



Perceptions of Military Students on Campus



Elise Browne and Amanda Landwehr
Faculty Advisor: Mickey Crothers, Ph.D.

University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Department of Psychology

Background

According to the U.S. Department of Education, in the 2007 to 2008 academic year, roughly 657,000 undergraduate students were veterans and an additional 215,000 students were either active duty or reservists (Radford, 2011). These numbers are increasing each year, yet many institutions do not have the proper programs in place to ensure the transition from military life to civilian student life is a smooth one. We began our research by examining programs and institutions that track their military student success and sought to determine common perceptions of military students within our own university, as well as the local technical college.

Lighthall (2013) outlined ten important characteristics professors and classmates alike should know about the student veterans sitting in their classes. Many have been on deployments, have families, and are now pursuing degrees because their military training does not easily translate into a civilian career, unlike typical college students who are taking the first step in finding a career path. Institutions that have the most successful military students are those that simply track their success and are aware of their presence on campus. USA Today published an article summarizing a survey that showed just how few colleges actively track their military students throughout their time on campus, as well as how few have special services for these unique students. In 2013, fewer than 11% of the 600 schools represented in the sample reported that they track completion rates of service member students, both former and current (Altman, 2013). Additionally, a majority of the institutions that do offer training for faculty members regarding veteran students, do not make the training mandatory; therefore, it reaches very few people.

Virginia Commonwealth University, like many universities across the nation, has experienced a marked increase in the number of military students on campus. Because of this, they have implemented a program called The Green Zone to help resolve the gaps in understanding for faculty who interact with these individuals by creating a visible network of supporters and educated professionals that could serve as sources of support and eager problem solvers for military personnel on campus (Nichols-Casebolt, 2012). Since the implementation of this program, military students have indicated (through surveys) a higher level of satisfaction with the transition from military to civilian life.

While less than 1% of the United States population serves in the military, that number still accounts for millions of individuals, and hundreds of thousands of those are pursuing or have pursued a college education. Slowly, institutions across the nation are working to bridge the gap between military life and civilian student life and through our research, we hope to support such advances here in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

Methods

Participants:

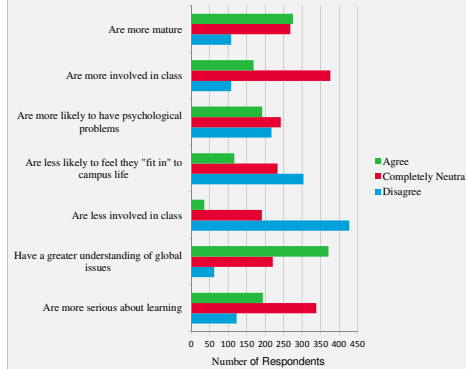
- 611 participants (356 from UW-Eau Claire, 225 from CVTC)
- The participants indicated informed consent by voluntarily completing the Qualtrics survey that we created.

Procedure:

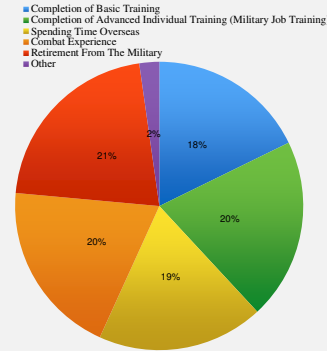
- Survey was created expressly for the present study, and included:
 - 36 write-in, multiple choice, and ranked questions
 - The main set of items asked about:
 - ∞ participants' opinions of their military student peers
 - ∞ how many, and of what gender those peers are
 - ∞ perceptions of male versus female military students
- Items from the Socially Desirable Response Set (Hays, Hayashi, & Stewart 1989)
- Items requesting demographic information of the participant
- Sent out to all students at Chippewa Valley Technical College via email; distributed to University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire students via email sent out by department heads agreeing to assist
- Write in responses were qualitatively analyzed by placing responses into categories; all other responses were analyzed using quantitative analyses.

Results

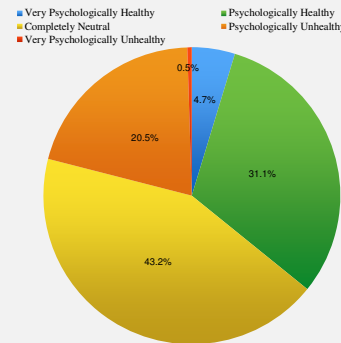
In comparison to non-military students, military students...



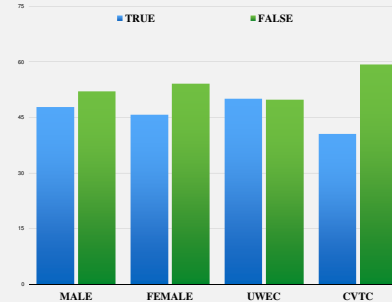
What do you think are the qualifications for being a veteran? (Select all that apply)



How psychologically healthy do you think currently serving or prior service military members are? (percent of all respondents)



Females have a hard time achieving success in the military (percent of respondents)



Limitations

A small number of limitations were found upon completion of this study. Our findings are drawn from a convenience sample, resulting in skewed demographics. The respondents were mainly females (76%) and overwhelmingly non-military (95%). Future research could benefit from additional male participants as well as additional military personnel. When respondents were asked about stereotypes of military students, it was unclear whether their responses reflected stereotypes they believe in, or stereotypes they have simply heard others discuss. Further clarification in the form of supplementary questioning would help obtain better insight into this issue. Participants had only two options, yes or no, regarding any prior military service. This left out those who may have military experience without having actually served, like those who may have been family members of military personnel and therefore lived on a military installation. It is possible that these individuals have more insight into a military lifestyle than those who have no direct experience, and therefore have different opinions which could be examined with future research. Additionally, participants' responses to our embedded social desirability measure suggest that our results may have been affected significantly by social desirability factors.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Miranda Cross-Schindler from UW-Eau Claire's Veterans Services Office for providing resources and guidance throughout our research process, Laura King from Chippewa Valley Technical College who helped to distribute our survey, UW-Eau Claire's Learning and Technology Services (LTS) for printing this poster, and the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (ORSP).

Other Findings

- When prompted to think about the term "disabled American Veteran," 53.4% of participants stated the image that comes to mind involved some sort of physical disability. 35.3% stated it involved both physical and emotional disabilities, and only 3.1% indicated, specifically, that it involved a psychological disability.
- Respondents were also asked whether they had heard of or know of any stereotypes regarding military students and 64.5% indicated they had not.
- When asked about intellectual capabilities, 87% of respondents stated that they did not believe that there were any differences in intellectual capabilities between male and female military members.
- When shown the statement "A majority of military members that have not seen combat have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)," 81% of respondents said this was false.

Clarifying Facts

- The following facts were added to our survey to distribute correct information about the relevance of PTSD.
- About 17% of military service members showed signs of mental health issues within a short period of time after returning home from combat deployments. An assessment conducted 3 to 6 months after their return home indicates that this number increased to about 20% of active duty and 42.4% of reserve service members.
- In 2005, about 2.3%-3.0% of non-deployed service members suffered from PTSD.

References

Altman, G. (2013). Best colleges for vets track veterans' academic success. *Military Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/11/11/best-colleges-for-vets/3500713/>

DeWitt, T. (2014). *The Aurora Foundation*. Retrieved from: <http://aurora4vets.org/>

Hays, R. D., Hayashi, T., & Stewart, A.L. (1989). A five-item measure of socially desirable response set. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 49, 629-636.

Lighthall, A. (2013). Ten things you should know about today's student veteran. *National Education Association*. Retrieved from <http://www.nea.org/home/53407.htm>

Nichols-Casebolt, A. (2012). In practice: The green zone: A program to support military students on campus. *About Campus*, 17, 26-29. doi: 10.1002/abc.21070

Radford, A. W. (2011). Military service members and veterans: A profile of those enrolled in undergraduate and graduate education in 2007-08. *U.S. Department of Education: Stats in Brief*, 163, 1-20. Retrieved from: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/10/>

Richardson, L. K., Frueh, B. C., & Acierno, R. (2010). Prevalence estimates of combat-related PTSD: A critical review. *Australia and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 44 (1), 4-19. doi: 10.3109/00048670903393597

Sautter, F. J., Armelie, A. P., Glynn, S. M., & Wielt, D. B. (2011). The development of a couple-based treatment for PTSD in returning veterans. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 42(1), 63-69. doi: 10.1037/a0022323.