

Student Military Service Members' and Veterans' Experiences at University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire: Transitions, Support Systems, and Services

Jason Bryant, Irene Baumann, Rosalyn Ross, and Katrina Mateski ❖ Department of Social Work

University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Lisa Quinn-Lee, PhD, MSSW, LICSW



Project Objectives

The purpose of this research was to improve the current understanding of the transition from being a military service member to becoming a UWEC student, as well as the effects on their families. Another goal was to identify UWEC campus support systems and services that are helpful for veteran students and families, and what needs to be improved.

Methodology

Nineteen students who are either veterans or current military personnel participated in this study. The student participated in a 30-45 minute interview where they were asked a series of open-ended questions that were created by the research team. These sixteen open-ended questions posed to the participants allowed them to describe their experiences and perceptions in their own words. Snowball sampling was utilized. The data analysis process included discovering themes and patterns and the relationships among them, which in turn led to increased knowledge and understanding of this topic.



Relevance of Study/Project Significance

It appears that inadequate attention has been given to conducting research with veterans, including student veterans. According to the 2010 United States Census Bureau, there are approximately 21.8 million military veterans in the United States. "As [the] numbers of student veterans grow nationwide, an important question emerging is whether or not campuses will be ready for the potentially unique challenges faced by student veterans as they assimilate to campus life; the first such transition for many" (Rudd, Goulding, & Bryan, 2011, p. 354).

Since increasing numbers of undergraduate students will likely experience deployment and re-enrollment, particularly during wartimes, "future research on student veterans' experiences and associated outcomes will be critical" (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010, p. 454). It is important to find out what supports and services can help ease this transition.

Findings

Are there any services not being offered that would be helpful to you and/or your family?

Common responses included: having an advisor with similar experiences, in particular military experience; student housing on or near campus for veterans and their families; opportunity to receive credits for their military service such as diversity credits and service learning hours.



<http://www2.uwla.edu/Veteran-Services/Certification-request/>

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being extremely satisfied and 1 being completely dissatisfied, rate the services and support systems that you and/or your family are currently using at UWEC. Please explain why you gave that rating.

Mean answer from participants was 8.5. Most responses mentioned Miranda Cross-Schindler as one of the main reasons that they rated this high. Most agree that services are good. Miranda solves complicated issues and concerns, helps to complete paperwork, follows through, answers questions, guides the GI bill process, explains coverage, effectively communicates, solves problems, quick to respond, she goes above and beyond.

"[The Student Veteran's Office is] always helpful, and if they don't know something, they'll find somebody who does know."

"Miranda is very helpful, because I don't have to worry about anything. All I have to do is fill out a sheet and then instantly my GI Bill starts coming and my tuition assistance. She hasn't always worked here, and before it was really complicated, but it is way smoother now."

"I've been to other colleges and it is better here."

What would be the most convenient mode or medium for campus support systems and services to be offered?

Most responses stated preference for a hybrid approach. Most liked having a choice of both internet resources and in-person resources.

Concerning your transition from military life to college life, what are some of the more rewarding or positive transition experiences you and/or your family have encountered?

The most frequently stated positive or rewarding experiences included college being paid for and no debt from student loans. Participants also stated that the military made them a better student and more prepared to do well in school. Other positive responses included: financially stable (not having to work as much because of monthly benefit), working/gaining employment, others look up to them, having more freedom in their life, flexibility of being in the military and going to school at the same time, making progress in their life, having health needs met, increased desire to do well in school, changed outlook on life, a maturing attitude on life, other students look up to them, professors are helpful and friendly, they appreciate life more.

Concerning your transition from military life to college life, what are some of the most difficult and challenging transition experiences you and/or your family have encountered?

The main challenges included difficulties connecting to or relating to other students due to an age gap or different life experiences. Other challenges included time management issues, lack of structure, adjusting to civilian life and school, not being around many military personnel, group work in classes, gender stereotypes, parking on campus, motivation, making decisions for yourself

