsized, public university. Stephenson et al. (2016) found that college selection factors such as programs offered, price, others’ perceptions of the university, size and location, friendly and comfortable, and aesthetics were all important themes from their study that were similar to the results found by Pampaloni (2010). The average number of institutions students considered was 3.03 which was similar to results found by Laroche et al. (1984) at 3.98. However, the 3.03 average number of institutions Stephenson et al. (2016) found was less than the 6.01 institutions reported by Dawes and Brown (2002) in the United Kingdom. None of these studies indicated if student respondents were on active duty, had a military affiliation, or were veterans. Often universities will tout specific programs designed to work with active duty students and veterans.

Non-profit and for-profit higher education institutions often solicit active duty military students and veterans to influence their college selection process. American University, National University, and the University of Phoenix are often sought by military members due to their online course offerings, tuition discounts, and purported awareness of military culture. However, there could be a negative stigma associated with attending these schools due to their online nature and perceived lack of academic rigor. Schimmel et al. (2009) identified similar findings

from others, noting “the importance of strong academic offerings and reputation has been consistently supported as important selection criteria by several researchers” (p. 16).

Pampaloni (2010) and Stephenson et al. (2016) focused on the college selection factors for traditional students, Schimmel et al. (2009) conducted a study at a single four-year institution comparing traditional undergraduate students, non-traditional students, adults seeking undergraduate degrees with some online courses, and graduate students seeking masters or doctoral degrees. Data were collected using an online survey tool and solicited responses from 683 students. Two hundred and fifty-seven students responded for a response rate of 37%. Among the different types of students, the most important variables were availability of a specific major, flexible course offerings, accreditation, specializing inside the major field of study, reputation, tuition cost, speed of degree completion, evening class availability, financial aid packages, and ability to commute to campus. These findings were consistent with studies by Pampaloni (2010) and Stephenson et al. (2016). By including the graduate and non-traditional student segments, Schimmel et al. (2009) found flexibility, speed of degree completion, evening class availability, and ability to commute to campus as important factors. Other non-traditional students, such as active duty students and veterans, would likely also find these college selection factors important.

## **B. Transition Challenges**

Active duty students and veterans face several challenges when transitioning from military service to the higher education environment. Transition challenges affect two distinct categories of veterans: those who were already enrolled in school and withdrew for active service and veteran students who are transitioning from active service to higher education for the first time. Rumann and Hamrick (2010) looked at the former population of students and focused on

the transition experiences of college students who returned from war zone deployments and subsequently re-enrolled in four-year colleges. The authors chose a qualitative, phenomenological research design using Schlossberg's theory of transition as a guiding theoretical framework. Students returning from combat deployments to re-enroll in school noted differences in military and academic life, incompatibilities of lingering stress and college life, and enacting facets of the "student" role during deployment and facets of the "military" role during college. Student veteran participants were reluctant to share stories or talk about deployment experiences with people upon their return to school, and when they discussed their experiences, they did so selectively (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010).

Jones (2017) conducted a study on military students transitioning from military service to the higher education environment for the first time, although his study focused on community colleges. Jones (2017) chose to focus on community colleges because they are the most popular institution-type attended by student veterans and account for over 43% of all enrollments. When students transfer from military service to civilian life they are faced with one of the most difficult challenges an individual can face (Jones, 2017). Veteran students are forming new identities and adjusting their individual identities throughout the military/higher education transition (Jones, 2017). Significant differences exist between academic and military culture and socialization, which presents challenges when transitioning to an academic environment (Pascarella, Terenzini, & Wolfe, 1986; Tinto, 1988; Jones, 2017). For example, military members may be reluctant to engage professors in an academic setting due to their experiences in the service that is a distinctly hierarchal environment (Jones, 2017). In the military, a service member's decision making involves following rules mandated by superiors whereas, in higher education professors often encourage students to question the rules. Jones (2017) explained that almost all veterans

face an adjustment period when returning to civilian society, sometimes due to physical and/or psychological injuries, but often the veteran has been changed due to the homogenized, martial environment of the military services. Considering these circumstances, it is important student veterans integrate socially into the college environment.

The studies of Rumann and Hamrick (2010) and Jones (2017) differed not just by institution type but also by theoretical framework. Rumann and Hamrick (2010) used Schlossberg's theory of transition as their guiding theoretical framework to categorize transitions into three types: anticipated, unanticipated, and nonevent. Jones (2017) identified shortcomings using this model for military veteran transitions into higher education and used an updated version of Schlossberg's theory that focused on lived experiences of veterans during transition instead of whether or not they go through specific steps.

Livingston et al. (2011) conducted a qualitative study on the re-enrollment of 15 student veterans at a large, four-year public institution with a rich military heritage in the Southeast. The primary purpose of the study was to build a base of knowledge on the academic and social experiences of veteran students. Livingston et al. (2011) used Schlossberg's (1984) theory to answer how student veterans managed college re-enrollment after deployment, training, or self-induced military absence. The authors found that some veterans who re-enrolled in higher education did experience confusion and uncertainty when renegotiating the enrollment process; however, most student veterans noted the re-enrollment process was relatively easy. The study also identified the re-enrollment transition as a twofold process that required navigating a bureaucratic process and was a personal-social experience. Student veterans struggled in seeking and using support from the university, and when they did, it was limited to support from other veterans and faculty members who were often veterans as well. Livingston et al. (2011) also

found veterans were likely to remain “invisible” (p. 322). That is, student veterans’ maturity, humility, and pride dictated whether they disclosed their veteran status to their peers, similar to the results found by Rumann and Hamrick (2010). Although student veterans did anticipate some transitions such as the re-enrollment process, Livingston et al. (2011) also found that student veterans underwent financial transitions and culture shock that were both unanticipated. This was a result of moving from the military structure to the seemingly unstructured nature of the college lifestyle. Livingston et al. (2011) noted that the institution should require academic advising to help veterans make campus connections and to provide a means to track the needs of veteran students as they transition back into the college environment. Additionally, academic advisors were identified as those who can encourage veterans to ask for support if they need help and provide them assistance with integrating to the campus socially (Livingston et al., 2011).

### **C. Persistence and Success**

Pascarella et al. (1986) identified the importance of starting the social integration process early in the collegiate career. The authors studied the influence of an institutional intervention on student persistence and withdrawal behavior in the framework of Tinto's model. Although their study did not focus on student veterans, it did center on the importance of social integration for college freshmen. The two most important factors for college freshmen persistence were social integration and commitment to the institution. Exposure to freshman orientation also had a direct influence on persistence. The social integration with other student veterans and veteran support groups could ease the transition burden and provide a support network for individuals. They identified that each of these factors can be affected by dedicated advising efforts that can ultimately increase persistence and overall success.



Mentzer et al. (2015) conducted a study to measure the correlation of academic, financial, and social supports to the persistence of a military student population: veterans, active duty, and their families. The study also reviewed this correlation on nonmilitary students to contrast the findings on both groups to determine how various supports correlate to persistence in higher education. A sample of 294 students was chosen from the nation's largest private, nonprofit university with an emphasis in online education. Out of the 294 students, 12 were military members, 30 were veterans, and 38 were family members (~28% associated with the military, ~72% were not associated with the military). About 80% of the students surveyed were working on their master's degrees while the rest were working on specialist or doctoral programs. The results of the study indicated that of the three factors measured (academic, financial, and social supports), only academic support provided a significant contribution to the military student's population intent to persist. There was not a significant difference in persistence between the military student population and nonmilitary students. However, there were some differences when reviewing additional factors. For nonmilitary students, persistence was significantly related to 8 of 11 scale scores (the largest being institutional commitment, academic integration, and academic support). For the military student population, 3 of 11 scale scores provided significant correlations for persistence: institutional commitment, academic integration, and academic efficacy had positive relationships with persistence while the amount of loans negatively affected persistence. The study on academic, financial, and social support mechanisms supported Tinto's theory on persistence (Tinto, 1975, 1997, 2012; Mentzer et al. 2015). The military student population should have access to focused academic support to ensure success. The study had similar findings of academic support research by Pascarella et al. (2008, 2011) and Terenzini and

Pscarella (1980) as a necessity for persistence (Mentzer et al. 2015). Lastly, persistence for both military and nonmilitary students was strongly affected by institutional identity.

Alschuler and Yarab (2018) conducted a study to ascertain retention and persistence rates of students who identified themselves as veterans and service members from archival records and to obtain current perspectives on factors that may affect their academic success through semi-structured interviews. Archival data from 2009 to 2014 showed a six-year graduation rate for student veterans of 50.5% (only 1.2% lower than the national benchmark reported by Cate, 2014). Although the graduation rate for veterans was similar with the national average reported in 2014, almost half of the 707 students in the study withdrew. Alschuler and Yarab (2018) also found that there was a lack of outreach by universities to veterans who appeared to have stopped or dropped out. The authors recommended campuses develop and implement a multiple-pronged, proactive, strength-based approach that encompasses multiple departments to enhance persistence and graduation. Further, they reported, universities must conduct outreach campaigns to reach those students who are having difficulty in the classroom in the form of advising and counseling. These findings were consistent with those of Mentzer et al. (2015), who indicated that the two core functions of the university are academics and institutional identity. Outreach, advising, and counseling all help to bolster students' academics and help build an institutional identity. Other recommendations included interdepartmental communication in the form of academic advising, student success, and career counseling (Alschuler & Yarab, 2018). Additionally, regular advising sessions for students with academic, financial, and personal problems would likely lower the number of veteran students who drop-out or stop-out.

Chan (2018) conducted a study to review the factors that influenced the academic achievement of student veterans in a two-year college environment. Specifically, the study

explored how college readiness and postsecondary academic performance were associated with academic achievement in terms of retention, graduation, or transfer for student veterans enrolled in a public two-year college. Those students who had higher academic standards saw a higher rate in the retention, graduation, or transfer of student veterans regardless of major or demographic background. That is, those students who tried to excel in their classes instead of just passing the course had more success in the study. Chan (2018) found that students who had higher academic standards saw a higher rate of overall success.

#### **D. Advising Veterans**

Miller (2015) conducted a study to determine how a graduate-level advisor perceives their role in advising military and student veterans. A review by the American Council of Education found a large difference in how institutions assist military veterans. Less than half of all reporting institutions offered any type of academic advising or long-range planning for student veterans (Miller, 2015). The author used an organizational micro-ethnographic qualitative paradigm as the methodological framework for the study and used the United States Army Command and General Staff College in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas as the study site. Several themes emerged from the study: an advisor to veterans must have empathy and be approachable, accessible, and available. Additionally, the duties of an advisor to veteran students include mentor, counselor, academic advisor, coach, and educator. Advisors help guide and coordinate resources for their students, not just academic resources but external ones as well (Miller, 2015). Universities should require academic advising for student veterans, especially when considering the transition challenges they face adapting to higher education.

Richardson et al. (2015) conducted a study to determine the impact of degree mapping on student veterans' enrollment in academic programs, persistence, number of classes registered per

term, and graduation rates. The study used a mixed-methods research design and focused on collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data. Most students in the study were nontraditional and were taking classes fully online; over 50% were active duty or military veterans. Academic advisors met with almost all newly admitted undergraduate and graduate students to explain the degree map and to ask initial questions such as: expected graduation date, work schedules, number of courses per term, and prerequisite knowledge deficiencies. Degree maps received positive feedback and there were noticeable increases in new student matriculations, active student population, and the number of courses taken per year by military and civilian students. Specifically, during the 2012-2013 academic year, the year after instituting degree maps, the university experienced a 32% increase in student matriculations, a 7.9% increase in student retention and a 5.02% increase in graduations (Richardson et al., 2015). Findings in the study indicated that all student populations, regardless of student status, can benefit from using a degree map and individualized learning plan. Although the study focused primarily on non-traditional active military students learning fully online, the use of dedicated academic advisors for all types of active military students and veterans in the face-to-face classroom may see similar results. These findings were also consistent with the advising recommendations from Livingston et al.'s (2011) study. Other studies have also pointed to positive advising impacts for the veteran population.

Parks et al. (2015) used a mixed-methods design and examined how academic advisors help student veterans determine their degree goals and how well they help student veterans apply their military experiences and training to achieve their goals. The authors looked to increase the understanding of how student veterans are served by academic advising staff and to identify ways to improve. Fifty student veterans participated in the study and only one was on active

duty. Parks et al. (2015) reported the majority of participants thought that their academic advisors did everything possible to assist with choosing classes or develop an academic plan. However, all participants in the study reported feeling their advisors did not have the skills or knowledge necessary to properly advise them. In fact, participants in the study believed advisors who work with student veterans should do everything they can to become familiar with their students' military experiences. Miller (2015) also explained that an advisor to veterans must serve a mentor, counselor, academic advisor, coach, and educator. A veteran's advisor also helps to serve as an accountability measure helping the veteran to set high goals to ensure academic success. Academic advisors who are familiar with the complexities of military life and are knowledgeable about campus resources for veterans are vital to their success (Parks et al., 2015). Often a university is not able to assist students directly, not for a lack of trying or desire, but because of a lack of knowledge of the types of policies, actions, and programs they should institute (Tinto, 2012).

### **E. Advising Strategies and Impacts**

The multitude of challenges that students face enrolling in and completing college can be overwhelming, as such, understanding the challenges students face is critical to increasing student retention (Zhang et al., 2017). Academic advising is the only service that guarantees interaction with students (Coll & Zalaquett, 2008, p. 275) and this guaranteed interaction between advisor and student serves as an important factor to develop relationships and impart a positive experience (King, 1993). Advising has been defined in several different ways with varying focus areas. Developmental advising occurs when an advisor and student discuss academic and career goals, where the student commits to achieving those goals (Zhang et al., 2019). Crookston (1972) called for using a developmental advising approach over "prescriptive

advising" as the latter approach did not foster a comprehensive personal relationship between the student and advisor. Advisors using a developmental advising approach are focused on personal and professional decisions as well as "facilitating the student's rational processes, environmental and interpersonal interactions, behavioral awareness, and problem solving, decision-making, and self-evaluation skills" (Molina & Abelman, 2000, p. 6).

Appreciative advising is an intentional and collaborative practice that helps students optimize their educational experiences while helping students achieve their goals (Hutson, Bloom, & He, 2014). Hutson et al., (2014) found increases in academic achievement and retention rates correlated with appreciative advising methods. Yet another example of advising is virtual advising. Virtual advising occurs when advising is delivered through impersonal means such as online or other detached media. Benefits of virtual advising include consistency and around the clock availability; however, this system does not replicate the success of face to face advising (Thompson & Prieto, 2013).

A good advising program can increase student retention, student satisfaction, and help students commit to a specific major (Montag et al., 2012), but the success of advising programs hinge upon meaningful relationships between students and advisors (Coll & Zalaquett, 2008). Students who had similar self-worth scores, levels of meaningfulness, or similar worldviews as their advisors experienced higher levels of satisfaction with advising that could play an important role with retention (Coll & Zalaquett, 2008). Hicks and Shere (2003) described the importance of the experiences that mold people and that an advisor can have a negative impact on a student whose life and experiences are different from others. Other barriers to academic success and retention are access to and understanding of course requirements (Goldrick-Rab, 2010),

academic preparation and performance (Adelman & Gonzalez, 2006), as well as a lack of integration into the college community (Tinto, 1975).

Effective mentoring can have a positive impact on each of these areas that can lead to increased retention, persistence, and graduation rates. Bettinger and Baker (2014) conducted a study on the impacts of student coaching, a form of advising, provided by InsideTrack. This organization offered student coaching to various postsecondary institutions including two- and four-year schools, public, private not-for-profit, and proprietary colleges. The authors examined academic records from over 13,000 students in two different cohorts, 2003-2004 and 2007-2008. Students were randomly assigned to a treatment and control group with the treatment group receiving coaching services while the control group did not and both groups were still eligible to receive school services. After six months the treatment group had a five-percentage point retention advantage over the control group, and at 12 months the treatment group also had a five-percentage point retention advantage over the control group. Even at 18 and 24 months the treatment group exhibited increases of 15% and 14% over the control group (Bettinger & Baker, 2014). Students who were coached during the first year, were approximately five-percentage points more likely to persist which represented a 9% to 12% increase in retention.

Active or proactive advising is another strategy that has gained popularity over the last 10 to 20 years. Several studies have shown that proactive advising can have positive outcomes on academic performance (Abelman & Molina, 2001; 2002) and student success (Poole, 2015). Abelman and Molina (2001, 2002) found that proactive advising methods that had greater increases in mean grade point average than advising methods with lower levels of intrusiveness (Abelman & Molina, 2001, 2002; Molina & Abelman, 2000). Kraft-Terry and Kau (2019) found in their research that Glennen (1976) coined the term intrusive counseling that required a student

to meet with an academic advisor before the student needed academic support. Earl (1988) described intrusive counseling as a deliberate, structured intervention to motivate a student at the first sign of academic difficulty. During advising sessions an advisor would establish rapport by connecting with and exhibiting care for students (Glennen, 1976). The student's courses should guide an advising curriculum that is intentional and focused on empowering advising experiences (Kraft-Terry & Kau, 2019). Many researchers now use terminology that reflects more positive phrasing and use words such as proactive advising and intentional advising that more accurately highlight the vigorous counseling methods that advisors use for their students (Drake et al., 2013; Kraft-Terry & Kau, 2019; Varney, 2012).

Using an intrusive advising model, Molina and Abelman (2000) conducted a study with students on academic probation using a nonintrusive control group, moderate-intrusion group, and a full intrusion group. The nonintrusive control group received a probationary letter from the Academic Advising Office outlining terms that must be met during their next term. The researchers explained different student services available to assist students such as the writing center, math tutoring, and counseling. The moderate-intrusion group also received a probationary letter followed by a phone call from the advising center coordinator. During the phone call, the coordinator discussed student services available and helped students develop an action plan by identifying the resources the student needed most. The full-intrusion group were required to meet with the advising coordinator for an academic interview. During the interview, the coordinator and student conducted a self-assessment and developed a strategy that would help the student return to good academic standing. The academic strategy included formal appointments with counselors as well as tutors and were written into a formal contract that was provided to the student, the coordinator, and was filed with the advising office. Molina and Abelman (2000)



found that the greater level of intrusiveness generated more positive outcomes than interventions that were less intrusive. Moreover, each of the three student interventions in the study resulted in a greater increase in mean GPA than in the mean GPA of students who were not on probation and students who did not participate in the study. The findings from Molina and Abelman (2000) suggested that proactive advising methods resulted in a greater GPA increase for students who had intrusive type advising than for students who did not have access to advising at all.

## **F. Chapter Summary**

This literature review explored the several works on the challenges student veterans face in higher education. School choice, transition challenges, academic achievement, and academic advising are all important aspects that student veterans encounter as they leave the military for higher education.

The most important school selection variables for traditional and non-traditional students were availability of major, flexible course offerings, evening class availability, tuition cost, speed of degree completion, financial aid packages, and ability to commute to campus (Pampaloni, 2010; Stephenson et al., 2016, & Schimmel et al., 2009).

The transition from military service member to civilian is extremely challenging and student veterans may undergo identity shifts during their transition to higher education (Jones, 2017). As a result of going through this significant transition, student veterans may be reluctant to share their experiences with others, and when they discussed their experiences, they were selective as to who they shared their experiences with (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). Student veterans' hesitancy in discussing their experiences may impact how they interact with others on campus.

Alschuler and Yarab (2018) recommended campuses develop and implement a multi-pronged, proactive advising approach to enhance persistence and graduation. Furthermore, they recommended that universities conduct advising and counseling campaigns to reach students who were having difficulty in the classroom. Advisors can specifically challenge student veterans to excel in their classes instead of merely passing. Student veterans who set higher academic standards saw a higher rate of overall success (Chan, 2018).

In sum, student veterans are a unique subset of students and have much to add to the higher education landscape. They are oftentimes older, more mature, and have a variety of life experiences that can provide other students with a different perspective on world events. Student veterans also face a litany of challenges when leaving the military for higher education and may require focused assistance from university staff.

### **Chapter 3. Research Methodology**

Student veterans are a unique subpopulation in higher education, and they can bring life experiences and a world view that few academic advisors can understand or relate to. Student veterans often retain their military cultural identities and values that can conflict with the cultural values they encounter in higher education (Durdella & Kim, 2012). As a result, academic advisors can resort to stereotypes of student veterans that can negatively affect how they advise them, resulting in possible further isolation from peers and faculty members (Parks et al., 2015). The purpose for conducting the study was to compare the academic success of student veterans with limited to no access to academic advisors with military experience to student veterans in Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) programs who have access to advisors with military experience. Additionally, the study explored the advising techniques used by military advisors for student veterans in ROTC programs as well as advising techniques for student veterans who were not in ROTC. The chapter included six parts: first, the rationale for a mixed methods design, second, a description of the sample population and how the sample was selected, third, a description and justification of the research instruments, fourth, a description of how data was collected, fifth, a description of data analysis, and sixth, a chapter summary.

#### **A. Research Design**

A quantitative research design offers researchers an opportunity to explain while a qualitative research design offers an opportunity to explore. A mixed methods research design provides researchers an opportunity to both explain and explore while presenting a more holistic study of a research problem (Biddix, 2018). Additionally, Beglar and Nemoto (2014) explained that researching a topic from multiple angles provides a higher probability of accurately understanding the topic and drawing stronger conclusions. Three mixed methods designs are

concurrent, sequential, and embedded. In a concurrent design, data collection and analysis occur independently but at the same time. A sequential design can be either explanatory or exploratory, where data collection and analysis of one method occurs first then influences the next method. An embedded design uses secondary data to answer study questions (Biddix, 2018). Creswell and Plano Clark (2006) described explanatory design as a two-phase mixed method process where qualitative data are used to explain or build upon initial quantitative results. The follow-up explanations model, a variant of explanatory design, is used to expand on quantitative results (Creswell et al., 2003) to explain "statistical differences among groups, individuals who scored at extreme levels, or unexpected results" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2006, p. 72).

In this study, the researcher chose to use a basic qualitative, mixed method design described by Biddix (2018), the explanatory sequential design. This model is an appropriate design because the researcher wanted to first identify statistical differences in grade point average between two different groups of student veterans, those student veterans in ROTC units and those student veterans not in ROTC units. Second, the researcher used basic qualitative methods including interviews and surveys to understand why these differences might exist. The follow up explanations model was a suitable method to help the researcher identify potential reasons for differences found in the quantitative phase (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2006).

## **B. Sample**

This study was conducted at the University of Arkansas, a large, mid-southern, land-grant research university. The university had a population of approximately 850 student veterans from 2017-2021 with a yearly enrollment of approximately 27,000 students. The university had an acceptance rate of 77% and half the applicants admitted to the university had an SAT score between 1120 and 1300 or an ACT score of 23 and 30. One-quarter of admitted students scored

higher than this range and one-quarter scored below this range (USNews.com, 2020). The institution's six-year graduation rate in 2018 for first-time, full-time, degree-seeking new freshman was 66% (catalog.uark.edu, 2020). The sample population for the quantitative portion of this study consisted of student veterans in the Army and Air Force ROTC programs and student veterans not enrolled in ROTC from 2017-2021.

For research question 1, the researcher conducted a quasi-experimental trial that consisted of all student veterans on campus. The researcher requested access to student veteran GPA data from 2017-2021 from the Office of Institutional Research (OIR) then reviewed all student veterans enrolled in ROTC units and student veterans that were non-ROTC students. Participants were split into five groups based on number of credit hours completed: 15-30 hours, 31-60 hours, 61-90 hours, 90+ hours, and a total group that included all student veterans.

Academic advisors for research question two were selected from ROTC units on campus. An introductory email (Appendix C) was sent that requested participants for an interview about advising student veterans. The researcher also identified the colleges on campus that had the largest number of student veterans enrolled. The advisors from colleges with the highest number of student veterans enrolled were contacted via email (Appendix D) and asked to participate in this study.

Participants for research question four were identified by the Veterans Resource and Information Center (VRIC). The researcher sent the survey to the Director of the VRIC who then disseminated the survey to the total population of student veterans on campus. The email was sent via the VRIC to ensure participant confidentiality and to follow FERPA regulations. The introductory email (Appendix G) explained the purpose of the survey and welcomed all student veterans to take the survey.

### **C. Instrumentation**

Data for research question one was collected using university archival records. A purposeful sample of all student veterans on campus with a specified number of credit hours completed comprised one of five groups: freshmen 15-30 hours, sophomores 31-60 hours, juniors 61-90 hours, seniors 90+ hours, and a total group that included all student veterans.

Grade point averages were examined using an independent t-test and an *alpha* significance level of .05. The significance level *a* is the maximum probability tolerated for rejecting a null hypothesis (Marilyn & Theresa, 2003). The null hypothesis for research question one was there is no significant difference in grade point average between student veterans in ROTC and student veterans not in ROTC. The alternate research hypothesis for research question one was there is a statistically significant difference in grade point average between student veterans in ROTC and student veterans not in ROTC.

For research questions two and three, all interviews were conducted in person with one exception. One interview participant was tele-working during the scheduled interview. As a result, this interview was conducted over Zoom. The questionnaires for the interviews were created by the researcher and were unique to this study (Appendix E and F). Questions were focused on understanding the different advising practices for advisors in ROTC units and advising practices in colleges across campus. The researcher was also interested in identifying differences in advising practices between advisors with a military background versus advisors without a military background for student veterans.

For research question four, the researcher developed a survey that was unique to this study (Appendix H). The survey used a five-point Likert scale: 1- strongly disagree, 2- disagree, 3 neither agree or disagree, 4 agree, and 5 strongly agree. Questions 7, 8, and 9 were reverse

coded to ensure respondents gave consistent answers. The researcher wanted to understand student veterans' perceptions of advising practices across campus. The questionnaires also revealed student veterans' reactions to advising practices which may help develop advising practices for student veterans.

#### **D. Collection of Data**

Before initiating the quantitative and qualitative research portion of this study, a request was submitted to the Institutional Research Board (IRB). The researcher completed all IRB requirements before accessing any student information and before contacting study participants. The quantitative portion of this study was completed by requesting access to institutional academic records student veterans on campus. The OIR provided student veterans' cumulative grade point averages from fall 2017 to spring 2020. All information provided by the OIR had been stripped of personal identifiable information such as name and student identification number to protect the identity of participants. The quantitative portion examined cumulative grade point averages of student veterans who participated in ROTC and those student veterans who did not participate in ROTC.

The researcher emailed advisors in Army and Air Force ROTC programs on campus and requested a 20 to 30 minute interview regarding their advising practices (Appendix C). The researcher explained the background and purpose of the study while describing literature that recommended that student veteran advisors have a military background or at least have the willingness to learn about student veterans' military experiences. Furthermore, the researcher also explained how this study could have wider implications for student veterans and how they are advised across this campus as well as other college campuses regionally and nationally. Two military advisors from Army ROTC and two military advisors from Air Force ROTC agreed to

participate in this study. Simultaneously, the researcher sent out emails (Appendix D) to advisors in six colleges that had student veterans enrolled. One advisor from five colleges volunteered for this study while two advisors from one college agreed to participate in this study.

The researcher used Qualtrics to develop a 20-question survey that used a five-point scale. The survey focused on student veteran perceptions of advising in higher education to determine what impact advising had on their experience in college. The researcher sent out Likert surveys via the VRIC to all student veterans currently enrolled on campus. The researcher focused on current student veterans at a large, research-based institution because these students may face more transition challenges due to campus size and the invisibility student veterans oftentimes seek from other students (Livingston et al., 2011). The findings from this study can likely be applied to similar sized institutions, but discretion should be used because student veterans at different institutions may face different challenges. These findings likely cannot be applied to smaller and different types of institutions due to different challenges student veterans experience at various institutions.

The researcher followed recommendations from Kvale and Brinkman (2009) by introducing the interview participants to the topic by conducting a briefing where "the interviewer defines the situation for the subject, briefly tells about the purpose of the interview, the use of a sound recorder" (p. 128). Rossman and Rallis (2012) also explained that researchers should be prepared for each interview and explain in detail the reasons for conducting the interview, how the information will be used, and to articulate an agenda and the researcher's overall strategy (p. 148). Additionally, informed consent is an important aspect of conducting qualitative research. Kvale and Brinkman (2009) described informed consent as revealing the overall purpose of the research and the research design features to participants. Informed consent



requires the researcher to obtain voluntary participation from the research subjects as well as advising them of their right to leave the study at any time (p. 70). Informed consent was obtained from each participant after the researcher revealed the purpose of the research along with an overview of the research design (Appendix B).

## **E. Data Analysis**

### **Research Question 1: Were there significant differences in grade point averages between student veterans in ROTC programs and student veterans not in ROTC programs?**

Quantitative data for this research question was analyzed using SAS 9.4 statistical software. Data for research question one was collected using a purposeful sampling procedure. The OIR provided the researcher with student veteran grade point average data, ROTC participation, student veteran status (reserves, active duty, national guard, or no longer serving), course of study, college, credit hours completed, gender, and age. All student veterans were identified and sorted into five groups according to the number of credit hours completed. Participants were grouped and compared to each other based on credit hours completed: 15 to 30 credit hours, 31 to 60 credit hours, 61 to 90 credit hours, 91+ credit hours, and then examined regardless of credit hours completed. An independent t-test was conducted where grade point average was the continuous dependent variable and ROTC participation was the independent variable of interest. A t-test was appropriate in this case due in part to the small sample size of student veterans in ROTC units. Banda (2018) explained that t-tests can be applied if a small sample size is used. The researcher used Satterwaithe's *p*-value due to unequal sample sizes between student veterans enrolled in ROTC and student veterans not in ROTC. After examining grade point averages for each group, the researcher compared mean cumulative grade point

averages for each group of participants (student veterans in ROTC with access to military advisors v. student veterans not in ROTC without access to military advisors) using an *alpha* significance level of .05. The significance level *a* is the maximum probability tolerated for rejecting a null hypothesis (Marilyn & Theresa, 2003).

**Research Question 2: What were the advising practices for student veterans in different ROTC programs on campus?**

Appendix E contains a questionnaire designed to identify advising practices for student veterans in ROTC units. Two military advisors from Army ROTC and two military advisors from Air Force ROTC were interviewed. Responses were recorded using field notes, an audio recorder, and Otter transcription software as the primary means for analysis. First, field notes were coded and organized according to common answers. Next, common themes were organized according to interview responses to answer research question two.

**Research Question 3: What were the advising practices for student veterans at various colleges on University of Arkansas campus not in ROTC?**

Appendix F contains a questionnaire to identify advising practices of academic advisors across six colleges on campus. The researcher selected each college based on student veteran enrollment and an academic advisor from each college was interviewed and their responses recorded. Responses were recorded using field notes, an audio recorder, and Otter transcription software as the primary means for analysis. First, field notes were coded and organized according to common answers then common themes were organized according to interview responses to answer research question three.

**Research Question 4: How did student veterans perceive advising practices on the University of Arkansas campus?**

Appendix H contains a five-point Likert scale created to identify how student veterans rate advising practices in their college. Likert scales are psychometric scales and have multiple categories where participants answer questions to signify their opinions, attitudes, or feelings about an issue (Nemoto & Beglar, 2014). Likert scales contain a limited number of possible responses such as *Disagree/Agree, Not useful/Useful, or I am not like this/I am like this* and should have a scale of four to six points. Whenever possible, six-point scales should be used as they assist with greater accuracy of measurement (Nemoto & Beglar, 2014). For this study the researcher elected to use a five-point scale to limit the number of responses in the survey to give respondents a more fluid survey. Each Likert scale question was totaled using a point system between one and five points to determine overall perceptions towards academic advising on campus.

## **F. Chapter Summary**

The chapter described the study's methodology which explained the foundation for a mixed methods design. An explanatory sequential design was selected because quantitative data examined in research question one required follow up research in the form of qualitative research for questions two, three, and four. The follow-up explanations model was used to expand upon data collected for question one.

The first research question focused on grade point averages among student veterans in ROTC programs and student veterans not in ROTC to determine if one group was more likely to have higher grade point averages than the other. The second research question examined the advising practices for student veterans in different ROTC programs on campus to develop an understanding of how advisors in ROTC units advise their student veterans. The third research question examined advising practices used at six colleges on campus to determine how student

veterans across the campus are advised. The fourth research question surveyed student veterans perceived academic advising on campus. The main objective of the research questions in this study was to collect and analyze data concerning academic outcomes, advising practices, and student veterans' perceptions of advising practices. The results of these findings may assist advisors in using certain practices when advising student veterans and how advisors should support student veterans.

## **Chapter 4. Findings**

Student veterans are a unique subgroup in higher education and include active-duty students, reservists, national guardsmen, and student veterans who are no longer serving in the military. Nearly one million student veterans have pursued higher education after completing their military service since 2002 (Dillard & Yu, 2018). Additionally, over half a million veterans have entered higher education in the past 10 years which has resulted in a growing population of student veterans on college campuses of all types (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). As a result, of the burgeoning number of student veterans in higher education, university staff such as advisors should be prepared to assist student veterans in achieving their academic goals. Past studies on student veterans have indicated that these students prefer to have advisors with similar backgrounds (i.e. military service) as them, or advisors who try to relate to their military experience. However, there is no quantifiable evidence that having access to advisors with military experience has a positive outcome on student success.

The purpose for conducting the study was to compare the academic success of student veterans with limited to no access to academic advisors with military experience to student veterans in ROTC programs who have access to advisors with military experience. Differences were explored between these two groups to determine if student veterans that had access to advisors with a military background had higher grade point averages, presumably due to the support, mentoring, and understanding of student veterans' military experiences. ROTC programs have assigned military personnel from their respective branches who help student veterans navigate the higher education environment. Officers in the ROTC programs are responsible for teaching, advising, and mentoring student veterans throughout their college experience which may have a positive impact on grade point averages.

The chapter begins with a summary of the study which includes the design of the study and data collection methods, data analysis, interview process, and survey results. The chapter concludes with a summary of the chapter.

### **A. Summary of the Study**

Most universities have provided dedicated personnel to assist student veterans using their financial aid benefits gained from service. However, little has been reported on the actual benefits of having access to military advisors. Academic advising teaches students how the higher education system works, assists with effective decision making, and how to develop the academic skills to succeed in higher education (Drake, 2011). Student veterans bring life experiences and a world view that few academic advisors can relate to. Student veterans often retain their military cultural identities and values that can conflict with the cultural values they encounter in higher education (Durdella & Kim, 2012). As a result, advisors may resort to stereotypes of student veterans that can negatively affect how they advise them, resulting in possible further isolation from peers and faculty members (Parks et al., 2015). This isolation may contribute to a student veterans' desire to dropout, stop out, or transfer to another institution.

For the current study, the researcher reviewed and compared the grade point averages of student veterans who were members of ROTC programs and student veterans who were not members of ROTC programs to determine if there were statistically significant differences between the two populations. The researcher also interviewed academic advisors in six separate academic colleges and two ROTC programs. Finally, a survey was sent to student veterans to determine student veterans' perceptions of academic advising at the institution.

After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board (Appendix A), the researcher requested student veteran data from the OIR to compare the grade point averages of

student veterans in ROTC programs and student veterans who were not in ROTC programs. The OIR provided student veteran data from fall 2017 to spring 2021 to the researcher which included the number of hours completed, veteran status (active duty, reserve, national guard, or no longer serving), ROTC participation, cumulative grade point average, college, major course of study, gender, and age. Student veteran names were replaced with identification numbers that correlated to students to maintain confidentiality and to comply with FERPA regulations. There were multiple data points for many student veterans due to the four-year range request. Therefore, the researcher only kept the latest grade point average for each student then grouped students into categories based on the number of credit hours completed.

The researcher used the major course of study data and college information to identify the colleges that had the most student veterans. The researcher sent emails to academic advisors in each of the colleges (Appendix D) and to ROTC advisors (Appendix C). The researcher requested an interview to identify academic advising practices for student veterans. The researcher conducted interviews with two advisors from Air Force ROTC, two advisors from Army ROTC, and advisors from six different academic colleges that had student veterans actively enrolled.

The researcher developed an original survey to capture perceptions from student veterans about advising practices on campus. The survey was developed using Qualtrics and included 20 questions. The survey was distributed to student veterans enrolled on campus. According to the OIR there are a total of 543 active duty, Reserve, National Guard, and student veterans on campus as of fall 2021. One hundred fourteen student veterans responded to the survey for a 21% response rate.

## **B. Data Analysis**

**Research Question 1: Were there significant differences in grade point averages between student veterans in ROTC programs and student veterans not in ROTC programs?**

The researcher conducted a Welch's t-test on five different groups of student veterans. A Welch's t-test was used due to the unequal sample sizes of the ROTC and non-ROTC student veterans. Student veterans were categorized into four groups of students based on number of credit hours completed. Students who completed 15 to 30 hours comprised the freshman group, students with 31 to 60 hours comprised the sophomore group, students with 61 to 90 hours comprised the junior group, and students with  $n > 91$  hours comprised the senior group. The total group independent t-test included the entire population of student veterans regardless of number of credit hours completed. Each of the groups tested had mean differences in grade point average between student veterans in ROTC and non-ROTC student veterans (Table 1).



Table 1.  
*GPA Comparison for Student Veterans in ROTC and Student Veterans not in ROTC.*

Group	Mean	Std Dev	Minimum	Maximum
ROTC Freshmen	3.2463	0.4115	2.3000	4.0000
Non-ROTC Freshmen	2.945	0.0371	0	4.0000
ROTC Sophomore	3.3786	0.6524	2.1150	4.0000
Non-ROTC Sophomore	2.9975	0.6492	0.5120	4.0000
ROTC Junior	3.6533	0.2796	3.2220	3.9650
Non-ROTC Junior	3.0489	0.5650	1.0910	4.0000
ROTC Senior	3.4222	0.3000	2.9100	3.9700
Non-ROTC Senior	3.0315	0.5384	1.6320	4.0000
ROTC Total	3.4552	0.4497	2.1150	4.0000
Non-ROTC Total	2.9483	0.7148	0	4.0000

*Note:* While every group had mean differences in grade point average, only three groups were statistically significant.

The sample size of freshmen student veterans in ROTC was small ( $n = 4$ ), while sophomore and junior student veterans was slightly larger ( $n = 7$ ). The sample size of senior student veterans in ROTC was the largest ( $n = 20$ ). Due to the unequal sample sizes in the student veteran groupings, Satterthwaite's *p-value* was used to determine statistical significance. The freshman and sophomore groups were not statistically significant at the .05 level while the junior, senior, and the total group were statistically significant at the .05 level. In the freshman group, the mean grade point averages of student veterans in ROTC and student veterans not in ROTC differed by .30 points (Table 2).

Table 2.

*Freshmen Statistics of Student Veterans in ROTC and Student Veterans not in ROTC.*

ROTC	N	Mean	Std Dev	Std Err	Minimum	Maximum
0	4	3.2463	0.8231	0.4115	2.3000	4.0000
1	471	2.945	0.8043	0.0371	0	4.0000

*Note:* Group one consisted of student veterans with 15 to 30 credit hours.

However, the scores were not statistically significant at the .05 level,  $p = 0.5179$  (Table 3). Therefore, the null hypothesis for the freshman group: there is no significant difference in grade point average between student veterans in ROTC and student veterans not in ROTC is retained.

Table 3.

*Freshmen T-test of Student Veterans in ROTC and Student Veterans not in ROTC.*

Method	Variances	DF	t Value	Pr >  t
Pooled	Equal	473	0.75	0.4561
Satterthwaite	Unequal	3.0489	0.73	0.5179
Cochran	Unequal	0.73	0.5184	

*Note:* Comparisons were not significant at the .05 level.

In the sophomore group, the mean grade point averages of student veterans in ROTC and student veterans not in ROTC differed by .38 points (Table 4).

Table 4.

*Sophomore Statistics of Student Veterans in ROTC and Student Veterans not in ROTC.*

ROTC	N	Mean	Std Dev	Std Err	Minimum	Maximum
0	7	3.3786	0.6524	0.2466	2.1150	4.0000
1	464	2.9975	0.6492	0.0301	0.5120.	4.0000

*Note:* Group two consisted of student veterans with 31 to 60 credit hours.

However, the scores were not statistically significant at the .05 level,  $p = 0.1745$ .

Therefore, the null hypothesis for the sophomore group: there is no significant difference in grade point average between student veterans in ROTC and student veterans not in ROTC is retained (Table 5).

Table 5.  
*Sophomore T-test of Student Veterans in ROTC and Student Veterans not in ROTC.*

Method	Variances	DF	t Value	Pr >  t
Pooled	Equal	469	1.54	0.1239
Satterthwaite	Unequal	6.1806	1.53	0.1745
Cochran	Unequal		0.73	0.1753

*Note:* Comparisons were not significant at the .05 level.

In the junior group, the mean grade point averages of student veterans in ROTC and student veterans not in ROTC differed by .60 points (Table 6) and the scores for the junior group were statistically significant at the .05 level,  $p = 0.0009$  (Table 7). Therefore, the null hypothesis for the junior group: there is no significant difference in grade point average between student veterans in ROTC and student veterans not in ROTC is rejected. The two groups' grade point averages were statistically different.

Table 6.  
*Junior Statistics of Student Veterans in ROTC and Student Veterans not in ROTC.*

ROTC	N	Mean	Std Dev	Std Err	Minimum	Maximum
0	7	3.6533	0.2796	0.1057	3.2220	3.9650
1	294	3.0489	0.5650	0.0330	1.0910	4.0000

*Note:* Group three consisted of student veterans with 61 to 90 credit hours.

Table 7.  
*Junior T-test of Student Veterans in ROTC and Student Veterans not in ROTC.*

Method	Variances	DF	t Value	Pr >  t
Pooled	Equal	299	2.82	0.0051
Satterthwaite	Unequal	7.222	5.46	0.0009
Cochran	Unequal		5.46	0.0013

*Note:* Comparisons were significant at the .05 level.

In the senior group, the mean grade point averages of student veterans in ROTC and student veterans not in ROTC differed by .39 points (Table 8) and the scores were statistically significant at the .05 level,  $p = 0.0005$  (Table 9).

Table 8.  
*Senior Statistics of Student Veterans in ROTC and Student Veterans not in ROTC.*

ROTC	N	Mean	Std Dev	Std Err	Minimum	Maximum
0	13	3.4222	0.3000	0.0832	2.9100	3.9700
1	248	3.0315	0.5384	0.0342	1.6320	4.0000

*Note:* Group four consisted of student veterans with > 91 credit hours.

Table 9.  
*Senior T-test of Student Veterans in ROTC and Student Veterans not in ROTC.*

Method	Variances	DF	t Value	Pr >  t
Pooled	Equal	259	2.59	0.0101
Satterthwaite	Unequal	16.37	4.34	0.0005
Cochran	Unequal		4.34	0.0007

*Note:* Comparisons were significant at the .05 level.

The null hypothesis for the senior group: there is no significant difference in grade point average between student veterans in ROTC and student veterans not in ROTC is rejected. The two groups' grade point averages are statistically different.

In the total group, the mean grade point averages of student veterans in ROTC and student veterans not in ROTC differed by .51 points (Table 10) and the scores were statistically significant at the .05 level,  $p < .001$  (Table 11).

Table 10.  
*Total Group Statistics of Student Veterans in ROTC and Student Veterans not in ROTC.*

ROTC	N	Mean	Std Dev	Std Err	Minimum	Maximum
0	20	3.4552	0.4497	0.1005	2.1150	4.0000
1	828	2.9483	0.7148	0.0248	0	4.0000

*Note:* The total group consisted of all student veterans regardless of credit hours completed.

Table 11.  
*Total Group T-test of Student Veterans in ROTC and Student Veterans not in ROTC.*

Method	Variances	DF	t Value	Pr >  t
Pooled	Equal	846	3.16	0.0017
Satterthwaite	Unequal	21.388	4.89	< 0.001
Cochran	Unequal		4.89	0.0001

*Note:* Comparisons were significant at the .05 level.

Therefore, the null hypothesis for the total group: there is no significant difference in grade point average between student veterans in ROTC and student veterans not in ROTC is rejected. The two groups' grade point averages were statistically different.

**Research question two: What were the advising practices for student veterans in different ROTC programs on campus?**

The four interviews with the military advisors from ROTC units varied between 22 minutes and 44 minutes. Interviews were conducted in each advisor's office inside the ROTC buildings. The researcher used an interview questionnaire approved by the IRB to guide each semi-structured interview (Appendix E). Field notes, an audio recording device, and Otter transcription software were used to ensure accuracy of each interview. The main objective of research question two was to investigate the advising practices for student veterans in ROTC units. The interview data provided insight into advising themes that military advisors use for student veterans.

*1. Career guidance*

All four of the participants responded that career guidance was an important topic they discussed with their students. When discussing what their student veterans wanted from advising sessions Participant D noted "Students will ask a lot of questions about different military experiences. A lot of it's military focused like general life and military questions." Participant B added, "They want to discuss real world experience, they want a little more than the basic things we teach to talk about life decisions on finance or student loans or all the way down to specific jobs."

*2. Mentor role*

Each of the military advisors discussed the importance of being a mentor to their students rather than just an advisor. Participant B discussed how the mentor role was greater than that of an advisor.

I think that's probably a bigger role than even the advisory role... I don't think I have so much of an advising, academic role. I think it takes an actual military member to advise

them on the little bit deeper stuff... So, kind of ironically, I think that even people that are getting out or maybe who have completely gotten out of the military could absolutely benefit from a military advisor in that capacity somebody that understands the higher education system better and who has similar life experiences or can relate to him a little better on their priorities and other things rather than a civilian academic advisor, alone. There's a, you know, there's a certain lingo and a certain aspect of leadership in life events that you get from a military that you don't get from anywhere else. It kind of helps to have that commonality, right off the bat right even if it's, like across services. You still speak the same lingo to some degree, and someone else not in the military would not pick up on. Especially stuff like deployments and life experiences and their capacity to or I mean, God forbid, but like some sort of PTSD type scenario. I've seen some stuff too.

### *3. Online records*

All the military advisors reported using an online record system to maintain records on their students. Participant A discussed the importance of maintaining records for their students.

They have to present me with their academic plan of all the classes they intend to take over the next four years, so we can make sure they're on time, getting all the credits they need so that they'll be prepared to commission... We have their accounts online, and we can pull any counseling that we've done with them, every PT (physical training) test they've ever had, and we can pull their transcripts off there too.

### *4. Incentives for academic performance*

Two of the four military advisors discussed different incentives for academic performance, indicating that there are reasons why student veterans would want to perform at a higher level academically. Participant D stated, "So, if you want to go to active duty and you want infantry, you're probably not going to make it with, probably less than a 3.0 grade point average, you probably need it to be higher than that."

### *5. Personal relationships*

All the military advisors mentioned the importance for building personal relationships. Participant C stated

I think it's openness, I'm very open and allow them to talk about pretty much anything. So I think just being personable and approachable makes a big impact on them because they can, they feel comfortable, to discuss what is discussed.

## 6. *Contact time*

Increased contact time was a trend across both ROTC programs and all military advisors.

Participant D stated

We interact four days a week with them. I'll teach two classes on Tuesday, we have leadership labs on Thursday, then we have three PT days each week. One PT day is mandatory for everyone but freshmen and sophomores attend all three days.

## 7. *Advising topics*

Advisors in both ROTC programs reported discussing a wide range of topics. Academic progress was among the top advising topics. Participant B stated

We meet at a minimum of once a semester (in a formal advising session). In one-on-one appointments we talk about life and things like that. Now, that being said, like I was saying, I influence and talk with all students on a broader spectrum. Well, it's funny we do talk grades, we can't be officers if you don't graduate, we can't graduate if we don't make grades. So besides like physical fitness, it is usually a pretty big topic for us.

## 8. *Grade point average requirements*

ROTC participants have grade point average requirements they must maintain.

Participant B explained, "In our program, it's 2.5 to graduate the program, and I think if they're on scholarship it's 3.0." Participant D stated, "You have to have a 2.5 to maintain your scholarship within the program, you can graduate with a 2.0 or higher, but you must have a 2.5 to contract (into the military)."

*Additional Data:* The setting was described using field notes from the meeting and from journaling that occurred immediately after each interview. Each interview with the military advisors took place in the advisors' own office in their building on campus. The advisors had various military publications, documents, and brochures in their offices as well as pictures and posters depicting various military activities. The offices seemed set up according to the



preferences of each advisor. Each participant seemed relaxed and comfortable discussing their advising practices with the researcher.

*Interview Processes:* For each interview the researcher described the purpose of the study along with the research questions of interest. Each participant was provided an informed consent worksheet (Appendix B) that detailed the use of an audio recorder and explained that their participation was confidential and voluntary. After completing the informed consent worksheet, the researcher began the interview by following the interview questionnaire. Field notes were taken using the interview questionnaire and the researcher took specific notes on topics to follow up on. If a topic surfaced that was not on the questionnaire, the researcher shifted from the questionnaire to the topic of interest to capture additional information. After gathering information on the topic of interest the researcher transitioned back to the questionnaire.

*Outlying Responses:* There were two responses that were outliers. Participant B stated, "I don't advise them too much, honestly on their grades. I don't think I have so much of an advising, academic role." Participant D remarked, "When they go to see their (college) advisors a lot of them complained about their academic advisors here because they don't understand our program. The importance of the classes and they're just another person trying to see their advisor."

*Answer to the Research Question:* Processes in each ROTC program are clearly defined and mandated by each program's policies. There are several commonalities between each program and how they approach advising student veterans. Students in both programs are required to have a four-year degree planning worksheet on file which is completed by the student and their college academic advisor. These forms are then uploaded into an electronic file and maintained for the duration of the student's academic career. The purpose of the four-year degree

planning worksheet was to ensure each student has a clear path to graduation and to commission as an officer in their service. Since students are required to graduate from college before they commission these documents are extremely important as they outline classes that each student must complete in a particular semester. Outside of academic advising and overseeing each student's college curriculum, each program also placed an emphasis on providing career guidance, mentoring, and building personal relationships.

Each military advisor had a manageable caseload of students, the largest number of students assigned to a single advisor was  $n = 60$ , the smallest number of students assigned was  $n = 22$ . Along with advising students, each military advisor had additional responsibilities of teaching a weekly three-hour course, leading a two-hour leadership lab each week, and attending physical training events with their students. The military advisors had personal contacts with their students an average of three times per week. The advisors had substantial experience in the military overall with a mean of 12.5 years of time in service. Additionally, each military advisor had previous command experience where they were responsible for leading units of various sizes from 10 personnel to over 200 personnel. One program required meeting with students a minimum of once per semester while the other program required two meetings per semester. Topics during advising appointments ranged from students' overall general performance, academics, future expectations, personal problems or issues, and academic resources such as tutoring.

**Research question three: What were the advising practices for student veterans at various colleges on University of Arkansas campus not in ROTC?**

The seven interviews with academic advisors from different colleges on campus varied between 20 minutes and 38 minutes. All interviews except two were conducted in each advisor's

office where they normally work. The two exceptions were interviews with participant K who was working from home at the time of the scheduled interview and participant G who the researcher met at an outdoor patio on campus. The researcher used an interview questionnaire approved by the IRB to guide each semi-structured interview (Appendix F). Additionally, field notes, an audio recording device, and Otter transcription software were used to ensure accuracy of each interview. The main objective of research question three was to investigate the advising practices for student veterans in different colleges on campus. The interview data provided insight into advising practices that regular college advisors use for all their students regardless of veteran status.

### 1. *Student veteran advising*

Six of the seven college advisors discussed the differences between advising student veterans and advising traditional college students. Participant G noted

I have noticed that my true veteran students especially if they're more nontraditional so if they're like older, they'll have a lot more questions about taking advantage of their time here, and our conversations do tend to be more than just academics, because they're usually a little more seasoned and they're looking for a little more out of their experience here, it really depends on the student.

Participant I explained the challenges of not knowing a student's veteran status

I think it is a real gap in the model that we have to be very honest about that a student veteran's status is not designated anywhere in UA Connect. It is not a part of a student's identity information that is sortable, in any way that we have access to. And so, veterans will not experience anything different than other students, unless they disclose the information to us.

Participant K explained the challenges of student veterans in higher education further

They (student veterans) have very different lives than our first-year students. They are very much maximizing the money they have and making sure they have enough classes to get the full stipend that they need, and some of them are like, I'm working full time so we're taking this one class at a time and so we go through that process and come up with a plan for that.

## *2. Effectiveness, limit frustrations*

All seven of the participants mentioned they tried to make their advising appointments as easy as possible to limit student frustrations. Participant E explained

And before we want to meet with them to advise them we check to make sure their credit has been transferred here, so that they're not stuck in a place of well, the credit hasn't been transferred yet so I'm going to tell you what I think is coming in but then it transfers to something completely different, then we have to have a second meeting which is often frustrating for those students.

Participant F explained that their college tried to streamline processes to make administrative issues easier on students, "If there's an issue with their transcript or degree audit or something, they can get the service right here, we're not going to send them somewhere else if we can take care of it." Participant G also explained

We try with all of our students to not be that person to pass them along because I do understand this university is really large and students do get passed around a lot, especially when people don't understand what they're doing.

## *3. Inefficient systems*

Three of the participants noted that the online system to conduct degree audits and view course curriculum was an inefficient because the curriculums that are posted online are outdated. Participant E explained

I can tell students from other colleges use the degree audit and UAConnect. We find it to be horribly inefficient and not effective because when the curriculum changes through the catalogue. UAConnect isn't always updated and so it doesn't give students really what their options are.

## *4. Large student caseloads*

All seven college advisors noted that they had large caseloads of students. Participant I described the large number of students assigned to them specifically

This year, I work with about 450 students, that has varied wildly over the nine years that I've worked here. I have had a caseload of only 300 students. I've had a caseload of 700

to 800 students, and then I've shared a caseload of 3,000 students amongst five of us when we had a different model.

### *5. Resources*

All seven college advisors mentioned understanding resources on campus was an important aspect of their job. Participant F stated "That's the main majority of my job is connecting people to, to what they need." Participant I explained "The (advisor) is not the person who provides all of your support, they're the person who provides these spokes out to other offices on campus to help you get connected." Participant K talked about how student veterans did not typically ask about resources

They (student veterans) are much more independent, typically than my regular freshmen students, so they don't typically ask. And I also provide them lots of resources in the class that I provide them so they don't ask for help as much as typical first year students do.

### *6. Additional responsibilities*

In addition to their main advising responsibilities, six of the seven college advisors had other responsibilities of teaching or leading student groups. Participant K explained, "I advise all first-year students, including transfer students. My other responsibilities are teaching. So, I teach about 300 students every semester in the fall and spring semesters. I teach a small number in the summer."

### *7. Veterans Resource and Information Center*

All seven of the advisors talked about the VRIC and knew the office was responsible for certifying credit hours so student veterans would receive their financial benefits. Participant G stated

I try to work really closely with our veterans' office and if our students need anything beyond like tutoring. I do tend to send them there. My experience is that our staff over there is so wonderful, and they tend to be experts in resources that are available to them, even outside of this university just general school resources for veterans and ROTC students, they're more familiar with like scholarships specifically, or financial resources,

because I know we have like pools of money set aside for certain things. But I don't know how to access it or what it can be used for so I send them there if there was any question that I can't answer because I know they're the experts.

#### 8. *Personal relationships*

Six of the seven participants mentioned the importance of building personal relationships with student veterans. Participant G remarked

I don't know if (building relationships with) me specifically, or if they've just gained enough maturity to know that all relationships can be beneficial. Most of them have a mentor outside of our office, our time is pretty limited. So, I do try to be conscious of being really realistic about the time that I can give them. I also don't have a military background or not a strong one in my family so I may not be as familiar with the experiences they're having.

Participant H explained how time restraints can make it difficult to build meaningful relationships

It's kind of hard because you don't want it to be like transactional right, like I don't want to just be like oh classes is what we're here for. See ya. You want it to kind of be a relationship but also you don't have a lot of time. I really make sure they understand I want them to feel good and understand. But it's rare that we don't connect.

Participant I discussed how the advising system currently used by their college is not conducive to building relationships because of minimal contacts.

I think relationship building is really important and it's hard to do, especially with our system and I will be honest right because our system is not set up for me to be able to create a strong relationship with a student unless they choose to come see me multiple times.

*Additional Data:* The setting details for these interviews was described using field notes from each meeting and from journaling that occurred immediately after each interview.

Interviews with participants E, F, H, and J took place in each advisors' own office in their building on campus. The office environment was suitable for an interview and offered plenty of privacy for the interview to take place. The interview with participant G took place on an open-air patio on campus. The setting for this interview offered less privacy than the office settings but

was still considered appropriate. The interview with participant I took place in a conference room. The setting for this interview was spacious and provided ample privacy for the interview. The interview with participant K took place virtually over Microsoft Teams. Each participant seemed relaxed and comfortable discussing advising practices with the researcher.

*Interview Processes:* For each interview the researcher described the purpose of the study along with the research questions of interest. Each participant was provided an informed consent worksheet (Appendix B) that detailed the use of an audio recorder and explained that their participation was confidential and voluntary. After completing the informed consent worksheet, the researcher began the interview by following the interview questionnaire. Field notes were recorded using the interview questionnaire and the researcher took specific notes on topics to follow up on. If a topic surfaced that was not on the questionnaire, the researcher shifted from the questionnaire to the topic of interest to capture additional information. After gathering information on the topic of interest the researcher transitioned back to the questionnaire.

*Outlying responses:* There were two responses that were outliers from other participant responses. One advisor joked that they only wanted to meet with their students once. Participant J stated, "I have to meet with them every semester at least once. Hopefully that's all it'll take, some do take more, more than that." Another advisor mentioned she had a student veteran advisee one year that did not know the VRIC existed. Participant J stated, "I know that there's a veterans support office on campus. And I don't think that the one veteran that I did have, I don't think he even knew about it somehow. It was so weird."

*Answer to the Research Question:* Processes for advising students in each of the six colleges are different from one another. Each college has an advising system to accommodate their student population and number of advisors. Student veterans in these colleges experience

the same advising practices as their non-veteran peers. All advisors in the six different colleges use UA Success to keep a digital record of meeting notes. The digital record helps advisors keep track of the student's progress and make note of specific details for each student. In the event the student changes majors, the digital record allows other advisors an opportunity to understand the student and their situation before meeting with the student. Advisors from each college mainly advised students on their enrollment dates, course scheduling, grade requirements, and occasionally life experiences. Two of the six colleges established advisors for first-year students (afterwards, students moved to another advisor in their major), one college had a specific advisor for student veterans and transfer students, and three colleges had advisors that maintained their students from year to year.

Each college advisor had a large caseload of students, the largest number of students assigned to a single advisor was  $n = 450$  (one advisor reported 2,200 appointments in one academic year, while another reported 1,000 appointments in one academic year), the smallest number of students assigned to an advisor was  $n = 250$ . Along with advising students, each college advisor except one had additional responsibilities of guiding a weekly perspectives course. Two advisors also led extra-curricular clubs for first-year students. One advisor was in a supervisory role and had no external requirements aside from supervising colleagues. The college advisors had considerable advising experience with a mean of six years' experience.

Four colleges required students to meet with advisors at least once per semester. One college required students to meet with an advisor if they had less than 45 hours of coursework completed or less than a 3.0 grade point average. Another college required students to meet with an advisor if they had less than 75 hours of coursework completed, less than a 3.0 grade point average, or were an honors student. One college used enrollment holds on all students to ensure



each student met with an advisor before the hold was lifted. Another college only required freshmen students to meet with an advisor their first semester before they registered for their second semester – all other students who were in good academic standing were not required to meet with an advisor, even though it was encouraged.

### **C. Survey Results**

#### **Research Question 4: How did student veterans perceive advising practices on the University of Arkansas campus?**

The student veterans selected for the study received an electronic survey link using a Qualtrics email invitation (Appendix G). The researcher drafted two reminder emails which were sent to the VRIC director for distribution (Appendix I and J). The VRIC director sent the emails to student veterans enrolled on campus to ensure participant confidentiality and to follow FERPA regulations (Table 12). Survey responses were reviewed daily and collected six days after the final email was sent. Qualtrics software was used to export responses to SPSS.

Table 12.  
*Survey received by student veterans by date and responses received.*

Email sent	Day of the Week	Responses Received
9/16/21	Thursday	35
	Friday	6
	Saturday	2
	Sunday	3
	Monday	5
	Tuesday	2
9/22/21	Wednesday	15
	Thursday	6
	Friday	1
	Saturday	0
	Sunday	0
	Monday	0
9/28/21	Tuesday	11
	Wednesday	19
	Thursday	9
	Friday	0
	Saturday	0
	Sunday	0

*Note.* There was a total of 117 responses, but three responses were not kept after 10/3/21.

The survey focused on the student veteran population enrolled on campus and sought to better understand student veteran perceptions to advising in higher education. The survey also

included a 500-word free text box that allowed respondents to list out any comments they had about advising student veterans in higher education.

The respondents to the survey were 66% male and 21% female with one student identifying as nonbinary or other (Table 13). Almost 52% of survey respondents consisted of nontraditional students while 36% were traditional students (Table 14).

*Demographic information*

Table 13.  
*Student veteran demographic information.*

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	75	65.8%
Female	24	21.1
Nonbinary/other	1	0.9
Missing	14	12.3
Total	114	100.0

Table 14.  
*Student veteran age groups.*

Age	Frequency	Percent
23 or younger	41	36.0%
24 or older	59	51.8
Missing	14	12.3
Total	114	100.0

*Survey Topics*

The participant questionnaire consisted of four main survey topics: advising relationships, student veteran advising, efficiency, and resources. Student veterans provided their

perceptions on advising in higher education which showcased several trends. These trends do not represent statistical significance but show how student veterans perceive advising in higher education.

Topic 1, advising relationships, included questions one through four. These questions focused on relationships between student veterans and advisors. Overall, student veterans answered in agreement towards topic 1 with  $\bar{x} = 3.3487$ . Topic 2, student veteran advising, included questions five, six, and 13. These questions focused on advising preferences for student veterans. There was a slight agreement trend in their responses with  $\bar{x} = 3.1055$ . Topic 3, efficiency, included questions seven, eight, nine, and 10. These questions focused on the effectiveness and efficiency of advising sessions. Respondents tended to agree with this topic,  $\bar{x} = 3.3248$ . Topic 4, resources, included questions 11 and 12. These questions focused on the advisors' knowledge of resources on campus and directing student veterans to resources,  $\bar{x} = 3.4515$ . Respondents tended to agree with topic 4 overall (Table 15).

Table 15.  
*Average survey scores for Topic 1, 2, 3, and 4.*

	Advising relationships	Student veteran advising	Efficiency	Resources
Mean	3.3487	3.1055	3.3248	3.4515
<i>n</i>	114	109	108	103
SD	1.02330	.74696	.84616	1.04674
Minimum	1.00	1.33	1.00	1.00
Maximum	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00

*Note.* Average survey scores computed using SPSS Statistics 27 software.

The highest mean score of any question on the survey was under Topic 1. Question one,  $\bar{x} = 3.89$ , where respondents indicated that their advisor meets their expectations for their academic

advising needs. Almost 74% of student veterans who responded to this survey agreed with question one (Table 16).

Table 16.  
*Q1 My advisor meets my expectations for my academic advising needs.*

Answer	Frequency	Percent
1 Strongly disagree	3	2.6%
2 Disagree	12	10.5
3 Neither agree/disagree	15	13.2
4 Agree	49	43.0
5 Strongly agree	35	30.7
Total	114	100

*Note.* Mean score for question one was 3.89 which trended toward agreement.

When examining student veterans' perceptions of their academic advisor's attempt to build personal connections with them, respondents answered with a  $\bar{x} = 2.97$  which indicated a slight trend towards disagreement. The majority of respondents (38%) either strongly disagreed or disagreed with this question while 28% neither agreed or disagreed (Table 17). Student veterans also reported their advisor should be a mentor who can help assist them in navigating challenges in higher education ( $\bar{x} = 3.23$ ).

Table 17.  
*Q2 My advisor has tried to build a personal connection with me.*

Answer	Frequency	Percent
1 Strongly disagree	15	13.2%
2 Disagree	28	24.6
3 Neither agree/disagree	32	28.0
4 Agree	23	20.2
5 Strongly agree	16	14.0
Total	114	100

*Note.* Mean score for question two was 2.97.

For the topic, student veteran advising, most respondents reported their advisor did not try to relate to their experiences. Forty percent of respondents disagreed with question six while only 16% agreed (Table 18). Thirty-nine percent of student veterans neither agreed or disagreed with question six. Forty-three percent of student veterans indicated they would prefer to have access to advisors with a military background while 11% disagreed (Table 19).

Table 18.

*Q6 My advisor tries to relate to my experiences as a member or former member of the armed forces.*

Answer	Frequency	Percent
1 Strongly disagree	14	12.3%
2 Disagree	32	28.1
3 Neither agree/disagree	44	38.6
4 Agree	10	8.8
5 Strongly agree	8	7.0
Missing	6	5.3
Total	114	100

*Note.* Mean score for question six was 2.69 which trended toward disagreement.

Table 19.

*Q13 As a student veteran, I prefer an advisor who has a military background.*

Answer	Frequency	Percent
1 Strongly disagree	3	2.6%
2 Disagree	10	8.8
3 Neither agree/disagree	41	36.0
4 Agree	26	22.8
5 Strongly agree	23	20.2
Missing	11	9.6
Total	114	100

*Note.* Average mean score for question 13 was 3.54 which trended toward agreement.

Under the topic efficiency, respondents tended to agree with question seven,  $\bar{x} = 2.81$ . Thirty-seven percent of respondents indicated their advisors could do more to assist them during advising appointments while 35% neither agreed or disagreed (Table 20). When asked if their advising appointments were a waste of time, respondents answered with a score of  $\bar{x} = 3.65$  which indicated their disagreement with the question.

Table 20.  
*Q7 My advisor could do more to assist me during advising sessions.*

Answer	Frequency	Percent
1 Strongly agree	19	17.8%
2 Agree	20	18.7
3 Neither agree/disagree	38	34.6
4 Disagree	25	23.3
5 Strongly disagree	6	5.6
Missing	6	5.3
Total	114	100.0

*Note.* Average mean score for this reverse coded question was 2.81 which indicated agreement with the question.

Of note, most respondents reported that their advisors were knowledgeable of resources on campus and did refer them to resources. When posed with question 11, "My advisor knows about different resources on campus that I may need to enhance my academic success, health and wellness, and to address other needs I may have" respondents answered with a score of  $\bar{x} = 3.60$ , that their advisors were knowledgeable of resources on campus.

### *Survey comments*

Student veterans who responded to the survey tended to remain neutral on several questions with respondents primarily answering neither agree or disagree on seven out of 13 Likert style questions (Q2, Q4, Q5, Q6, Q7, Q11, and Q12). However, respondents provided several comments in the free text comment section that provide additional insight to their survey responses. Only four out of 37 free text comments indicated positive perceptions of academic advising on campus with student veterans.

### *Themes*

#### *1. Lack of connections*

Seven of the student veterans mentioned a lack of connections with their advisor. One student veteran stated, "Advising from my perspective seems like someone just doing a job and seeing students as a number rather than recognizing that we are individuals." Another veteran wrote, "I meet with my advisor once per semester. I do not know what else an advisor is supposed to do other than that." Yet another student veteran stated, "There was zero support when I started here and nothing has changed. When I do ask questions, I am met with a sass tone or a complete disregard. The advising is horrendous." The lack of connections between respondents and their advisors could be summed up by this quote, "Since, I have started two years ago. My advising has been a joke. On top of that the questions I did pose to my advisor went unanswered, disregarded, or given bad information."

#### *2. Understanding student veterans*

Eight respondents indicated their advisors had a difficult time understanding them as student veterans. One student stated

The main concern I have with academic advising as a veteran, is that it is obvious most advisors don't know how to converse with someone who isn't straight from high school.



Most of my advising appointments have been helpful but also lacked the understand of my unique issues as a veteran.

Another student wrote, "Although we represent a niche community, it would be beneficial to have specific advisors available who understand working with veteran students." Yet another student wrote, "I would love the idea of having an academic adviser with military experience advising active duty and veterans." Of the students who talked about understanding student veterans, one wrote, "My academic advisor knew nothing about minimum and maximum enrollment to get all the benefits of my GI bill." Another student mentioned how their advisors could not grasp their experiences. The student wrote, "Advisors don't seem to grasp how difficult it is to earn the hour you gain in the military, and I don't think they care about them."

Another student wrote about transitioning from the military and explained

I don't have an advisor. When I was about to leave my station in California in early 2018, I received information on who my advisor was and I was very excited. After daily attempts at communication, he reached out approximately 1-2 weeks after my first message. I saw him once. He was not helpful, not insightful, and not interested in my success. I doubt he even knows that I am a veteran. It's now late 2021 and I haven't seen him since. I have to schedule other appts with other advisors.

One student wrote about their experiences at a two-year college

If more academic advisors were like my previous advisor at Sunshine Community College (sic) who dealt with only military personnel, it would be helpful. She is the only reason I have continued my education because she is a mentor and pushes me to succeed even at a different college.

### *3. Helpful advisors*

Although most of the comments in the survey mentioned difficulty connecting with advisors there were four positive accounts of advisors working with student veterans. One student wrote, "Undergrad advising was the best with Dr. S. (sic) She is a veteran as is her husband Dr. A. (sic) This has made the experience wonderful and very, very easy." Another student wrote about their advising experiences on campus

My advisor has been very knowledgeable and consistently helped me with opportunities I was unaware of. These opportunities are both financial guidance and academic resource guidance. All of my questions so far have been answered, and he continues to make an effort to help.

Another student wrote, "The advising has been very helpful during my time in higher education. All my questions are answered in a timely manner, and I never feel forgotten."

*Answer to the research question:* Student veterans' perceptions to advising practices on campus were mixed. The majority of student veterans on the University of Arkansas campus do feel that their advisors meet their expectations for their academic advising needs. However, responses to another question on academic advising revealed that respondents thought their advisors could do more to assist them during advising sessions. Additionally, student veterans felt that their advisors did not try to relate to their life experiences and student veterans preferred to have access to advisors with a military background. Student veterans did feel that their academic advisors were knowledgeable of different resources on campus.

#### **D. Chapter summary**

The chapter focused on the results of the data collection and answers to the research questions. The first section of this chapter discussed findings for quantitative grade point averages differences between student veterans in ROTC programs and student veterans not enrolled in ROTC programs. The results indicated that there were statistically significant differences between student veterans in ROTC and non-ROTC student veterans in three different groups. There were mean grade point average differences between the freshmen and sophomore groups; however, the freshman and sophomore groups did not have differences that were statistically significant. There were statically significant differences in grade point averages between the junior, senior, and total group.

The second and third sections of this chapter focused on advising practices for student veterans in ROTC units and student veteran not enrolled in ROTC units. The results indicated a difference in advising practices for student veterans who are enrolled in ROTC. Student veterans enrolled in ROTC have access to military advisors who share a similar background with them, and they have many more opportunities for advising, mentoring, and coaching than student veterans not in ROTC. The last section of this chapter centered on survey responses and how student veterans on the University of Arkansas campus viewed advising practices. The results for this question indicate that the majority of respondents' expectations were met during advising sessions, but that advisors did not try to relate to their experiences as a veteran and that they wanted access to advisors with a military background.

## **Chapter 5. Conclusions and Recommendations**

Student veterans in higher education face many challenges during their transition from the military to college and often face obstacles unique to their veteran status. However, student veterans have no way of being identified by their academic advisors unless they self-report their status during advising sessions. Additionally, there are no standard advising practices for student veterans at the University of Arkansas that considers their unique experiences and specific needs. This chapter includes a summary of the study which discusses answers to the four research questions, conclusions, recommendations for practice and additional research, discussion of the study, and a chapter summary.

### **A. Summary of the study**

The study examined the grade point averages of student veterans in ROTC units and student veterans not enrolled in ROTC units to determine if statistically significant differences existed between the two groups. This study also investigated advising practices for student veterans at the University of Arkansas and surveyed how student veterans perceive advising practices at the University of Arkansas.

#### **Research Question 1: Were there significant differences in grade point averages between student veterans in ROTC programs and student veterans not in ROTC programs?**

There were mean grade point average differences among each of the groups tested in this study. The freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, and total group all had mean grade point average differences. However, only three of the groups were statistically significant. The junior, senior, and total group of student veterans in ROTC had scores that were different statistically

from student veterans that were not in ROTC while the freshman and sophomore groups had mean grade point average differences that were not statistically significant.

**Research Question 2: What were the advising practices for student veterans in different ROTC programs on campus?**

The two different ROTC programs on campus had similar advising practices for their students. The only difference between the two programs was that one program required one official meeting with a military advisor while the other program required two meetings per semester. Students in both programs are required to have a four-year degree planning worksheet on file which is completed by the student and their college academic advisor. The purpose of the four-year degree planning worksheet is to ensure each student has a clear path to graduation and to commission as an officer in their service. Military advisors in both programs placed an emphasis on providing career guidance, mentoring, and building personal relationships. Topics during advising appointments ranged from students' overall general performance, academics, future expectations, personal problems or issues, and academic resources such as tutoring. Strikingly, the military advisors had personal contact with student veterans during physical training events, class, and leadership laboratory three to four days each week.

**Research Question 3: What were the advising practices for student veterans at various colleges on University of Arkansas campus not in ROTC?**

There are no specific advising procedures for student veterans in the six colleges where student veterans are enrolled. Each of the six colleges has a process unique to their school. Each college has an advising system to accommodate their student population and number of advisors. Student veterans in these colleges experience the same advising practices as their non-veteran peers. All advisors in the six different colleges use UA Success to maintain digital records for

their students. Advisors from each college mainly advised students on their enrollment dates, course scheduling, and grade requirements. College advisors have no way to determine the veteran status of a student unless the student discloses the information.

**Research Question 4: How did student veterans perceive advising practices on the University of Arkansas campus?**

Student veterans' perceptions to advising practices on campus were varied with both positive and negative responses. Positive perceptions towards academic advising in this study were that advisors met student veteran expectations for their academic advising needs. Student veterans responded with a mean score of 3.89 that those advisors did meet their expectations. However, student veterans felt that their advisors could do more to assist them during advising sessions. Student veterans also felt that their academic advisors were knowledgeable of different resources on campus and referred them to these resources for when needed.

Some negative perceptions were that advisors did not try to relate to their life experiences as veterans and that their advisors did not try to build a personal connection with them. However, student veterans indicated that their advising appointments were not a waste of time. Student veterans revealed a preference for academic advisors with a military background.

**B. Conclusions**

1. Student veterans enrolled in ROTC units had grade point averages that were significantly different in three out of five groups tested with a *p value* < .05. There was no discernible reason why these differences exist, and it cannot be directly attributed to advising methods or contact time.

2. Advising in ROTC units were conducted by advisors with military backgrounds, and they had substantial experience in the military. While ROTC advising practices do require

military advisors to discuss course scheduling and academics, their advising sessions range into broader topics such providing career guidance, mentoring, and building personal relationships. Military advisors also have much smaller caseloads than college advisor counterparts and they see their students an average of three to four days per week.

3. Advising practices in the six colleges that were examined were unique to their college and their advisors. Academic advisors have no way to discern the veteran status of a student unless that student discloses the information. College advisors have extremely large caseloads which makes relationship building difficult due to the sheer number of students they meet with.

4. Student veterans want to be advised by people with a military background. Student veterans want an advisor who can connect with them over shared experiences, or at a minimum want advisors who try to relate to their experiences as student veterans. Student veterans have a desire to build connections with their advisors and they see their advisors as mentors in higher education.

## **C. Recommendations**

### **Recommendations for practice and policy**

1. Create an advising team made up of veterans with experience across higher education. These advisors would be available to all student veterans on campus regardless of their college affiliation. Establish a developmental advising program designed specifically for student veterans. This advising program should pair student veterans with advisors from a military background. Advisors would be available to advise, mentor, coach, and provide career guidance to student veterans.

2. The student veteran advising team and the VRIC should both be located in the student success center. This would create an efficient process in one central location to ensure student

veterans get the mentoring, advising, and fiscal support they need without going to multiple offices across campus. Student veterans can get their hours certified and at the same time visit with an advisor.

3. Significant differences exist between academic and the military culture. This can present a significant challenge when student veterans transition to higher education. Create a campus wide military awareness program that trains advisors, faculty, and staff on best practices when working with student veterans. The military community has unique social and cultural values that many university staff are unaware of. The training program should be open to all administrators, staff, faculty, and students.

4. Revamp UA Connect to give advisors the ability to identify student veterans in their caseload. This would assist advisors in preparing for advising session and to use different advising practices that are better suited for student veterans. Additionally, this online system must be revised to include updated curriculum requirements. Several academic advisors reported the system is not effective due to outdated curriculum options which can be frustrating for all students regardless of veteran status.

5. Each college should establish an advisor or advisors specifically for student veterans. Currently, only one college has an advisor identified for student veterans. If possible, this advisor should have a military background or at the very least, familiarity with the military or a willingness to connect with veterans. This would create continuity with student veterans and a baseline understanding of student veterans' experiences.

6. It is important to improve interdepartmental communication to students get the support they need. Advisors should build personal relationships with the VRIC and vice versa. Each of the military and college advisors knew the VRIC existed and the approximate location of the



office. However, there are no existing personal relationships between the VRIC and any college or military advisors.

### **Recommendations for additional research**

1. The study reviewed the academic outcomes for student veterans enrolled in ROTC and student veterans not enrolled in ROTC, advising practices for these students, and their perceptions of academic advising on one campus. Future studies could focus on an institution that has a larger sample size of student veterans enrolled in ROTC as the overall sample size of student veterans in ROTC programs in this study was small.

2. This campus had Army and Air Force ROTC programs but did not have a Naval ROTC program. Future studies could include a research site that had all three programs to determine if there are statistically significant grade point average differences between student veterans at other four-year research universities.

3. Another opportunity for research at other universities would be to conduct a larger survey of student veterans at multiple four-year research institutions. This survey could help determine if there are consistencies among student veterans' perceptions on advising across higher education and lead to better advising practices.

4. Future studies could also concentrate on surveying student veterans in two-year colleges which could lead to a better understanding of advising practices for student veterans at smaller institutions. There should be a focus on how smaller institutions advise their students and what impact, if any, these practices have on their experiences.

5. Future studies could conduct an experiment with a treatment and control group that is focused on student veteran advising. The treatment group would have access to military advisors across an academic year while the control group would only have access to their college

advisors. Dependent variables of interest could include grade point average and retention. Varying levels of engaged advising, measured by number of contacts per semester, could also be used to evaluate outcomes on grade point average and retention.

6. Future research could also examine or account for variance in standardized testing scores and high school grade point averages for ROTC and non-ROTC student veterans to determine effects on undergraduate grade point averages.

#### **D. Discussion**

Previous studies have focused on the impact that proactive advising has had on academic performance (Abelman & Molina, 2001; 2002) and student success (Poole, 2015). Abelman and Molina (2001, 2002) found that proactive advising methods that had greater increases in mean grade point average than advising methods with lower levels of intrusiveness (Abelman & Molina, 2001, 2002; Molina & Abelman, 2000). The study produced similar results where student veterans in ROTC units had higher mean grade point averages than student veterans that were not enrolled in ROTC. The ROTC student veterans had far greater access to military academic advisors than non-ROTC student veterans had to their academic advisors. ROTC advisors reported contact times with their student veterans from three to four times per week compared to the one or two times per semester that non-ROTC student veterans had with their academic advisors. While the increased contact time and engaged advising practices of the military academic advisors do not correlate directly to increased grade point averages, it does showcase the potential effects of engaged advising practices.

Mean grade point averages were examined for the freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior groups. The junior, senior, and total group were statistically significant while the freshman and sophomore groups did not show any statistical significance. One possible explanation for the

difference between the junior and senior groups are the incentives for the ROTC student veterans. Student veterans from both ROTC programs are placed into their military specialties based partly on their academic performance. The higher their academic performance, the more likely they are to receive the specialty they want. The same could be said for the non-ROTC student veterans, these students also have incentives to perform at a high academic level because they too are working to achieve job placement in their chosen career path as well as to stay in good standing with the university.

There were similarities and differences in the advising practices of military advisors in ROTC programs and regular academic advisors. For one, both sets of advisors conducted advising appointments that were centered on academics, curriculum choices, and grade requirements. However, the military advisors reported opportunities to expand into broader topics such as career counseling, life experiences, mentoring, and coaching. Montag et al. (2012) reported that a good advising program could increase student retention and student satisfaction but the overall success of advising programs depend on building meaningful relationships between students and advisors (Coll & Zalaquett, 2008). Student veterans in this study reported that their advisors should serve as mentors who can assist them in navigating the challenges across higher education. However, large advising caseloads may be a detriment to building relationships. Good personal relationships are an important trait of an advisor/advisee relationship and was a theme common to the college advisors. Participant I stated,

I think relationship building is really important and it's hard to do, especially with our system and I will be honest right because our system is not set up for me to be able to create a strong relationship with a student unless they choose to come see me multiple times.

However, when asked if advisors had tried to build personal connections with them, student veterans polled in this survey slightly disagreed with the statement. The regular academic

advisors reported a desire to create and build personal relationships but the sheer number of students they were responsible for advising often prevented building meaningful connections. Conversely, the military advisors had ample time to connect with their students due to smaller caseloads and increased contact time with their students.

Student veteran students did report that their expectations were met during advising appointments with their advisors but that academic advisors did not try to relate to their personal experiences. Moreover, student veterans reported that they wanted access to an advisor with a military background, with several students indicating that their academic advisors lacked the understanding of the unique issues of being a veteran which were similar to findings by DiRamio et al., (2008) and Parks et al., (2015). Rumann and Hamrick (2010) reported that student veterans undergo a significant transition when they enter high education. As a result, student veterans do not share their experiences often, and when they do, they were selective who they shared their experiences with. Having access to an advisor with a military background would help ease their transition into higher education and provide an outlet to someone who has shared life experiences. Additionally, an advisor with a military background and experience in higher education would be in a great position to serve as a mentor for student veterans.

This institution should create a policy designed to support student veterans. This strategy must be all encompassing, meaning that student veterans are identified and tracked throughout their time in higher education and include an interdepartmental support system. Upon admission, the university should initiate a proactive outreach campaign immediately to develop relationships with student veterans. The support system should include admissions counselors to coordinate campus visits and new student orientations designed with the student veteran in mind.

Communication should begin between a student veteran advising team and new student veterans before the student veteran arrives on campus.

Previous studies have also identified the importance of communication between the institution and student veterans. Alschuler and Yarab (2018) found that there was a lack of outreach by universities to veterans which could enhance persistence and graduation. Universities should use advisors to reach student veterans before they feel isolated or disconnected from the university. Outreach, advising, and counseling all help to bolster students' academic success and help build an institutional identity (Mentzer et al., 2015). Alschuler and Yarab (2018) also recommended cross departmental communication that included academic advising, student success, and career counseling. Several respondents in the survey from this study indicated a lack of personal connections with their academic advisors and those student veterans who did make personal connections with advisors had a great experience at the institution. Not only should this policy support student veterans with engaged advising practices, but it must also focus on helping them navigate financial aid, student veteran GI Bill benefits, and integrate with the university and other student veterans.

## **E. Chapter Summary**

This chapter discussed answers to four research questions and produced four conclusions. There are also six recommendations for practice and policy. Additionally, there are five different areas for additional research which include focusing on a study site that has a larger sample of student veterans in ROTC programs, a study site that has three different ROTC programs instead of two, surveying student veterans at multiple four-year research institutions, surveying student veterans at two-year colleges, and conducting an experiment using a

developmental advising approach for student veterans. The discussion section supported results from the study and discussed similarities and differences from previous research.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A

#### IRB Approval Confirmation



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**To:** Brett E Rankin  
**From:** Justin R Chimka, Chair  
IRB Expedited Review  
**Date:** 08/13/2021  
**Action:** **Expedited Approval**  
**Action Date:** 08/13/2021  
**Protocol #:** 2103325447  
**Study Title:** 2017-2021 STUDENT VETERAN GPA DATA  
**Expiration Date:** 07/13/2022  
**Last Approval Date:**

The above-referenced protocol has been approved following expedited review by the IRB Committee that oversees research with human subjects.

If the research involves collaboration with another institution then the research cannot commence until the Committee receives written notification of approval from the collaborating institution's IRB.

It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval before the expiration date.

Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without Committee approval. Please submit continuation requests early enough to allow sufficient time for review. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in the automatic suspension of the approval of this protocol. Information collected following suspension is unapproved research and cannot be reported or published as research data. If you do not wish continued approval, please notify the Committee of the study closure.

**Adverse Events:** Any serious or unexpected adverse event must be reported to the IRB Committee within 48 hours. All other adverse events should be reported within 10 working days.

**Amendments:** If you wish to change any aspect of this study, such as the procedures, the consent forms, study personnel, or number of participants, please submit an amendment to the IRB. All changes must be approved by the IRB Committee before they can be initiated.

You must maintain a research file for at least 3 years after completion of the study. This file should include all correspondence with the IRB Committee, original signed consent forms, and study data.

cc: Michael T Miller, Investigator



Should you have questions or concerns about this interview, please contact Brett E. Rankin at [REDACTED] or his Dissertation Director, Dr. Michael Miller at [REDACTED] or via office phone at [REDACTED]. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact Ro Windwalker, the University's Human Subjects Compliance Coordinator, at [irb@uark.edu](mailto:irb@uark.edu) or 479-575-2208.

Before we begin, do you have any questions? If you have no questions and would like to participate, please print, and sign your name below

Participants name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Time of interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

ROTC/College affiliation: \_\_\_\_\_

Advising experience: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional work responsibilities: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C

### INTRODUCTORY EMAIL TO ROTC ADVISORS

Hello,

My name is Brett Rankin and I am a doctoral student in higher education. I am conducting research on student veterans in higher education. The purpose of my research is to examine how academic advising impacts academic outcomes and experiences in higher education. As an advisor with military experience, you have a shared background with the students you advise which may have an impact on how students perform in higher education. Therefore, I would like to conduct a 20 to 30 minute personal interview with you to ascertain advising practices used for your students.

These interviews are completed on a fully voluntary basis and every participant has the right to withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. Participant confidentiality is of the utmost importance before, during, and after the study. All information collected will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law and University policy. No identifying information will be used in any report or publication resulting from the research.

Responses to questions will be recorded and submitted as part of my dissertation but will not be associated any advisor. Should you have questions or concerns about this research, please contact Brett E. Rankin at [REDACTED] or his Dissertation Director, Dr. Michael Miller at [REDACTED] or via office phone at [REDACTED]. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact Ro Windwalker, the University's Human Subjects Compliance Coordinator, at irb@uark.edu or 479-575-2208. I thank you for your consideration and support.

## Appendix D

### INTRODUCTORY EMAIL TO COLLEGE ADVISORS

Hello,

My name is Brett Rankin and I am a doctoral student in higher education. I am conducting research on student veterans in higher education. The purpose of my research is to examine how academic advising impacts academic outcomes and experiences in higher education. I would like to conduct a 20 to 30 minute personal interview with you to ascertain advising practices used for your students.

These interviews are completed on a fully voluntary basis and every participant has the right to withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. Participant confidentiality is of the utmost importance before, during, and after the study. All information collected will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law and University policy. No identifying information will be used in any report or publication resulting from the research.

Responses to questions will be recorded and submitted as part of my dissertation but will not be associated any advisor. Should you have questions or concerns about this research, please contact Brett E. Rankin at [REDACTED] or his Dissertation Director, Dr. Michael Miller at [REDACTED] or via office phone at [REDACTED]. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact Ro Windwalker, the University's Human Subjects Compliance Coordinator, at [irb@uark.edu](mailto:irb@uark.edu) or 479-575-2208. I thank you for your consideration and support.

## Appendix E

### Research Question 2 Questionnaire

1. What is the advisor's military background?
  - a. How long has the advisor served in the Armed Forces?
  - b. What was the advisor's military occupational specialty?
  - c. What is the advisor's rank?
  - d. What is the advisor's military leadership experience?
2. How much experience does the advisor have working with student veterans?
  - a. How long has the advisor served as an advisor on campus?
  - b. How many student veterans does the advisor currently advise?
  - c. How many total students does the advisor meet with?
3. How often does the advisor meet with students? Is there a requirement to meet with students in the ROTC program?
  - a. How many times per semester does the advisor and student meet?
  - b. How many times per year does the advisor and student meet?
4. What paperwork is required for each advising session?
  - a. What is the purpose of advising paperwork?
5. What topics are discussed during advising sessions?
6. What assistance does the advisor provide students?
  - a. What type of academic support do advisors provide?
  - b. What is the advisor's understanding of university resources for students?
  - c. What is the advisor's role as a mentor?
7. Describe the effectiveness of the advising sessions?

## Appendix F

### Research Question 3 Questionnaire

1. What is the advisor's military background? If the advisor served in the military proceed to
  - 1.a. If not, proceed to question 2.
    - a. How long has the advisor served in the Armed Forces?
    - b. What was the advisor's military occupational specialty?
    - c. What is the advisor's rank?
    - d. What is the advisor's leadership experience?
2. How much does experience does the advisor have working with student veterans?
  - a. How long has the advisor served as an advisor on campus?
  - b. How many student veterans does the advisor currently advise?
  - c. How many total students does the advisor meet with?
3. How often does the advisor meet with students? Is there a requirement to meet with all students in the college?
  - a. How many times per semester does the advisor and student meet?
  - b. How many times per year does the advisor and student meet?
4. What paperwork is required for each advising session?
  - a. What is the purpose of the advising paperwork?
5. What topics are discussed during advising sessions?
6. What assistance does the advisor provide students?
  - a. What type of academic support do advisors provide?
  - b. What is the advisor's understanding of university resources for students?
  - c. What is the advisor's role as a mentor?
7. Describe the effectiveness of the advising sessions?

## **Appendix G**

### **INTRODUCTORY EMAIL TO STUDENT VETERANS**

Hello,

My name is Brett Rankin and I am a doctoral student in higher education. I have served in the Marine Corps for 24 years and I am conducting research on student veterans in higher education. The purpose of my research is to examine how academic advising impacts academic outcomes and experiences in higher education. I would like to provide you with a short, five minute survey where you can rank the effectiveness of advising practices you have experienced at the University of Arkansas.

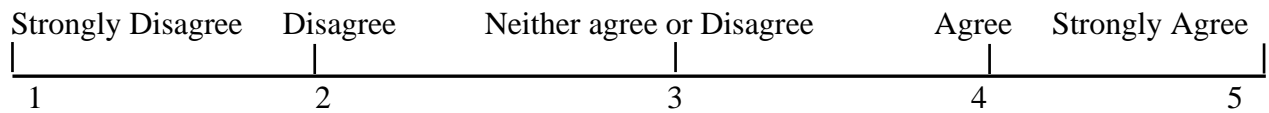
Surveys are completed on a fully voluntary basis and every participant has the right to withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. Participant confidentiality is of the utmost importance before, during, and after the study. All information collected will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law and University policy. No identifying information will be used in any report or publication resulting from the research.

Survey responses to questions will be recorded and submitted as part of my dissertation but will not be associated to you. Should you have questions or concerns about this survey please contact Brett E. Rankin at [REDACTED] or his Dissertation Director, Dr. Michael Miller at [REDACTED] or via office phone at [REDACTED]. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact Ro Windwalker, the University's Human Subjects Compliance Coordinator, at [irb@uark.edu](mailto:irb@uark.edu) or 479-575-2208.

By opening the link to this survey, you are providing your consent to participate in this study. I thank you for your consideration and support.

## Appendix H

Please respond to the following items using the scale below. Circle the number which best describes your reactions to the workshop for each item. Do not put your name on this form; your responses will be anonymous. Please make any additional comments you may have on the back.



1. My advisor meets my expectations for my academic advising needs.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

2. My advisor has tried to build a personal connection with me.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

3. I see my advisor as a mentor who can assist me in navigating challenges in higher education.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

4. My advisor has made a positive impact on me during my time in higher education.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

5. My advisor understands me as a student veteran.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

6. My advisor tries to relate to my experiences as a member or former member of the armed forces.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

7. My advisor could do more to assist me during advising sessions.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

8. My advising appointments are a waste of time.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

9. I do not have regular access to my advisor.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

10. My advisor is well prepared for advising sessions with me.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

11. My advisor knows about different resources on campus that I may need to enhance my academic success, health and wellness, and to address other needs I may have.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

12. My advisor has directed me to specific resources on campus to help me.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

13. As a student veteran, I prefer an advisor who has a military background.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

14. Please indicate your college affiliation.

15. Please indicate your year class.

16. What is your age group.

23 or younger

24 or older

17. Please indicate your sex.

18. Please indicate your branch of service.

19. Please indicate your duty status.

20. Use this box to list any comments you have about academic advising in higher education for student veterans.



## **Appendix I**

Hello,

I recently sent you an invitation to take the Advising Student Veterans survey to provide your feedback on advising in higher education. If you have not filled out the survey and would like to participate, please do so at the link below. If you have already completed the survey, Thank You!

The survey will take approximately five minutes to complete. If you have any questions, please contact me by email at [REDACTED] or my advisor, Dr. Michael T. Miller at [REDACTED]. Your feedback is critical to my study, and I appreciate your participation.

Access the survey here: [https://uark.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_09w6eTcuT6rCTbg](https://uark.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_09w6eTcuT6rCTbg)

Thank you,

## **Appendix J**

Hello,

Thank you all who have completed the survey! If you have not completed the Advising Student Veterans Survey and would like to participate, you have one final chance to provide your opinion.

The survey will take approximately five minutes of your time. If you have any questions, please contact me by email at [REDACTED] or my advisor, Dr. Michael T. Miller at [REDACTED]. Please click the link below for the survey. I appreciate your support.

Access the survey here: [https://uark.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_09w6eTcuT6rCTbg](https://uark.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_09w6eTcuT6rCTbg).

Thank you,