THE EXPERIENCES AND ACADEMIC SUCCESSES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN POST-9/11 VETERANS AT MARTIN R. DELANY STATE UNIVERSITY (PSEUDONYM OF AN ACTUAL HISTORICALLY BLACK UNIVERSITY)

by

Dymilah Luwanna Hewitt

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Approved by:

_____
Dr. Greg Wiggan

_____
Dr. Henry Harris

_____
Dr. Gloria Campbell-Whatley

_____
Dr. Christopher O'Brien

ABSTRACT

DYMILAH LUWANNA HEWITT. The experiences and academic successes of African American post-9/11 veterans at Martin R. Delany State University (pseudonym of an actual historically black university). (Under the direction of DR. GREG WIGGAN)

The purpose of this study is to examine the academic experiences of veterans attending historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Following World War II, enrollment at HBCUs was as high as 35%. Broader access at traditional colleges and the proliferation of for-profit colleges and universities (FPCUs) have led to a decline in African American veteran enrollment at HBCUs (Gasman, Baez, Sotello, & Turner, 2008). Many veterans are choosing FPCUs, but they are not receiving the quality education they were promised (Dynarski, 2016). This qualitative case study explored the following: the reasons African American veterans are choosing to attend HBCUs; the challenges they face as student veterans; and the various factors that contribute to their academic success. The theory that guided the study was Critical Race Resilience Theory which draws from Critical Race Theory and Resilience Theory. Data were collected from in-depth interviews with five male and two female African American student veterans at Martin R. Delany State University (pseudonym). The findings indicate that the participants view HBCUs as valuable institutions that provide a welcoming environment. They also reveal that financial support from the Veterans Administration and emotional support from family, friends and other veterans can have a major impact on the academic success of African American veterans. This study has great implications for educational policy reform.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FPCU	For-Profit College or University
HBCU	Historically Black College or University
PWI	Predominately White Institution
SVA	Student Veterans of America
TAP	Tuition Assistance Program
TCU	Traditional College or University
VA	Veterans Affairs
VOC REHAB	Vocational Rehabilitation

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The Academic Achievement of African American Post-9/11 Veterans at Martin R. Delany State University (Pseudonym of an Actual Historically Black University)

> *"I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; and that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice. So help me God."* (US Army, n.d.)

All military personnel must take the oath of enlistment at the very beginning of their service. Veterans who served their country and honored their commitment, are entitled to the benefits earned during their military service. They are a part of the growing number of adult students in higher education. (DiRamio, Ackerman & Mitchell; Vacchi, 2012). Their enrollment and participation increases campus diversity and their financial benefits can improve the financial stability of higher education institutions. The colleges and universities that receive these hard-earned benefits are obligated to fulfill the promises made during recruitment and promote academic achievement, but this does not always happen.

A veteran is a person who served in the active military, naval or air service, including reserve forces. Over 3.7 million veterans have served in the United States Armed Forces since September 11, 2001 and approximately 15% or 555,000 of these veterans are

African American (Joint Economic Committee, United States Congress, 2015). Post-9/11 veterans make up almost 18% of the total veteran population and this number is expected to increase to 32% by 2043 (Joint Economic Committee, United States Congress, 2015). Approximately 1.5 million veterans and family members have used the transferrable educational benefit of the Post-9/11 GI Bill. Most veterans (92%) use it themselves (NCES, 2016). Even before the Post-9/11 GI Bill was passed, there had been a steady increase in veterans using the educational benefit. Between 2000 and 2009, there was a 36% increase in the number of veterans receiving veterans' education benefits (NCES, 2016). After the Post-9/11 GI Bill became available, veterans' education beneficiaries (active duty service members, veterans and their families) increased by 42% the next two years (NCES, 2016). Between 2009 and 2013, the number of beneficiaries increased by almost 100%, from 564,487 to 1,091,044 (NCES, 2016).

There are many education programs offered by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs. They include the Post-9/11 GI Bill, the Montgomery GI Bill, Reserve Educational Assistance Program (REAP), Veterans Educational Assistance Program (VEAP), Survivors and Dependent Assistance, Accelerated Payments, Co-Op Training, Correspondence Training, Entrepreneurship Training, Flight Training, National Call to Service Program, and Tuition Assistance Top Up (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016). While there are many programs that can assist veterans in their pursuit of higher education, the Post-9/11 GI Bill is often selected by those eligible because of its generous educational benefits. It is available to individuals who served "at least 90 aggregate days on active duty after September 10, 2001" (United States Department of

Veterans Affairs, 2016). The benefits cover tuition and fees (up to $17,500), a monthly housing allowance, and a stipend for books and supplies (up to $1,000 per year) based upon the length of their service (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016).

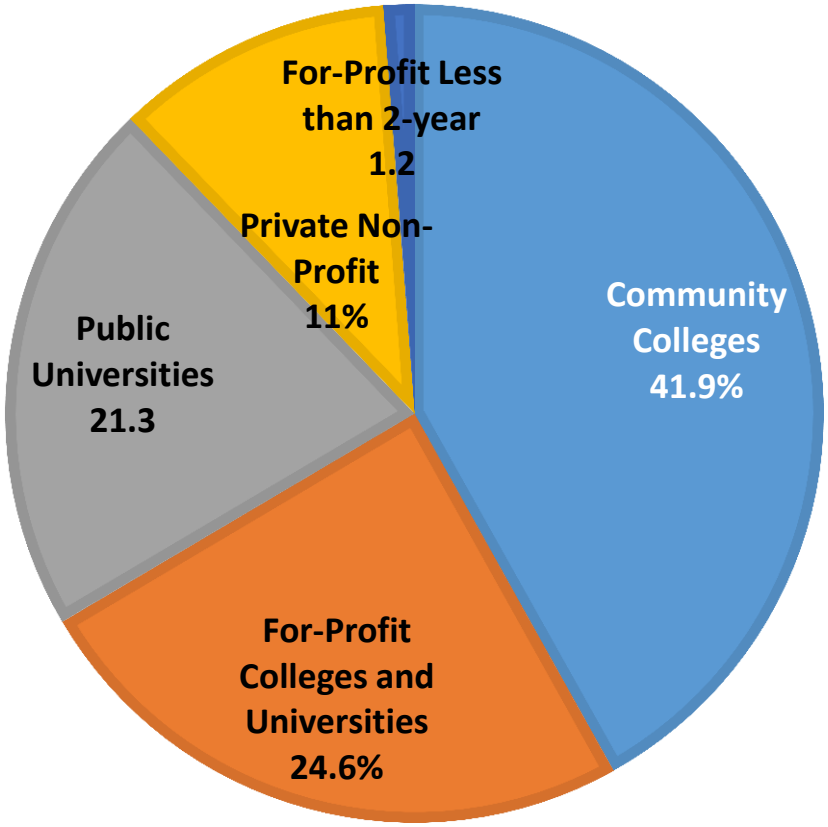
African American veterans are among the increasing number of veterans who are pursuing degrees following the wars in Iraq (2003-2011) and Afghanistan (2001-2014). African American post-9/11 veterans are using veterans' benefits at a higher rate (53.6%) than other African American veterans of other time periods (41.3%) (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2015). However, when it comes to education benefits specifically, this is not the case. According the National Center for Education Statistics, African American veteran enrollment in higher education (16.8%) is only slightly higher than African American enrollment, in general (16%) (NCES, 2016). White students make up 57.8% of the undergraduate student population but this rate increases to 62.6% for student veterans (NCES, 2016). With the variety of tuition assistance programs available, there is room for more African American veterans to use them to pursue higher education.

Some veterans choose not to use their benefit, possibly, because they have a career path that does not require a college education. Others may believe that they are not college material or just never seriously considered it. Some veterans have been impacted by traumatic brain injuries, amputations, post-traumatic stress disorder and/or other disabilities that require extensive medical intervention (Whiteman, Barry, Mroczek & Wadsworth, 2013). Understandably, they need time to recover before they can consider pursuing an education. In spite of the numerous challenges veterans face, there are many higher education institutions that actively recruit veterans.

Because of widespread segregation, between 1946 and 1949 (after the conclusion of World War II), the African American veteran enrollment rate at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) was on average 30% of the entire enrollment (Gasman, Baez, Sotello & Turner, 2008). However, this has changed drastically. HBCUs are no longer the primary option for African American veterans. Huston-Tillotson University, located near Fort Hood in Austin, Texas, had a Post-9/11 GI Bill student population of 10% in 2014 (Cooper, 2014). In that same year, Fayetteville State University in North Carolina, had over 500 undergraduate students who were Post-9/11 G.I. Bill recipients, which increased their veteran population by 15% (Cooper, 2014). These universities are not the norm.

Veterans, in general, are choosing other types of institutions. FPCUs have extremely effective recruitment strategies. They spend a significant amount of their overall budget (up to 23%) on recruitment and they offer online and evening classes that are appealing to adult students (Sander, 2012). In the 2011-2012 academic year, community colleges were the most popular choice of veteran undergraduates and 41.9% of veterans in college were enrolled in public two-year colleges (NCES, 2016). For-profit colleges and universities (FPCUs) that offer two-year or four-year degrees were attended by 24.6% of all veterans. Public universities enrolled 21.3%; private non-profit institutions, 11%; and for-profit less that two-year institutions, 1.2% (NCES, 2016).

Figure 1



College Choices of Student Veterans in 2011-2012 Academic Year

After World War I, veterans received $60 and a train ticket home. In an attempt to better provide for veterans, the World War Adjusted Act, also known as the Bonus Act, was passed in 1924 (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016). It was supposed to compensate veterans based upon the number of days they served, but it took up to 20 years for many veterans to receive it. The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, also called the G.I. Bill, was passed to provide benefits for returning World War II veterans (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016). The initials GI have stood for galvanized steel, general issue and government issue (History Channel, 2016).

Government issue is most appropriate considering how the term is currently used. The benefits available for active duty veterans who were honorably discharged, included low-cost mortgages, low-interest business loans, one year of unemployment insurance and financial assistance to attend high school, vocational school or college (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016). Harry W. Colmery was a former national commander of the American Legion. He introduced the G.I. Bill on January 10, 1944, which was eventually passed and signed by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016).

The Bill was updated in 1985 by former Mississippi Congressman Gillespie Montgomery (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016). The new bill was called the Montgomery GI Bill. Congressman Montgomery was a World War II veteran and he advocated for an update because he was concerned about the decline in military recruitment in the1980s and believed a more educated military would be an asset to the country (The G.V. "Sonny" Montgomery Foundation, 2016). According to Montgomery's foundation website, "The measure is credited with saving the all-volunteer military force by providing education benefits for active duty, National Guard and Reserve members" (The G.V. "Sonny" Montgomery Foundation, 2016). In 2008, it was updated again. When compared to previous bills, the educational benefits of the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill are more extensive and flexible and can be transferred to a spouse or child (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016). According to Patrick Dunne, the Veteran Affairs Undersecretary of Benefits in 2009, the Post-9/11 GI Bill is "focused on meeting the eligible veteran's personal goals and needs and covering all educational expenses" (Dunne, 2009, p. 5). He is confident that the program "will carry VA benefits

programs into the 21st century and guide our benefits payment system development" (Dunne, 2009, p. 5).

For their military service in World War II, as previously noted, African American veterans were promised low-cost mortgages, low interest business loans, unemployment insurance and financial assistance to attend vocational school or college (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016). However, after serving their country in a segregated military, African American veterans were often stifled by racism as they attempted to use these benefits upon the completion of their military obligations (Humes, 2006). While the G.I. Bill had a positive impact on the college enrollment and graduation of African Americans following World War II (Humes, 2006), this enrollment was often limited to historically black colleges and universities (Herbold, 1995; Humes, 2006; Turner & Bound, 2003). Subsequently, veterans who used the G.I. Bill also had a lasting impact on colleges and universities. In the years immediately following the conclusion of World War II, enrollment at HBCUs increased by nearly 100% (Herbold, 1994). Due to segregation in higher education, there were limited opportunities for African Americans particularly at southern colleges and universities in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi and South Carolina (Turner & Bound, 2003). Similarly, in 1946, at Princeton University, there were 9,000 students, of which 46 were African Americans (Herbold, 1994). Opportunities for higher education in the North and South were limited at best and closed in most situations. HBCUs were the colleges and universities where African American veterans were most welcomed.

Before the education benefits were announced, 7% of soldiers stated that they wanted to pursue higher education upon their return to civilian life, but after the news

spread of these benefits, the number soared to 43% (Turner & Bound, 2003). The influx of students necessitated change and forced college campuses to improve their facilities, admissions procedures, curricula and pedagogies (Altbach, Gumport & Berdahl, 2011). In 1945, there were 1.6 million students enrolled in higher education and 88,000 were veterans (Altbach et al., 2011). Two years later, college enrollment was 2.3 million students, of which over one million were veterans (Altbach et al., 2011). In 1947, there were 26,306 veterans enrolled in HBCUs (Gasman et al., 2008). They made up 35% of the total HBCU population of 74,173 (Gasman et al., 2008). In 1940, HBCU enrollment was 43,003 and in 1950, it had increased to 76,600 (Herbold, 1994).

While there were considerable benefits that African Americans derived from the G.I. Bill, racism in America, particularly in the South, kept many veterans from reaping the full benefit of the bill. In his book, *When Affirmative Action Was White,* Ira Katznelson (2005), argued that after World War II, the GI Bill widened a racial gap that was already large. While the G. I. Bill was a race neutral initiative, John E. Rankin, the Mississippi congressman and other likeminded legislators made sure that each individual state would be able to control how this federal bill was executed. He worked diligently against more federal control of the bill (Herbold, 1994; Humes, 2003). Ultimately, it was a challenge to enforce a race neutral initiative like the G.I. Bill in a segregated society.

Research Questions

The objective of this dissertation is to explore the factors that have impacted the academic achievement of Post-9/11 African American veterans at HBCUs. The dissertation investigates the following research questions:

- What are the social, political and economic factors that have impacted the enrollment of post-9/11 African American military veterans at Martin R. Delany State University?
- What support systems have facilitated the success of current student veterans at Martin R. Delany State University?

Statement of the Problem

African American veterans are not using their education benefits as much as white veterans are (NCES, 2016). Some African American veterans who are using their education benefits are not receiving the quality education they were promised during recruitment (Dynarski, 2016). Broader access at traditional colleges and the proliferation of for-profit colleges and universities (FPCUs) have led to a decline in African American veteran enrollment at HBCUs (Gasman et al., 2008). While some HBCUs currently face challenges of their own, these institutions boast a long legacy of graduating and training much needed African American professionals who had no other options (Wiggan & Scott, 2015).

Table 1

Six-Year Graduation Rate at Four Year Colleges (2008-2014)

Type of Institution	Completion Rate
Private	65%
Public	58%
HBCU	36%
For-Profit	27%
Overall	60%

NCES, 2016 and *The Atlantic*, 2014

Private colleges and universities are the most selective of the higher education institutions so their graduation rates are the highest (Quinton, 2014). Public institutions are funded by state and federal governments, and admit a more economically diverse population of students with a variety of preparation levels, so it is often challenging for less academically prepared and lower income students to complete their studies in 6 years. HBCUs have a history of meeting students where they are. After emancipation there were night schools and Saturday schools to educate formerly enslaved Africans to prepare them for life after slavery (Anderson, 1988). Acceptance rates at many HBCUs remain high and the financial challenges of the many low-income first generation students they enroll, as well as the financial challenges of the institutions themselves, account for their lower graduation rates (Smith, 2013). FPCUs focus on adult students, (Altbach et al., 2011) but their graduation rates are the lowest of all higher education institutions. (NCES, 2016). African American veterans are entitled to a quality experience in higher education. The old adage, "Buyer beware" is appropriate for veterans as they seek to use their tuition benefits, because once they are gone, they are gone. Many higher education institutions desire African American post-9/11 veterans, but it is up to each individual veteran to make a decision based upon facts and not convincing recruitment strategies. Since many veterans are first generation college students (Lutz, 2008), they need more information to make good college selections.

Since the Post-9/11 GI Bill was passed in 2008, FPCUs have been selected at a high rate by veterans in their pursuit of bachelor's degrees. In the 2011-2012 academic year, 2 year or more FPCUs were selected by 24.6% of all student veterans (NCES, 2016). While the recruitment and marketing strategies are effective, their low graduation

rates and high loan default rates (Altbach et al., 2011) provide evidence that those institutions are not right for many of the students that they recruit and enroll. FPCUs focus their recruitment efforts on individuals who are less represented at traditional colleges and universities (TCUs). Many of these students are low income, first generation college students (Dynarski, 2016). In 2005-2006, 37% of students enrolled in FPCUs were from underrepresented groups compared to 20% in private, non-profit TCUs (Hentschke, Lechuga & Tierney, 2010). Data from 2008 show that underrepresented students at FPCUs made up as much as 43% of the total student population (Hentschke et al., 2010).

Veterans are likely drawn to for-profit colleges because of the convenient class schedules, online course offerings and the potentially shorter time to degree (Cate, 2014). Many for-profit colleges offer evening and weekend classes to accommodate students who work full time jobs on weekdays (Hentschke et al., 2010). This can work well for students who desire regular face-to-face contact with their instructors. The online classes are effective for students who either cannot or choose not to sit in a traditional classroom for their education. Many schools offer complete degree programs totally online. This allows students to complete their course requirements when it is convenient for them and frees them from traveling to and from class.

Two of the strengths of the for-profit colleges are their successful marketing and recruitment strategies. They spend a significant amount of money to recruit veterans and other adult students, and their strategies are working to get the students to enroll. The fifteen largest for-profit universities typically spend 23% of their total budget on sales and marketing, while non-profit institutions spend about 0.5% (less than 1%) (Sander,

2012). The University of Phoenix spent over $1 billion dollars on marketing in 2011; this included billboards, television commercials and glossy magazines like *Phoenix Patriot* to attract students (Sander, 2012). Since these institutions do not have endowments, they must generate income to stay in business. Their income is generated from loans, grants and federal aid obtained by their students (Hentschke et al., 2010).

While some FPCUs are doing well financially, they have faced a great deal of scrutiny. Two widely documented problems are low graduation rates and high student loan default rates (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016; Altbach et al., 2011). Other problems include institutional instability. Several large FPCUs have recently closed (Dynarski, 2016; Federal Student Aid, 2016). In 2015, *The Los Angeles Times* reported that the Pentagon had temporarily barred the University of Phoenix from recruiting students at United States military bases and halted tuition assistance for new active duty troops due to inquiries from the United States Federal Trade Commission and former-California Attorney General Kamala Harris. This did not affect the G.I. Bill. Between 2009 and 2014, FPCUs received 40% of the 8.2 billion G.I. Bill dollars going to higher education institutions. In 2014, the industry took in 46% of the 538 million in tuition assistance dollars (Puzzanghera, Kirkman & Zarembo, 2015).

Tom Harkin, an Iowa Democrat, served as Chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee until his retirement in 2015. The former Navy pilot led a two-year investigation of FPCUs and made this statement before the report was released:

> In this report, you will find overwhelming documentation of exorbitant tuition, aggressive recruiting practices, abysmal student outcomes, taxpayer dollars spent

> on marketing and pocketed as profit, and regulatory evasion and manipulation. These practices are not the exception — they are the norm. They are systemic throughout the industry, with very few individual exceptions (Lewin, 2012).

FPCUs have targeted low income, first generation and student veterans so much that there are policies in place to regulate how much of their income comes from federal funds. The 90/10 Rule tries to limit the amount of federal money that goes to FPCUs. These institutions manage to exploit loopholes and operate primarily on taxpayer money, but lawmakers are working to change this practice.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to provide a space for the voices of current African American veterans at HBCUs. Their experiences can inform higher education policy and improve the educational outcomes of future veterans. While the majority of veterans in school are enrolled in community colleges (41.9% of all veterans) (NCES, 2016) and for-profit colleges (24.6%), the experiences of post-9/11 African American veterans at HBCUs are worthy of investigation.

When HBCUs were the primary option for African American veterans, many of the campuses were at capacity (Herbold, 1994, Humes, 2006). Researchers estimated that between 20,000 to 50,000 students were turned away from HBCUs due to infrastructure and housing limitations in 1946 and 1947 (Bannier, 2006; Herbold, 1994). The following table shows that after World War II (between 1946 and 1949) veterans made up on average over 30% of the total HBCU student population.

Table 2

HBCU Enrollment after World War II

Year	Number of veterans	Total Students	% of all students
1946	18,216	58,842	31
1947	26,306	74,173	35
1948	22,526	70,644	32
1949	19,320	69,651	27

Note: Adapted from *Understanding Minority Serving Institutions*, 2008.

As stated previously, there has been a decline in African American veteran enrollment at HBCUs. There are a few HBCUs—Fayetteville State University in North Carolina and Huston-Tillotson University in Texas—that enroll veterans at a relatively high rate and offer comprehensive programs, but even at those HBCUs, enrollment is significantly lower than the period following World War II. Savannah State University has a very low veteran enrollment, less than 2% of all students are veterans or their dependents using their benefits (Cooper, 2014). This is particularly alarming because Georgia has 11 military bases and Savannah State is near Hunter Army Airfield and Fort Stewart Army base (Military Bases, n.d.; Cooper, 2014). The African American student veterans who participated in this study share useful information about how HBCUs can do a better job recruiting, retaining and helping student veterans graduate.

Historically black colleges and universities are heavily concentrated in the South. Many African Americans remained in the south during the Reconstruction period and following years of slavery in America (Anderson, 1988). Similarly, a large number of military bases are located in the South (Veteranaid, 2016) and four of the five largest bases are in this region as well. The most populated United States military bases are Fort Bragg near Fayetteville, North Carolina with a population of 238,646; Fort Campbell on the Kentucky-Tennessee border with 234,914; Fort Hood near Killen, Texas with

217,003; Joint Base Lewis-McChord near Tacoma Washington with 209,486 and Fort Benning which straddles Georgia and Alabama at 107,627 (Veteranaid, 2016). Only one of these top five bases is not in the South—Joint Base Lewis-McChord, in the state of Washington. The location of HBCUs and their long history of educating African American veterans (Herbold, 1993; Humes, 2006; Turner & Bound, 2003) put them in a unique position to serve student veterans. As demonstrated in the following table, African Americans are well-represented in the military and it would be mutually beneficial for both parties, if HBCUs improved their recruitment of veterans. The support that comes from the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill and other military tuition assistance programs could improve the financial outlook of many HBCUs.

Table 3

Veteran Demographic Characteristics, 2014

Gender	All Veterans	Post 9/11 Veterans	Nonveterans
Male	90%	80%	44%
Female	10%	20%	56%
Race/Ethnicity			
White	83%	77%	79%
Black	12%	15%	12%
Asian	2%	3%	6%
Other	3%	5%	3%
Latino* (any race)	7%	13%	16%

Note: Latino is not specified by the United States Military. People who enter must choose from Black or White, hence totals do not equal 100% with Latino included.
Table adapted from a table created by the JEC based upon data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Current Population Survey.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it may help to fill a gap in the research. There is data on the completion rates of post-9/11 veterans, but there is very little information available on African American veterans at HBCUs (Cate, 2014). In a study of nearly one million student veterans who used Montgomery and Post-9/11 GI Bill between 2002 and 2010, the research team found that 51.7 percent of student veterans earned a postsecondary degree or certificate (Cate, 2014). However, this study did not provide information related to the specific educational experiences of African American student veterans.

Since African American veterans at HBCUs are so understudied, this research may also provide valuable information for leaders at public and private historically black colleges and universities who seek to increase their veteran population and better serve them. This study provides valuable information about the support systems and programs that are helping student veterans as they work to achieve college degrees. Veterans can be a great addition to any campus, but many of them need assistance as they transition from active duty military service (DiRamio et al., 2008). There are HBCUs with model programs and this study reveals how services and assistance such as counseling, tutoring, and housing can improve academic achievement, retention and graduation rates. Veterans need a supportive educational environment and HBCUs are in a position to provide that environment. The institutions would in turn benefit from the guaranteed money that comes from the GI Bill and other military tuition assistance programs.

Delimitations and Limitations

This study has several delimitations. Delimitations refer to the specific aspects that help set the parameters of the study (Creswell, 2003). The participants of this study are men and women who self-identify as African American. The participants are also veterans of one of the branches of the United States Armed Forces—Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines or Coast Guard. That means that they were all honorably discharged, and are eligible for benefits. They also served after the terrorist attacks on the United States that left 2,996 people dead at the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, the Pentagon in Arlington County, Virginia and the plane crash site at Stony Creek Township near Shanksville, Pennsylvania on September 11, 2001. All participants were current students of Martin R. Delany State University, an historically black university in the Southeast region of the United States at the time of data collection. While this study is interested in the experiences of post-9/11 veterans, it is open to veterans who use any of the different tuition benefit programs or fund their education. Some students attend college to take a few classes, but this study was limited to veterans who were pursuing bachelor's or master's degrees.

Definition of Terms

Veteran

A veteran is a person who served in the active military, naval or air service and who was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable (Cornell University Law School, 2016).

Post-9/11 Veteran

A post-9/11 veteran is a veteran who served any time after September 10, 2001(United States Veterans Affairs, 2016).

HBCU

HBCU is short for historically black college or university. According to the Higher Education Act of 1965, an HBCU is "a college or university that was established prior to 1964, whose principal mission was and is the education of Black Americans, and is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association determined by the Secretary of Education to be a reliable authority as to the quality of training offered or is, according to such an agency or association, making reasonable progress toward accreditation." According the White House Initiative on HBCUs, these institutions offer "all students regardless of race an opportunity to develop their skills and talents" (Higher Education Act of 1965).

FPCU

FPCU is short for a for-profit college or university. Private for-profit colleges and universities are institutions that are run by companies and must meet the demands of investors and stockholders. These institutions can legally receive up to 90% of their revenue from federal student aid (Hentschke, Lechuga & Tierney, 2010).

TCU

TCU is short for a traditional college or university that is not an HBCU or FPCU.

GI Bill

The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, also called the G.I. (Government Issue) Bill, provided benefits for returning World War II veterans. These benefits were available for active duty veterans who were honorably discharged, and they included

low-cost mortgages, low-interest business loans, one year of unemployment insurance and financial assistance to attend high school, vocational school or college. Harry W. Colmery was the former national commander of the American Legion who introduced the G.I. Bill on January 10, 1944 (Veterans Affairs, 2016). It was eventually passed and signed by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and it provided a monthly stipend of $50 for single veterans and $75 for married veterans as well as the payment of tuition, books and supplies up to $500 (Turner & Bound, 2003).

Martin R. Delany

Martin R. Delany was born free in Virginia and earned the rank of major during the Civil War. He was also an abolitionist, author, physician and early proponent of black nationalism. He was one of the first black people to be admitted to Harvard Medical School but was unable to complete his degree because white students opposed his admission (Ullman, 1971).

Summary

The objective of this study is to explore the academic achievement of African American post-9/11 veterans at Martin R. Delany State University. It investigates the historical, social and economic factors that have impacted African Americans and their experiences in higher education as a whole and at HBCUs specifically. While more opportunities at public, private, and for-profit colleges and universities have led to a decline in African American veteran enrollment at HBCUs, this study closely examines the educational experiences of veterans at an HBCU that enrolls veterans at a relatively high rate. Since there is limited information on this topic specifically, Chapter Two provides a brief review of the literature related to this topic and relevant historical

information on African American veterans and their experiences at HBCUs. Chapter Three provides the details of the research method used. Chapter Four presents the findings of this study. Chapter Five discusses the findings in the context of the relevant literature and the theoretical framework and presents recommendations. It also shares suggestions for research on African American veterans in the future.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

I am a veteran of the war
I up and joined the army back in 1964
At sixteen I just had to be a man at any cost
I volunteered for Vietnam where I got my leg shot off
I recall a quote from a movie that said "who's more a man
Than a man with a reason that's worth dyin' for?"

They had me standing on the front line
They had me standing on the front line
They had me standing on the front line
But now I stand at the back of the line when it comes to gettin' ahead

"The Front Line" (Byrd & Wonder, 1982, Side 1, Track 4)

African American veterans at HBCUs are an understudied group. While actual studies on the academic achievement of post-9/11 veterans specifically are difficult to find, there is some literature on African American veterans when the GI Bill was introduced after World War II (Herbold, 1994; Humes, 2005). A general search using the terms *veterans, Iraq* and *historically black colleges* on Google Scholar yields a variety of articles including: "Cost, Convenience Drive Veterans' College Choices"; and "Black Greek Fraternity Experiences on Predominantly White and Historically Black Campuses: A Comparison." Another search using the terms: *black, post-9/11 veterans* and *education* yields the following articles: "10 Key Facts about Veterans of the Post 9/11 Era;" "HBCUs, Post 9/11 Veterans Exploring Mutual Attraction;" "Empty Promise: Black American Veterans and the New GI Bill and "Where Are the Post-9/11 Veterans?" While there is a great deal of literature on veterans in higher education that have informed this study, this literature does not typically cover African American student

veterans at HBCUs. There are a growing number of dissertations on post-9/11 veterans (Cole-Morton, 2013; Redhouse, 2016; Semer, 2015; Senk, 2015), but not on African American veterans at HBCUs. HBCUs and veterans are inextricably bound because of the role these institutions played in the success of African American veterans and the crucial role veterans played in the development of HBCUs (Herbold, 1994).

This literature review explores the relationship between African American veterans and HBCUs. It also discusses the government programs that supported and facilitated their enrollment in college. Since many veterans choose FPCUs (Molina, 2014; NCES, 2016), this literature review also covers the growth of FPCUs and their dependence on veteran, low income, and first generation students. While veteran enrollment is not what it once was, there are still some HBCUs that have model veteran's programs and other HBCUs can learn from them.

There are five themes that emerged from the literature on the academic achievement of African American veterans and the social, political and economic factors that contributed to their enrollment and success. 1.) After World War II, African American veterans were pushed to vocational education over college degrees (Herbold, 1994; Humes, 2005). 2.) Between 1946 and 1949 African American veterans made up approximately 30% of the HBCU student population; (Gasman et al., 2008). 3.) In spite of the decline in veteran enrollment at HBCUs, there are some HBCUs that successfully recruit veterans (Cooper, 2014). 4.) After the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the type of four-year college selected most often by veterans is the FPCU (NCES, 2016). 5.) Higher education institutions must address the transitional needs of veterans to effectively promote veteran student success (DiRamio et al., 2008; Vacchi, 2012).

Research Questions

The objective of this literature review is to explore literature that provides context for a study on the academic achievement of post-9/11 African American veterans at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). This dissertation answers the following questions:

- What are the social, political and economic factors that have impacted the enrollment of post-9/11 African American military veterans at Martin R. Delany State University?
- What support systems have facilitated the success of current student veterans at Martin R. Delany State University?

Native American, Latino & Asian American US Military Participation

While it is widely known that African American soldiers experienced discrimination, it should be noted that soldiers of Latino, Asian and Native American descent also served in segregated units (Harris, 2014). The unique experiences and impressive accomplishments of these different groups are not widely known or publicized. Soldiers were called names and passed over for promotions. While President Truman signed Executive Order 9981 on July 26, 1948, which legally ended segregation in the military, the practice continued (Allen, 1989; Harris, 2014). President Eisenhower ordered the VA to fully integrate its hospitals in 1954 after a 1953 investigation revealed that 47 of 166 veteran hospitals were segregated (Harris, 2014).

Native Americans served in the Revolutionary War and the Civil War as scouts and auxiliary troops. They used the Choctaw language to confuse Germans, and during

World War I, four Native Americans were awarded the Croix de Guerre, France's highest military honor. During World War II, over 44,000 served with about 400 Navajo working as cryptologists (code talkers). Their codes were never broken by the enemy (Harris, 2014).

Chicanas/os (Mexican Americans) have a history of service that begins with the War of 1812 and along with other Latina/o groups, they have participated in the most recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. As many as 9,000 Mexican Americans fought in the Civil War in both the Union and Confederate Armies. They served in World War I and in World War II and were among the first units to successfully subdue the enemy in the Pacific (Harris, 2014).

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders also served in the War of 1812 and the Civil War in the Confederate and Union Armies. Japanese Americans endured harsh discrimination when President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 that forced them to move from their homes in the west coast to U.S. internment camps. Even during this time, Japanese American soldiers served in World War II with distinction—most notably the 100th Battalion and the Army's 442nd Regimental Combat Team (Harris, 2014).

African Americans Veterans during World War II

African American men have participated in every American war since the Revolutionary War (Allen, 1989: Harris, 2014). These soldiers had to overcome exclusion and discrimination and were often relegated to undesirable tasks, typically the most dangerous or most menial (Allen, 1989). They were often put on the frontline of combat and assigned dangerous jobs stateside like loading bombs on Naval ships. Most

African American veterans served in segregated units. The military did not outlaw segregation until well after the conclusion of World War II in 1948 (Harris, 2014).

The essence of the discrimination African American veterans endured during World War II can be captured in one tragic incident—the explosion at Port Chicago, and the so-called mutiny that followed. The Second World War took place between 1939 and 1945. Before the landmark Supreme Court Case, Brown vs. the Board of Education in 1954, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, segregation was common in most areas of American life. Some of the notable events and activities of the 1930s with racial implications included Italy's invasion of Ethiopia and the rise of Hitler's regime. In sports, Jesse Owens won four gold medals in Berlin, Germany, and Joe Louis defeated Max Schmeling in their second fight (Allen, 1989). Even though there were joyous moments that brought people together, the deep economic depression that hit the country hard, hit the African American community even harder. While African Americans had fought to participate in previous wars, there was a loud cry for them to focus on democracy and freedom at home (Allen, 1989; Herbold, 1994). In spite of the discrimination they faced, African Americans served valiantly in every conflict. One of the most celebrated combat units was the Tuskegee Airmen of the 99th Pursuit Squadron and the 332 Fighter group (Harris, 2014). The Tuskegee Airmen were the subject of the 2012 George Lucas film *Red Tails.*

On July 17, 1944, a devastating explosion led to the death of 320 men—of which 202 were African American—on two Navy ships, the E.A. Bryan and the Quinalt (Allen, 1989). Many more people were injured. The Port Chicago disaster caused the largest domestic loss of lives during World War II (Allen, 1989). The explosion was the result

of soldiers handling bombs with little training, and under constant pressure from white superior officers to work as fast as possible. The work stoppage following the explosion at the Port Chicago Naval Magazine, near the San Francisco Bay Area was characterized by commanding officers as "mutiny." Robert Small was stationed at Port Chicago, and said that the officers would make bets to see which unit could load the ships the fastest (Allen, 1989). Other seaman stated that they were given incentives and extra privileges if they loaded the ships faster than other units.

After an investigation of the events that led to the disaster, the judge advocate questioned the role of the black enlisted personnel:

> The consensus of opinion of the witnesses and—practically admitted by the interested parties—is that the colored enlisted personnel are neither temperamentally or intellectually capable of handling high explosives. As one witness has stated, sixty percent of the lowest intellectual strata of the men sent out of Great Lakes were sent out to Port Chicago. These men, it is testified, could not understand the orders which were given to them and the only way they could be made to understand what they should do was by actual demonstration…It is an admitted fact, supported by the testimony of the witnesses that there was rough and careless handling of the explosives being loaded aboard the ships at Port Chicago. (Allen, 1989, p. 70-71)

The judge advocate attacked the intelligence of the soldiers and blamed them for the explosion when they were following the orders of their superior officers. After the white officers were absolved of responsibility, the seamen were expected to resume their duties of loading ships. When many of them refused, 50 of them were brought up on charges of

mutiny and sentenced to as many as fifteen years in prison. NAACP lawyer Thurgood Marshall was able to secure their release from prison on appeal (Allen, 1989). However, they were not immediately discharged from the Navy and had to return to military service.

After World War II, veterans of color still served in the military at high rates and faced unfair treatment. Native Americans served in subsequent conflicts including, the Korean and Vietnam Wars and The Gulf War, Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation New Dawn. By March 19, 2003, Chicanos/as and Latinos/as made up close to 10% of active duty military and almost 18% of combat troops. During the Vietnam War, black lives were lost at a disproportionately high rate (Harris, 2014). At the time, African Americans were 11% of the population but they comprised 20% of all combat deaths (Harris, 2014). After being pressured, the military made changes and these rates were reduced. The discrimination faced by Asian Americans has persisted and in 2011, Private Danny Chen of the US Army committed suicide in Afghanistan after enduring persistent harassment and physical abuse by his fellow soldiers. Eight soldiers were charged with hazing after Private Chen's death (Harris, 2014).

Soldiers and officers of color have shown their commitment to the military through their many accomplishments. Their unique contributions should not be overlooked. Allen's study was quite comprehensive. He interviewed as many survivors of the Port Chicago blast as he could. Even though the interviews took place decades after the horrific event, one does not forget such an experience. They provided many details that painted a clear picture of that specific event and their overall experience in the

Navy during World War II. While there has been progress in the treatment of African American veterans and other veterans of color, there is still work to be done.

African American Veterans in Higher Education

African Americans did not benefit from the GI Bill as they should have. Institutionalized racism and segregation in higher education and society at large prevented many of them from fully using their GI Bill benefits in the late 1940s (Herbold, 1994; Humes, 2006). Turner and Bound (2003) found that, "For white men, the combination of World War II service and the availability of the GI Bill benefits had substantial positive effects on collegiate attainment" (p. 171). This was not the case for black veterans particularly in the southern states when compared to other parts of the country. Widespread segregation, particularly in southern colleges and universities in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi and South Carolina, severely limited their options (Turner & Bound, 2003).

Black veterans were not allowed to attend segregated universities, and overcrowding at HBCUs made it difficult for all interested veterans to gain admission. Much of the literature on veterans after World War II addressed the racial inequality in the administration of the GI Bill in a segregated society. Herbold argued that while the bill helped people, African Americans were clearly at a disadvantage because of racism. Basically, there was never a level playing field as the title asserts.

While the GI Bill was supposed to be a race neutral initiative, one of the GI Bill's sponsors, Senator John Rankin opposed equal rights. He was an advocate for white veterans, but he wanted black soldiers to be relegated to roles of servitude (Herbold, 1994). In 1920, Rankin wrote an editorial on the tragic epidemic of lynching after the

1917 Armstice. He argued that African American soldiers had become "more brutal and bold" after passing for "sunburnt Yankees or Native Americans overseas and felt they could approach and pursue white women. He insisted that each black soldier would believe that his military service would "make him a peer of the white man and place him on terms of social and political equality with members of the Caucasian race" (Herbold, 1994, p. 104). The architects of this bill knew that it could never be race neutral in an environment of de jure and de facto racism.

There was a major shift in higher education in the United States after World War II and the implementation of the GI Bill. Predominately white universities expanded their mission and services to accommodate white veterans (Altbach et al., 2011). The increase in veterans seeking college degrees forced colleges to change their emphasis from classical education to fields like engineering and economics. Working class Americans were given the opportunity to pursue a college education, which led to a rise in the white middle class. While HBCUs experienced growth, the black middle class did not expand at the same rate. African American veterans' opportunities for higher education and advancement were limited by overcrowding at HBCUs and disparities in funding for K-12 education (Bannier, 2006). In 1940, less than 2% of the African American population had graduated from college, and the enrollment at HBCUs was 43,003. By 1950, the population at HBCUs had grown to 76,600. Due to their limited facilities, between 1946 and 1947, they turned away between 20,000 and 50,000 veterans (Bannier, 2006; Herbold, 1994). Herbold's article is significant because it explains the paradoxical nature of the GI Bill as a race neutral initiative in a segregated society.

Just as Herbold's article argued that African Americans did not benefit from the GI Bill as much as they should have, research conducted by Humes (2006) as well as Turner and Bound (2003) revealed that African Americans were encouraged to pursue vocational careers after World War II. According to accounts from veterans, many of the Veterans Affairs counselors argued that there were limited opportunities for University educated blacks at that time and they would be better off learning a trade. The African American veterans who defied these counselors and insisted on obtaining a college degree, were part of an educated middle class that helped in the fight for Civil Rights (Humes, 2006).

Historically Black Colleges and Universities and the Evolution of Their Curriculum

Historically black colleges and universities are enduring monuments of the tremendous economic and academic growth made by African Americans after experiencing the suppression, oppression and tyranny of the horrific institution known as American slavery (Stampp, 1989). During the Trans-Atlantic Slave trade, Africans were brought to South America, North America and the Caribbean Islands. There were many atrocities committed against enslaved Africans in the United States to maintain fear and control as the European colonizers sought to build wealth (Stampp, 1989). One of those atrocities was preventing Africans from acquiring an education (Douglass, 2015). Not long after the emancipation proclamation was signed by President Lincoln in 1863, many HBCUs were founded (Anderson, 1988). They were established to provide instruction to formerly enslaved Africans, to help prepare them for a variety of new career options. Many of the schools began as vocational schools but the demand for more educated

professionals forced them to change their mission to train students for careers in fields like law and medicine (Anderson, 1988).

HBCUs have made it possible for many African Americans to access higher education and pursue a wide range of desirable and profitable career options (Brady, Eatman & Parker, 2000). In 1900 there were approximately 4,000 African Americans enrolled in HBCUs and this number increased to about 29,000 between 1900 and 1930 (Avery, 2009). In 2011, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that 263,414 students were enrolled in HBCUs and about 81% of these students were African American. Even though only 14% of African American students choose to attend HBCUs, they are still very important in the educational landscape as admission standards continue to rise at flagship and other state universities. Only a select few from any cultural background will have the opportunity to attend the most selective colleges (Avarette, 2014). The prominent role HBCUs have played in the ability of African Americans to access higher education is clearly evident. Nearly 70% of all African Americans who have earned college degrees since the establishment of the United States, received their degrees from HBCUs (Avery, 2009).

HBCUs have a long history in the United States. The curriculum at the first institutions during reconstruction reflected the double consciousness W.E.B DuBois described in *The Souls of Black Folk*. "Double consciousness" is a term used to describe an individual whose identity is divided into several facets. According to DuBois, "It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro; two

souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (DuBois, 1903, pp. 12-14). When historically black colleges and universities were founded this twoness was reflected in their mission. The administrators pushed for the free men and women to acquire the skills needed to succeed in a white supremacist society.

Anderson (1988) provides a great deal of detail about the evolution of HBCUs. He covers the educational and schooling experience of African Americans from 1860 to 1930. He explains how some of the institutions now known as colleges and universities began as normal cultural and industrial institutes like Hampton and Tuskegee (Anderson, 1988). The primary goal for many of these schools was to train teachers and teach industrial and agricultural skills. While many newly freed Africans envisioned broader educational opportunities, some of the early principals and benefactors wanted African Americans to focus on trades and the service industry. Samuel Chapman Armstrong established Hampton's curriculum, values, and ethos, based upon his social class and ideology. These ideals differed greatly from those of the formerly enslaved men and women who started the Sabbath schools and other public schools immediately after emancipation. They wanted to challenge the forces that had held black people back for centuries. Armstrong wanted to avoid confrontation and maintain the status quo. After Booker T. Washington started Tuskegee Institute, the mission of normal schools represented the "Hampton-Tuskegee Idea" (Anderson, 1988). While Washington presented a program of industrial education, conciliation of the south and submission and silence in the face of inequality, DuBois wanted black people to educate themselves as much as they could and not limit themselves to specific careers (DuBois, 1903). The

push for industrial education was primarily to placate affluent whites. Instead of black people educating themselves as they wished, they had to educate themselves as the educational leaders deemed necessary in a racist society.

There were some historically black colleges and universities that respected African Americans and their desire to be educated without limitations. Henry L. Morehouse, the corresponding secretary for the Northern Baptist Mission Society described the need for a "talented tenth," in the following way, "In all ages the mighty impulses that have propelled a people onward in their progressive career, have proceeded from a few gifted souls" (Anderson, 1988, p. 200). He felt the "talented tenth" should be educated so they could develop "thoroughly disciplined minds." As the 20th century approached, there was a shift in the curriculum at HBCUs to incorporate more Greek and Roman scholarship. This took place at schools like Fisk, Atlanta and Howard (Anderson, 1988). There was a consensus that leaders need more than just industrial education. As DuBois and Carter G. Woodson emerged as forces in higher education, these institutions began to include the study of black life and culture in their curriculum. This marked the beginning of Afrocentricity in the curriculum at HBCUs. The mission of many of these institutions evolved a great deal in the 1960s following the Civil Rights Movement, and the onset of the black power movement. Black Studies and African American Studies began to emerge as a discipline on a number of campuses (Asante, 1998).

The shift in the curriculum at HBCUs was necessary. It was only appropriate that these institutions taught the truth about the culture and heritage of the ancestors of the majority of the students. For people of African descent, the theory of Afrocentricity served as a prescription for the ideological domination caused by hundreds of years of

colonization. Antonio Gramsci called this domination, hegemony (Gramsci, 1967). Carter G. Woodson explains ideological domination below:

> If you can control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his action. When you determine what a man shall think you do not have to concern yourself about what he will do. If you make a man feel that he is inferior, you do not have to compel him to accept an inferior status, for he will seek it himself. If you make a man think that he is justly an outcast, you do not have to order him to the back door. He will go without being told; and if there is no back door, his very nature will demand one. (Woodson, 1933, p. xiii)

Afrocentricity calls for a psychological orientation in which African ideals are placed at the center of analysis that involves African culture and behavior (Asante, 1998). Afrocentricity removes Europe from the center of the African reality (Asante, 1998).

Western educational institutions have concealed many truths about world history to maintain an image of superiority over people of color. These institutions have systematically excluded the accomplishments and contributions of great African civilizations (Williams, 1987). According to Western scholars, intellectual thought originated from Europeans. Herodotus was considered the father of history and Homer the author of the *Iliad* and *The Odyssey* was considered the first known author in Europe and one of the greatest epic poets. Other Greek scholars included Socrates (470-399 BCE) who is known as one of the founders of Western Philosophy. His student Plato (428-348 BCE) was the founder of the Academy of Athens, the first institution of higher learning in the Western world. Aristotle (384-322 BCE) was a Greek philosopher and scientist and he developed the first comprehensive system of Western philosophy.

However, there are other works that precede these Western texts. One of these works is the religious text, *The Book of the Coming Forth by Day and Night* written by the Kemetians around 2500 BCE. The Greeks called them Egyptians. The first book ever written was *The Teachings of Ptah-Hotep* around 2700 BCE (Hilliard, Williams & Damali, 2012).

While Greece is known for its early philosophers and institutions of higher learning, the first university was actually located at Waset in Africa around 1750 BCE. The ancient Egyptians were very learned people who had knowledge of fine art, architecture, science, mathematics, and medicine to name a few. Imhotep built the first pyramid about 2,000 years before Hippocrates, the Greek father of medicine was born. In West Africa the three prominent centers of learning were located at Jenne, Gao and Timbuktu (Williams, 1987). The University of Sankore at Timbuktu was known for its high standard for scholarship in the 15th and 16th centuries (Williams, 1987). The University had the following disciplines: the Faculty of Law; Medicine and Surgery; Letters; Grammar; Geography; and Art. Some of the African scholars at that time were Mahmud Kati, Rahman es Sadi and Ahmad Babo (Williams, 1987). Babo was the last African to serve as president of the University of Sankore. These early universities on the continent were clearly African and scholars from other parts of the world came to study under these great professors. This history is often excluded and the truth about early civilizations is distorted to elevate western history and culture.

In the 1960s, HBCU students went to extreme measures to get the curriculum to reflect their African heritage. In 1968, the students of Howard University took over the administration building (PBS, n.d.). Initially they wanted to protest the policies of the

University's president, but their concerns and demands grew. They wanted the University to establish an African American History and Culture Department, hire a Black president, and provide courses that gave them the opportunity to make meaningful connections with the working class communities that surrounded the Howard University campus (PBS, n.d.). The student protest was successful. There began to be a major change in the mission, curriculum and governance on HBCU campuses across the country (Asante, 1998).

The Impact of Veterans on HBCUs

Veterans who used the G.I. Bill have had an enduring impact on colleges and universities. Enrollment at HBCUs increased by 100% in the late 1940s (Herbold, 1994). Before the education benefits were announced, 7% of soldiers stated that they wanted to pursue higher education upon their return to civilian life, but after the news spread of these benefits the number soared to 43% (Turner & Bound, 2003). The influx of students necessitated a change and forced campuses to improve their facilities, admissions procedures, curricula and pedagogies (Altbach et al., 2011). While there were a limited number of opportunities for African Americans to enroll in state colleges and universities in the north (Turner & Bound, 2003), this was not the case in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi and South Carolina. The schools where African American veterans were most accepted, were historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). There were about 100 at that time and the many were filled to capacity after World War II (Herbold, 1994). African American veterans had a significant impact in HBCUs. The GI Bill was passed at a time when there was a major shift taking place in higher education. It was being made available to the masses and not just the elite (Herbold, 1994; Humes, 2006).

In spite of limited options in higher education, African American veterans made lasting contributions to HBCUs, at a time when growth and stability were needed.

Veteran Transition from the Military Context to the Higher Education Context

There is a Yoruba (Nigerian) proverb that says, "It takes a whole village to raise a child." Similarly, higher education professionals often say, "It takes an entire university to graduate a student." This is certainly the case with student veterans. The transition from the military context to civilian society can be challenging. It can be even more challenging to add the transition to higher education, which is completely different from the military. According to David Vacchi (2012), higher education institutions are often very competitive and individualistic while veterans have been acculturated to put their unit first. DiRamio et al. (2008), and Wheeler (2014) provide recent data on the challenges veterans are facing and what can be done to improve their educational outcomes. While most of the literature speaks in general terms and does not mention race, one scholar, Alfred Ottley (2014), focuses on African American veterans and their transition to higher education.

There are many misconceptions about student veterans. They are by no means a monolithic group. Some have a high military identity and are very open about their military experience. Others have low military identity and do not care to reveal their past military experiences. One of the reasons some veterans keep their military status to themselves is because of widespread misconceptions about veterans. Vacchi (2012) argues that some scholars exaggerate difficulties to call attention to the needs of veterans but that is not necessary. For example, they may suggest that posttraumatic stress disorder and other disabilities are more prevalent than they actually are. Vacchi (2012)

points to research of over 800,000 student veterans that suggests that veterans have no more difficulty adjusting to college than others. When veterans are characterized in any way, the scholar must back up their assertions with accurate data.

Another factor that higher education institutions must consider when working with veterans is the military socialization or acculturation process (Vacchi, 2012). Unlike most World War II, Korea and Vietnam veterans, for the most part, post-9/11 veterans came in after the elimination of the draft in 1973. Current veterans are more educated than ever before (NCES, 2016). Basic training or boot camp is an experience where recruits are expected to unlearn youthful habits and learn the military way. Usually the longer a veteran has spent in the military the greater the impact of this process. Soldiers are taught to think about the team. Some veterans express frustration by the individualistic nature of higher education in America. Some veterans have had to endure severe physical and psychological trauma, but they find it difficult to ask for help even when they really need it. Colleges and universities must be aware of some of these dispositions (Vacchi, 2014).

Literature on veterans' transition to higher education often uses adult transition and student development theories and models to describe this experience for veterans. Schlossberg's Theory of Adult Transitions (1984) is the guiding theoretical framework to describe the reintegration process. The three stage model developed by Schlossberg, Lynch and Chickering (1984) consists of: *moving in* which is when individuals learn the new expectations in their new environment; *moving through* which is when an individual begins to understand the new environment and has learned to balance the demands of the new environment with the other aspects of his or her life; and *moving out* is when the

cycle begins again because the previous transition has ended. This model is used and adapted in studies done by DiRamio et al. (2008), and Wheeler (2014). According to Vacchi, some college impact models (Tinto, 1993; Wideman, 1989) identify three stages of a micro-chronosystem: initial transition to college, academic achievement and transition out of college. This also applies to student veterans. The Ecological Systems Theory developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner proposes that the human experience takes place in a web of nested environments. Vacchi combines his Model for Student Veteran Support with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model (1993) to create the Combined Ecological Model for Student Veterans. Vacchi's Model for Student Veteran Support consists of: 1) services provided to veterans; 2) support to overcome obstacles during the transition to, and through college; 3) faculty interaction; and 4) peer and general campus support. This model is the microsystem that takes place within the mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem. This combined model is impacted by economic, social and cultural trends. These various theories and models are useful. They are the building blocks for models to better understand and serve veterans.

The literature shows that veterans face a variety of challenges that higher education institutions should address. In Wheeler's (2014) study on veterans at community colleges, there were several themes that emerged. They included academic preparation, community college experience, campus services, orientation, military influence on education, personal connections, family and significant others, pre-military friends, military friends, peers, and benefits bureaucracy. The findings led to many implications for practice. The author emphasized the fact the veteran student population has unique needs so a Veterans' Service Office should be set up on each campus.

Veteran students also need health workers who understand PTSD and Traumatic Brain Injury. Clubs and activities could help veterans connect with one another outside of the classroom (Wheeler, 2014).

DiRamio uses Schlossberg's framework to describe the experiences of his participants. They chose to join the military for many different reasons including the 9/11 terror attacks, economic reasons, educational benefits and family tradition (moving in). They also learned the process of adjusting to deployments and the military culture. Once deployed, they were forced to learn the culture of the country they served and the realities of life as a soldier in an active war (moving through). The participants described the last stage of military service (moving out) and their feelings of re-entering civilian life. After being away, so much was unknown. The researchers also spoke about programs like the Transition Assistance Program. The purpose of the article was to uncover strategies to assist veterans as they adjust to college life (moving in).

Some of the more practical things colleges and universities can do to make life easier include: awarding credit for military training, accepting transfer credit for college courses taken while in the military, patience with GI Bill processing (which often happens after deadlines for payment), waiving health care requirements for those with VA health coverage, improving bursar practices, and improving the quality of faculty and advisor interactions with students (Vacchi, 2012).

For-Profit Colleges and Universities

For-profit institutions are known for their heavy recruitment of veterans. This is not a new phenomenon. After World War II, there was a major increase of vocational schools that were established to meet the needs of the returning veterans of all races. The

institutions were also intent on getting as much GI Bill money as they possibly could. Before the war there were about 100 of these private vocational schools. After the war, the number grew to more than 10,000 by 1950 (Humes, 2003). These schools offered training for careers from cooking to aviation. While some of these schools were legitimate, others were not. They basically just took the veterans' hard earned benefits and offered little in return. African American veterans were often targeted. The lack of federal oversight allowed this to take place. Ultimately, many of these schools were shut down after a congressional investigation discovered the corruption (Humes, 2003).

The number of for-profit colleges and universities (FPCUs) offering associate's and bachelor's degrees in the United States in 1976 was 55. By 2006, the number of FPCUs in the United States grew to 986 (Altbach et al., 2011). While smaller colleges have closed down unexpectedly, some of the larger colleges are actually thriving financially with their current business model (Sander, 2012). FPCUs are a growing sector in higher education.

FPCUs are shifting to do the following: focus more on the needs of the employer; compete with traditional colleges and universities (TCUs) for the same students; partner with traditional colleges; extend the market to include high schools; and knit together fragmented student coursework. (Hentschke et al., 2010). The race and social class of many of the students who obtain degrees from FPCUs is striking. FPCUs initially focused their recruitment efforts on people who were less represented at TCUs. Many of these students are low income, first generation. In 2005-2006, 37% of students enrolled in FPCUs were from underrepresented groups compared to 20% in private, non-profit TCUs. Data from 2008 indicate that underrepresented students at FPCUs made up as

much as 43% of the total student population. These numbers show that many students who were not served well in high school, graduated underprepared for higher education. There is a lot that high schools can do to help create a culture of success.

When Lechuga (2010) examined the various roles and responsibilities of 52 faculty members (22 part-time and 32 full-time), from four different FPCUs (which offered certificates, as well as associate's, bachelor's, master's and doctorate degrees) he found that the faculty on each campus was very diverse with respect to their level of education and professional experience in the field in which they taught. Many faculty members were contract hires so there was very little job security beyond the contract. Fewer than 5% of the faculty on two of the campuses were full-time. They focused on hiring faculty and staff more than teaching. The other two institutions had mostly full time faculty. The faculty typically has limited control over the curriculum. Ironically, most of the faculty at the FPCUs (all but two) received all of their education from TCUs (Hentschke et al., 2010).

A Successful HBCU Veteran Student Program

There are a number of Veterans Affairs Programs at HBCUs that successfully recruit, retain and graduate veteran students. One of these institutions is Fayetteville State University (FSU). The main campus is located near Fort Bragg. FSU also has a campus on the military base. Classes are offered on the base and the director has an office there as well. FSU serves both active duty personnel and veterans. Of the 5,410 students enrolled in 2014, approximately 500 used the Post 9/11 G.I. Bill. Cooper (2014) profiled the HBCUs that were excelling in their efforts with student veterans. In that article, Veronica Alexander, director of military-affiliated services at FSU stated that the

veterans graduate at the same rate or better than the general student population. The FSU presence on a military base helps with recruitment, but they also use other marketing strategies like newspaper and magazine advertisements in military periodicals. Most veterans take classes on the main campus, which is 20 minutes from the Fort Bragg. Across the street from campus there is a tutorial center specifically for veterans that helps with retention and graduation. There are also student organizations like the Student Veterans Association (SVA).

The Academic Achievement of Veterans

US veterans have all sacrificed to earn their educational benefits and the United States government has spent a lot of money to provide them with these benefits. After World War II, 7.8 million veterans used the GI Bill to access higher education (Bannier, 2006). They received $7 billion in education benefits; that amount was about $40 billion in 2005 (Bannier 2006). Between 2009 and 2013, after the Post 9/11 GI Bill went into effect in 2009, over one million veterans, active duty service persons and their relatives received over 30 billion dollars in education benefits (US Department of Education, 2016; United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2013). Of the 16 million US veterans called to service during World War II, there were over 400,000 who perished during that war. Of the 3.7 million veterans who served in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, nearly 7,000 veterans have died while serving (Defense Casualty Analysis System, 2016). All veterans have paid a steep price for their benefits. To track the United States' great investment, there is a need to study the academic achievement of veterans who are receiving these benefits.

In 1940, higher education was for the elite. Before World War II, about 10% of Americans attended college. Most traditional colleges and universities refused to admit African Americans at that time and about 85% of them attended HBCUs. In 1940, HBCU graduates were 1.2% of college educated Americans (Bannier, 2005). When the GI Bill was passed in 1944, the Veterans Administration estimated that about 700,000 would use the bill for educational purposes, but about 50% of the World War II veteran population used it for education. World War II veterans used these benefits to pursue a wide range of training, certificates and degrees. About 2.2 million used the benefit to get on the job or farm training; 3.5 million used it to attend vocational schools; and 2.2 million used it to attend college and universities (Buckley, 2004).

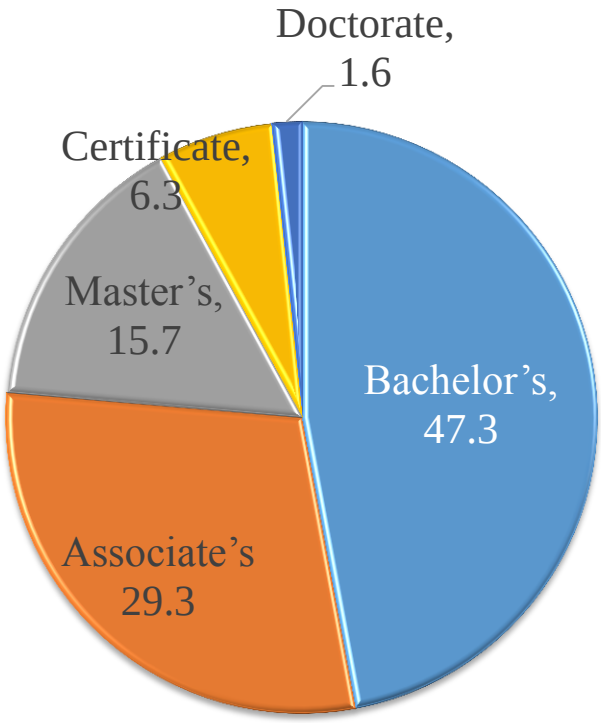
As previously stated, college enrollment soared between 1940 and 1950. In 1942, about 213,000 college degrees were conferred across the nation, and in 1951 this number increased to 454,000 (Bannier, 2006). Veterans made up 49% of all college students in 1947. In 1947, 35% of all students enrolled in HBCUs were veterans (Gasman et al., 2008). Between 1940 and 1950, enrollment at HBCUs increased to the point that they were unable to admit 55% of the African American veterans who wanted to enroll. The Lantham Act of 1946 increased funding at HBCUs and aided in expansion but the degrees granted varied greatly by race. This lack of access to higher education had a major impact on their academic achievement. Only 6% of African American veterans earned college degrees after World War II. More than three times as many white veterans (19%) earned college degrees during the same timeframe (Bannier, 2006).

The academic achievement of post-9/11 veterans is of interest to many different stakeholders: the United States government, taxpayers, higher education institutions and

veterans themselves. Since the Post-9/11 GI Bill is relatively new (passed in 2008, available in 2009), there a limited number of studies that have been done. Some of these studies present data that argues post-9/11 veterans have a high postsecondary dropout rate and others argue that these veterans are completing postsecondary programs at high rates. Many studies are limited by small sample sizes and the lack of homogeneity in their samples. One study that has attempted to provide accurate data on this matter is *A Review of Veteran Achievement in Higher Education* by the Million Records Project produced by the Student Veterans of America in 2014. This quantitative study used data from the Veterans Administration. The National Student Clearing House and the Student Veterans of America joined forced to acquire completion data for one million student veterans who used their benefits between 2002 and 2010. During this time, 4,067,476 veterans used the Montgomery GI Bill and Post-9/11 GI Bill. After removing the people who used both at some point, or switched once the Post-9/11 GI Bill became available, the total sample was 788,915 (Student Veterans of America, 2014).

Between 2002 and 2010, the participants were 21% female. The initial school sector enrollment was 79.2% public; 10.7% private non-profit; 10.1% for-profit (proprietary) (Student Veterans of America, 2014). The branch of service of the participants was 18.1% Air Force; 39.7 Army; 1.5% Coast Guard; 17.1% Marine Corps; 23.5% Navy. The study found that the overall completion rate for veteran participants was 51.7% or 404,483. Of this 51.7%, 6.3% earned certificates; 29.2% earned associate's degrees; 47.3% earned bachelor's degrees; 15.7% earned masters and 1.6% earned doctorate degrees (Cate, 2014). The overall completion rate will increase because the data included veterans who are still enrolled, and will eventually finish.

Figure 2



Degrees Earned by Post-9/11 Veterans in the *Million Veterans Project*

The time to completion rates of veterans typically varies because they are nontraditional students with personal and professional obligations. There are several paths that veterans take on their way to completing a certificate or a degree. The Million Records Project presents three hypothesized completions paths. *Path Alpha* is when the student veteran pursues higher education after fulfilling his or her military contract. *Path Beta* is when the student veteran takes courses while in the reserves or National Guard

but takes breaks during deployments and activations. *Path Gamma* is when the student veteran takes classes prior to enlisting in the military and re-enrolls upon completion of their military service. These different paths shed light on the varying time to degree rates and completion rates of veterans.

Summary

The literature on African American veterans covers the social, political and economic factors that have impacted their enrollment and academic achievement from World War II to the present. When the first GI Bill was passed in 1944, many African American veterans were pushed to vocational education over college degrees. The veterans who were able to access higher education were typically restricted to HBCUs. Between 1946 and 1949, African American veterans made up approximately 30% of the HBCU student population. Broader access to TCUs and the proliferation of FPCUs have led to a decline in veteran enrollment at HBCUs. In spite of the decline in veteran enrollment at HBCUs, there are some HBCUs that successfully recruit veterans. Higher education institutions must address the transitional needs of veterans to effectively promote veteran student success. The literature on the academic achievement of recent veterans specifically, is still emerging because of the recent passing of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, but there is some reliable data that reveals the completion rates of veterans is 51.7%. Studies are needed that focus on the academic achievement and transitional needs of African American veterans who attend HBCUs.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHOD

The purpose of this study was to examine the academic achievement of African American Post-9/11 veterans at historically black colleges and universities. This case study helps to inform policy makers and higher education administrators on the impact of quality student services for veterans on college campuses. It also provides valuable information about other support systems that help student veterans achieve their academic goals. Critical Race Resilience Theory (CRRT) frames the exploration of the evolution of higher education options of African American veterans from World War II to the present and their academic achievement at historically black colleges and universities. CRRT is a combination of critical race theory (CRT) and resilience theory.

Theoretical Framework

CRT was derived from critical legal studies and is found in the early work of Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman. Critical legal studies favored a form of law that addressed the specificity of individuals and groups in social and cultural contexts over traditional legal scholarship that emphasizes doctrinal and policy analysis (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Gloria Ladson Billings compiled the work of other scholars to summarize the four tenets of critical race theory in the article "Just What is Critical Race Theory and What Is It Doing in a Nice Field Like Education?" (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

According to Billings, the first premise of CRT asserts that racism is "normal, not aberrant in American society" and a permanent fixture in American society (Delgado,

1995). Derrick Bell proclaimed that racism is permanent. Bell's 1998 book, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism*, challenges readers with complex and compelling narratives that reveal his views on the impact of race and class in the United States. The subtitle alone is a bold statement about the very controversial issue.

The second premise argues that critical race theory uses storytelling to "analyze myths, presuppositions, and received wisdoms that make up the common culture about race that render Blacks and other minorities one-down" (Delgado, 1995, p. xiv). This is perhaps one of the reasons law professor and scholar Derrick Bell wrote short stories about race and class. By doing so, he made the concepts of critical race theory accessible to people outside of academia who were more likely to read fiction over academic journals when given the choice. One of the stories from that book "The Space Traders" presents the case of aliens coming to planet earth and landing in the United States. They offered enough gold to pay the national debt and scientific and technological benefits to make life better in exchange for all of the black people. The story focused on how the United States government grappled with this proposition and the subtitle of the book provides a clue on the final decision.

The third tenet asserts that critical race theory requires the critique of liberalism because liberalism does not have the mechanism to institute the major changes needed to address the damaging effects of racism (Crenshaw, 1988). Crenshaw argued that working through the law takes a long time. Racism requires a great deal of work and liberalism is unable to address all of the areas that need improvement.

The fourth tenet contends that Civil Rights legislation primarily benefitted white Americans. Even though affirmative action often faces scrutiny because some feel that it

gives advantages to people who have not earned them, white women benefitted greatly from affirmative action (Guy-Sheftall, 1993). In the case of Abigail Fisher vs. University of Texas at Austin, the Supreme Court decided in June of 2016 to uphold the affirmative action program at the University of Texas (Liptak, 2016). The University's Top Ten Percent Program which has facilitated racial and ethnic diversity on the campus was in question. Ms. Fisher is a white female and she believed that she was not admitted because of her race. In the context of CRT, this is a bit ironic.

The other theory that informs Critical Race Resilience is Resilience Theory. Resilience is the ability to overcome adversity, and be successful in spite of exposure to high risk (Fraser et. al, 1999). People who are resilient have the ability to sustain their competence under pressure and the capacity to heal from trauma (Masten, 1994) "In Resilience: Theory and Research for Social Work Practice" (2002), Roberta Greene lists the key theoretical assumptions of resilience. First of all, resilience is a *biopsychosocial spiritual phenomenon*, which *involves a transactional dynamic process of person-environment exchanges*. It *encompasses an adaptational process of goodness-of-fit.*

Resilience is often a collective process that is demonstrated over time. Essentially it *occurs across the life course with individuals, families, and communities experiencing unique paths of development*. Resilience is different for everyone and the process of recovering from trauma *is linked to life stress and people's unique coping capacity.* Since recovery takes place for most people while they handle a variety of everyday tasks, resilience *involves competence in daily functioning*. Resilience *may be on a continuum–a polar opposite to risk* and it *may be interactive, having an effect in combination with risk factors.*

Research on post-traumatic growth finds that people do not always need to see a professional after a difficult life-changing experience (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2013). Research has shown that individuals who have faced trauma, can get better with the support of a caring and consistent friend or loved one. Similarly, Green asserts that resilience *is enhanced through connection or relatedness with others.* It is also *influenced by diversity including ethnicity, race, gender, age, sexual orientation, economic status, religious affiliation, and physical and mental ability.* Resilience is *expressed and affected by multilevel attachments, including family, school, peers, neighborhood, community, and society* as well as *the availability of environmental resources.* Finally, resilience is *influenced by power differentials.*

Research Design

A qualitative research approach was selected to explore the academic achievement of African American post-9/11 veterans attending HBCUs. According to Creswell, "Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem" (Creswell, 1998, p. 15). The researcher does this by building a complex, holistic picture, analyzing worlds, reporting detailed views of informants and conducting the study in a natural setting (Creswell, 1998). A qualitative research method is appropriate because it is the best method to provide a space for the voices of this unique population of student veterans. According to Merriam (1998), the qualitative approach helps to describe social phenomena.

Yin (2014) provides a twofold definition of a case study. It is an "empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the case) in depth and within a

real world context especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident" (Yin, 2014, p. 16). He also emphasizes that a case study inquiry "copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points; relies on multiple sources of evidence with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion; and benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis" (Yin, 2014, p. 17).

The descriptive case study approach helped to assess the efficacy of a variety of support systems and methods of intervention. This method provides data that explains the causal effects (Yin, 2014). This study used a descriptive case study method to capture data on current student veterans. This specific type of case study framed with critical race resilience theory, guided the study because the descriptive case study method "presents a complete description of a phenomenon within its context" (Yin, 2003, p. 5).

The data sources used in this study for triangulation were first and second interviews with each participant as well as Veterans Affairs education benefits policies. The literature review and the education policy review will provide context for the participant interviews.

Participants

The participants were selected using a criterion-*i* purposeful sampling method. Criterion-*i*, is a purposeful sampling strategy in which "participants are drawn from agencies, organizations or systems involved in the implementation process…based on the assumption that they (the participants) possess knowledge and experience with the phenomenon of interest and thus will be able to provide information that is both detailed (depth) and generalizable (breadth)" (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan &

Hoagwood, 2013). Direct recruitment was used to locate participants. With the cooperation of Director and VA Liaison of the Student Veteran's Center at Major Martin R. Delany State University, recruitment emails were sent to enrolled student veterans. Martin R. Delany State University was selected, because they have a relatively high number of enrolled student veterans and a number of student services and programs designed to help student veterans succeed. Referral sampling also known as snowball sampling was also used to locate participants willing to be interviewed for the study.

The recruitment goal was 8 to 12 student veterans and this goal was based upon the belief that a sample of that size would provide the appropriate amount of data to adequately answer the research questions. There were seven participants but the data collected was very rich. To make sure that the selected participants met the desired criteria, they were asked to sign a disclosure statement to verify that he or she is African American and had served in the United States Armed Forces following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. While the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill offers a very generous educational benefit, this study was open to students who received other forms of tuition assistance. Post-9/11veterans were selected because they can provide information that can add to the current literature. They were also selected because they have had to demonstrate resilience to overcome the trauma of serving their country—in a war zone in many cases—and also the challenge of attending college as non-traditional adult students. There is a great deal of literature on African American veterans who attended college after World War II. Segregation at that time made it very difficult for veterans. Post-9/11 veterans are in college during a time when there are many higher education options

available to them. Qualitative data helped to explain the changes in education from the time the G.I. Bill was first offered to African American veterans to the present.

Data Collection

Primary data for this study were collected through individual interviews after approval was granted from the Institutional Review Board at UNCC and MRDSU. The effectiveness of the interview protocol was tested with doctoral students and veterans who were not included in the study. The interview questions were arranged to help provide a coherent narrative of the student veteran's educational experience and academic achievement. All of the initial interviews took place in person and were recorded on a digital audio recorder. First interviews lasted from 60 minutes to 90 minutes. Student veterans were invited to schedule a first individual interview at a time that worked best for them. After transcribing first interview transcripts, the author contacted students to schedule a second interview to check the transcript for accuracy and elaborate on points that they made and also respond to the researcher's additional questions. Student veterans were interviewed twice. All interview participants were asked to invite other participants to be interviewed who met the criteria of the study. All interviews were transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process began during data collection. After carefully reviewing the interview transcripts, recurring themes were identified. This process is also known as line by line coding. According to Charmaz (1983), "qualitative coding…means creating categories from interpretations of data." After the initial coding, subcategories were

identified. Atlas ti, a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software, was used to analyze the data. This entailed the insertion of the codes into the software package and then going through all of the interviews to identify quotes that matched the code. The software quantified the number of times a specific code was supported by a veteran in the interview data. This helped the researcher identify the themes that appeared most often and specific quotes that verified the findings.

The data analysis was done through the framework of critical race resilience theory. Student veterans, those who have spent time in war zones and those who have not, have experienced trauma and loss. Their desire to pursue higher education speaks to their resilience and ability to overcome difficult experiences and focus on preparing for a brighter future. Critical race resilience was crucial in the examination of the academic achievement of post-9/11 veterans at HBCUs.

Trustworthiness

Creswell lists eight processes that ensure the validity of a study. They include: prolonged engagement and persistent observation; triangulation; peer review; negative case analysis; clarification of researcher bias; member checking, rich thick descriptions; and external audit (Creswell, 2003). This study included four of those verification procedures. They are triangulation, clarification of researcher bias, member checking and rich thick descriptions. Triangulation ensures validity because data is pulled from multiple sources to answer the research questions and verify the findings. In this study, the data used included interviews and Veterans Affairs policy data. Data from other sources corroborated the interview data provided by the veterans.

According to Charmaz (2014), "The quality of your study starts with the data, as does the credibility" (p. 32). Rich, substantial and relevant data are needed for a quality study that stands out. A sufficient amount of data must be collected to provide the details needed to answer the research question(s). The objective of data collection is to paint a clear picture of each participant's experiences. To establish reliability, the interview protocol, the selection criteria, the participants, and all aspects of the research method were included, in the event that someone would like to replicate this study.

It is inescapable that the researcher's bias impacts almost every aspect of the study. The researcher's beliefs impact data collection and analysis because the researcher can only interpret from her own perspective and through her own set of experiences and biases. The researcher must clarify her bias. In an attempt to be more aware of these beliefs and how they could potentially impact the outcome of the study, the author regularly wrote about them. This may not affect the outcome of the study and its overall findings but an attempt was made to be as objective as possible in the collection and analysis phase.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim. Member checking was necessary to provide the participants the avenue to: validate the accuracy of their responses; challenge initial interpretations; provide their own interpretations of the data; and provide additional information (Charmaz, 2014). Each participant was sent a copy of their transcript and asked to verify what they initially stated and provide more thorough responses if they desired.

The primary reason this study used a qualitative research method was to provide a space for the voices of African American post-9/11 veterans. Their ideas were preserved

through their thick and rich descriptions (Creswell, 2003). While this is a case study, narratives are presented to provide a narrative of the participants. This can only be done by capturing the voice of each individual veteran as described in the interview data.

Subjectivity Statement

This research project is personal to me because I was a first generation college student who came from a low-income household. I was one of the top students at my high school but I was still underprepared for the university that I attended. I took the most rigorous courses at my high school but that was not enough because of the inequitable course offerings and facilities at my school. Even though it took me a while to get my bearings as a college student, I am grateful that I attended an undergraduate institution that was respected. People never question if I learned anything at the University of California at Berkeley. I needed a good education, because I lacked a lot of the social capital that other educated individuals possess. I had connections that could help me as the result of my church, but I had to learn how to use my education to achieve the success that I wanted. I am really concerned about people who attend colleges that are not a good match for their level of preparedness.

Education can help a person move to a higher socioeconomic status, but primary, secondary, and even higher education can perpetuate inequality particularly for students and parents who do not know how to make these institutions work for them. I worked at a small private historically black university for over six years and even though the school had its flaws, I came to really understand the value and importance of black colleges. As the admission requirements continue to rise at elite private universities and state

universities, HBCUs are needed in the twenty first century almost as much as they were when they were initially founded. I really believe in the mission of HBCUs and I believe more African American students should attend them. They would benefit from the large support networks, rich legacies, small class sizes and personal attention.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this research method. While the author will take every measure possible to be objective, she is the primary instrument so her biases will impact the outcome of this study. The sample size of 7 is also a limitation. While this is a manageable number for a qualitative case study, it would have been good to have more participants. Another limitation of the study is the university affiliation of each veteran. While the choice to interview veterans from one university was intentional, it would be good in the future to get the perspectives of students from both public and private HBCUs. With one school being selected it also limits the participants to residents of one state in a specific region of the country. Perhaps the experiences are different in different parts of the country.

Summary

This study answered the following research questions: What are the social, political and economic factors that have impacted the enrollment of post-9/11 African American military veterans at Martin R. Delany State University? What support systems have facilitated the success of current veteran students at Martin R. Delany State University? To accomplish this task the author used the descriptive case study method. This qualitative study relied upon interview data from participants that met the selection criteria of being a post-9/11 veteran enrolled in Martin R. Delany State University who

served in the military following September 11, 2001. Each participant was interviewed twice and the interviews were transcribed, coded and analyzed. The interview data were triangulated for accuracy.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

This chapter shares the findings of the study. The first section provides brief narratives of each of the participants based upon the interviews. Pseudonyms are used for the names of the participants and staff members, and institutions mentioned. It also includes a demographic chart of the participants. The next section of this chapter covers the major themes and subthemes that emerged from the interview data collected.

Part I: Participants

Robin

Robin is a Criminal Justice major who joined the Army National Guard during her first year at Martin R. Delany State University. She wanted to attend a PWI in her home state after graduating from high school, but her parents insisted that she attend MRDSU. While she did not choose MRDSU willingly, she appreciates the family atmosphere and the opportunities that she has had to hold leadership positions on campus. Training and deployment have caused her to miss several semesters. She did not think she would have to go to Afghanistan but she did. She is currently using Chapter 1607 to fund her education and works full-time as a security guard. While she sees the value in the institution and the services provided for veterans, she believes that the University could be a lot more military and veteran friendly. In her opinion, some faculty members were insensitive when she had to fulfill her military duties. She would like to see a policy change regarding withdrawls for active duty service persons during deployments.

At the time of data collection, her military contract was set to expire and she was unsure if she would re-enlist.

Melody

Melody is a STEM Education major who was recruited by the Marines in her senior year of high school. She joined to take part in the Musicians Enlistment Option Program and was stationed at a large military base for four years. She was never deployed. MRDSU ultimately was her choice because of its location and the fact that it offered her major. While it was not necessarily her first choice to attend and HBCU, she is glad that she has had the opportunity to learn things about her history and culture that she did not now. She also feels representation is important and that it is a good thing to see African Americans as professors and leaders. While she appreciates many aspects of MRDSU, she does not feel challenged academically. Her education is being funded by the Post-9/11 GI Bill and she works part-time because she needs more money to live comfortably. Melody is the only participant that is currently married.

Joseph

Joseph is a Criminal Justice major who serves in the Army National Guard. It was always his first choice to attend an HBCU. He did not want to go too far from home so he chose MRDSU. He wanted to enjoy every aspect of his college experience, so a PWI was not an option for him. He started at MRDSU as a freshman but left and joined the military. He hoped that it would straighten him out and help him focus. His mother was against him joining the military initially. Now that he has returned to MRDSU, he feels the skills he acquired in the military are helping him succeed in college. He worked a seasonal job the previous semester but he was not working at the time the data were

collected. He funds his education with the Montgomery GI Bill and the Tuition Assistance Program.

Langston

Langston is a Computer Science major. Like Joseph, he started MRDSU right after high school, but left to join the Navy and returned after 8 years. He moved around quite a bit in high school and did not feel prepared for the mathematics courses required for his major. While he had to overcome some academic challenges, he is doing very well and persisting in his major. He wanted to go to an HBCU because of the role that they have played in the advancement of African American people and the nation as a whole. He is using the Post-9/11 GI Bill to fund his education and at the time of the initial interview was not working. Overall, he is pleased with the support services available for veterans.

Burton

Burton is a Sociology major that served in the Army for four years and the Army National Guard for three years. While in the Army he was part of an Airborne unit. He was accepted to MRDSU while in high school but decided to attend a community college to study to become a fire fighter. After he changed his mind about pursuing a career as a fire fighter, he joined the Army. Before he began taking classes at MRDSU, he attended a community college again to prepare to transfer. His first choice was the flagship state institution, but he respects the legacy of MRDSU, the history made by its students and the reputation of its academic programs. He is currently funding his education with Chapter 33, the Post-9/11 GI Bill and he also has received some disability benefits. He was very interested in having more of a social life with other African Americans after

serving in a predominately white military unit. He regularly visits the veteran's office on campus and believes that their support and that of other veterans has helped to ease the transition to civilian society. His career interest in political sociology was probably piqued by his military experience. He is curious about international affairs and the factors that motivate countries to go to war. It appears that his previous military service has impacted his career choice.

Calvin

Calvin is a graduate student in the sciences who served in the Marines and the Army Reserves for a total of over 25 years. He made the sudden decision to join the military at a crucial point in his life but he has no regrets about the decision. The first time he returned to his hometown, he realized how violence had taken so many of his childhood friends and classmates. Over time, he became accustomed to military life, but grew tired of taking orders, so he enrolled in college so he could advance in rank. He attended a community college, a PWI and two HBCUs to complete his bachelor's degree. Calvin earned a master's degree but chose to pursue another one because he felt a different career path would help him better manage his PTSD symptoms. A series of negative experiences at a PWI made him declare that he would never attend another one. After meeting an MRDSU professor at a conference, he felt their graduate program would be a good fit. His degree is being funded by vocational rehabilitation and he was not working at the time of the interviews. Calvin believes all the help he needs to be successful is available to him and he appreciates the support he receives from veteran's office and faculty members. They make the accommodations he needs because of the challenges he faces from PTSD and TBI complications.

Nolan

Nolan is a STEM major who served as an Army Ranger. He joined the military to experience a new environment because a lot of his friends were going to jail or ending up dead. After three tours in Afghanistan and two in Iraq, he began to think about his future beyond the military and the prospect of getting an education. He pondered a number of careers and wanted to choose something that fit his personality. He was undecided about a career at the time of the initial interviews, but plans to attend graduate school in the same field. Although he has previously used his military education benefits, he was using scholarships to fund his education. He works on campus. While Nolan acknowledges that he received a great deal of support from the faculty in his department at MRDSU, he is very disappointed with the way veterans are treated on the campus. He feels like the school focuses on the band and the football team and does not value its veterans. Nolan attended a community college in Virginia that did a phenomenal job serving veterans so his expectations were high coming into MRDSU. In his opinion, MRDSU does not come close to those expectations. He was the only participant who was a parent and has three children.

Table 4

Demographic Information of Student Veteran Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Branch	Major	Deployments	Hometown
Robin	25	National Guard	Criminal Justice	Afghanistan	Charlotte
Melody	23	Marines	STEM Education	No war zone	Clemmons
Joseph	24	National Guard	Criminal Justice	No war zone	Clinton
Langston	25	Navy	Computer Science	West. Pacific	Detroit
Burton	26	Army & National Guard	Sociology	Afghanistan	Charlotte
Nolan	36	Army	STEM	Iraq Afghanistan	Rocky Mount
Calvin	49	Marines & Army Reserves	STEM	Iraq, Ukraine Afghanistan Somalia	Los Angeles

Part II: Themes

The second section of this chapter will reveal the themes that emerged from the interviews. An interview protocol was developed to elicit responses from participants that would help answer the research questions. Questions were selected that would provide data that could be analyzed using critical race resilience theory. Data were analyzed according to the major themes that were discovered in the interview transcripts. The themes and subthemes were organized according to the two research questions.

Research questions and thematic alignment

What are the social, political and economic factors that have impacted the enrollment of post-9/11 African American military veterans at Martin R. Delany State University?

Themes

- HBCUs Are Valuable Institutions

"You don't sell the family house."

- HBCUs Provide a Welcoming Environment

"You can bring your brains here and we will treat you like at home."

- PWIs Have Too Many Racial Problems

"Schools like that are not for your best interest."

What has facilitated the success of current veterans at Martin R. Delany State University?

Challenges

Themes

- Student veterans struggle with understanding the values of the millennial generation

"When someone tells you to do something your superior you don't ask why."

- Some student veterans struggle with physical, psychological and cognitive challenges

"PTSD is not one thing. It tells you how you function in life."

Support Systems and Personal Attributes

- Financial Support from the VA Makes a Difference

"Vocational rehabilitation pays for everything."

- Friends, Family, and Other Veterans Help in the Transition

"My battle buddies and my friends they kept me in school."

- Skills Acquired from the Military Help Student Veterans Succeed

  "It's helped me to be focused"

- Veterans Office on MRDSU Campus Provides Valuable Support

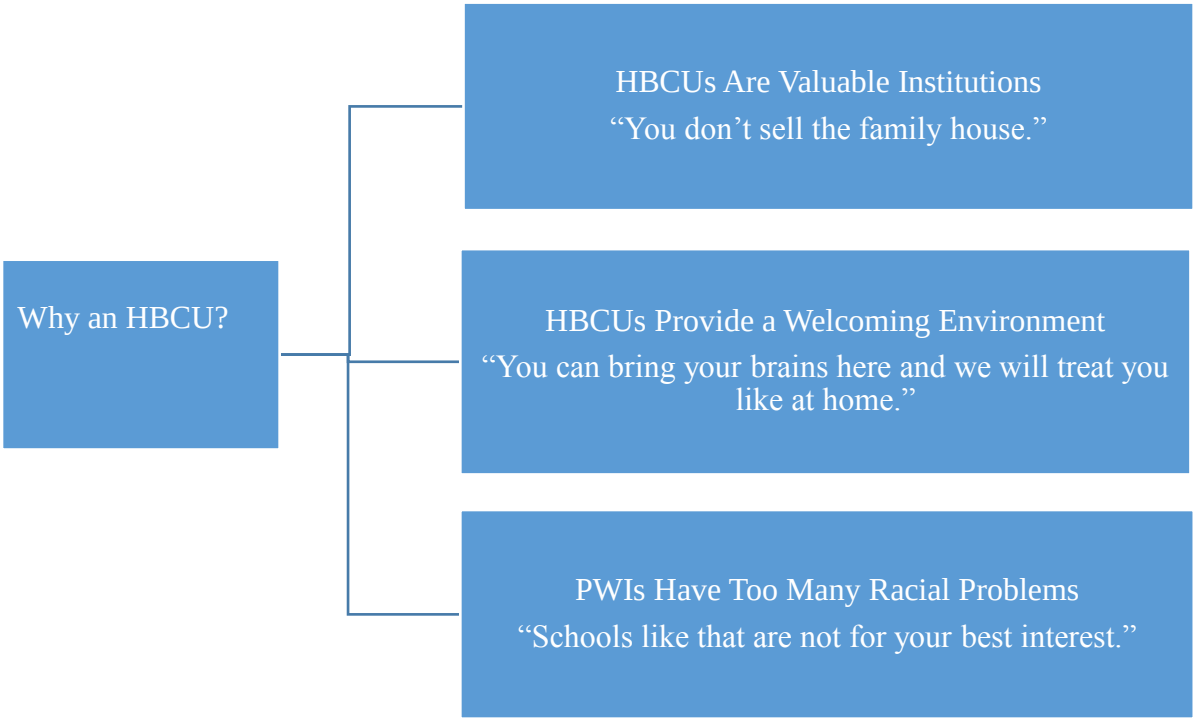
"I love it here. It gets you away from the main part of the campus for a while."

The themes are aligned with the research questions for the sake of organization.

The first question asked, what are the social, political and economic factors that have impacted the enrollment of Post-9/11 African American military veterans at Martin R.

Delany State University? It was previously noted in the introduction that there are many higher education options from which African American veterans can now choose. At one time, HBCUs were the only option for most of them. What is it that would cause an African American veteran to choose an HBCU? The participants provided a great deal of insight on this issue.

Figure 3



Theme: HBCUs Are Valuable Institutions

"You don't sell the family house."

Subtheme: History of HBCUs

One of the most prominent themes that was highlighted in the interview data was the value of HBCUs to the participants. The participants were drawn to many different aspects of the HBCU experience. While MRDSU, or an HBCU in general, was not the first choice of all of the participants, they all acknowledged the value of the HBCU and

argued that they are still needed in the current educational landscape. Burton actually wanted to attend the flagship state institution right out of the military, but was not accepted. While it was not his first choice, he was definitely eager to attend MRDSU because of all that it had to offer. He makes a statement that captured the sentiments of all of the participants about the value of HBCUs:

> MRDSU was meant for certain purposes and intentions. Now that we have it, we must maintain and continue to grow the legacy, kind of like having a family house. You don't sell the family house. You keep it in the family because it's yours. It's history. It's historical. You respect that. That's why HBCUs are important.

Nolan agrees that HBCUs are valuable because of their history. "It's a lot of history. I feel like if you know where you come from you get a good idea where you're going."

Langston always wanted to attend an HBCU. He was drawn to them because of the role they have played in improving this country after hundreds of years of slavery. He liked how they continued to play a role during the Civil Rights Movement. When asked why he chose to attend an HBCU, he responded:

> For me, as far as liking anything like businesses or institutions, I think I always gravitated toward something that had some sort of history and meaning in life and to me going to [a popular state institution] is not that important. It's not that important, because of the history behind it. I really don't know too much history about it but I know this school has the [a prominent group of student activists] and they had stuff that was going on during Civil Rights. Coming out of high school, that was my senior paper. I did a paper on Civil Rights and the differences

> between 2009 and the 70s and stuff like that. So, junior and senior year was pretty much dedicated to it, doing research on Civil Rights and what kind of effects the movement had on people and our communities. So, for me coming to an HBCU was super important because of that history behind it.

Subtheme: HBCUs Promote Self-Knowledge

The two female participants—Robin and Melody—would have been very open to attending a PWI. Robin wanted to attend a predominately white state institution, but her parents insisted that she attend MRDSU. Melody was open to another predominately white state institution that had her major but MRDSU was closer and more convenient. Both women have had challenges on the campus which will be coved later but they both attest to the continued value, relevance and necessity of the HBCU in general. Both women attended predominately white high schools and served in a predominately white male United States military, so they both appreciated the opportunity to learn about their cultural heritage. When asked if she believes that HBCUs are still needed Robin responded:

> Absolutely. I feel like I've grown as a person here. Things that I've done here. I've served on numerous boards. At another university, I don't think I would have done that. I don't feel I would have been as comfortable at a PWI. I'm a shy person. You just learn more about yourself and about your culture here. It's like a family here.

Similarly, Melody responds:

> Yes. For people like me, I didn't really get the black experience culturally, especially at school, and you just learn so much more about yourself when you're

> surrounded by people who are also like you. You learn things that others don't deem important. I realized how important it was to me. There's just so much to learn that I didn't realize that I missed, that I am learning and know now about myself.

Both of these women truly value the fact the HBCUs have this added dimension. They did not necessarily go looking for it but they found it at MRDSU and they are pleased that they did.

Subtheme: Perceptions Others Have of the Value of HBCUs

All of the participants of this study are insiders because they have attended an HBCU. They understand what these institutions have to offer and what they may lack for potential students. With regard for the value of these institutions, most of the students had comments about the perceptions that people have of the HBCUs, which influence higher education selections. Robin thinks these preconceived notions impact enrollment. She admits that these perceptions were part of the reason she initially did not want to attend. She shared:

> My cousins we were talking about this the other day. A lot of people don't like HBCUs. They get this misconception that HBCUs aren't good schools. So I think that's the reason why I didn't want to come to an HBCU…People dog HBCUs, so HBCUs have this perception to them. I guess it's word of mouth. You shouldn't go there and it just travels. A lot of people think they are just party schools.

Robin's father attended MRDSU, but finished his degree at a large state institution. He had firsthand knowledge of the institution and wanted his daughter to experience it for

herself. Perhaps he knew she would grow from the experience and learn some things outside of the classroom that she could not at PWI.

Melody's mother attended a nearby HBCU so she had some knowledge of the education they offer and the students they produce. Melody argued that black education in general is devalued in this country:

> I think they (HBCUs) are overlooked by people in general. People might assume that they're just party schools or it's not a real education. I think America as a whole puts black education behind traditional institutions. I think that has a lot to do with it. I don't know if they're overlooked by veterans specifically because veterans are going to have free school if they didn't lose their benefits. I would like to think people choose their school based off what it specializes in. I'm also guilty of that because if [a prestigious state PWI] was closer I probably would have gone there instead. My mom went to an HBCU.

Burton also believes HBCUs have an image problem and could use some public relations magic. When asked if HBCUs were overlooked by veterans he responded:

> I think HBCUs are overlooked on all scales because it's an HBCU. People think the name of an Ivy League is more prominent than an HBCU. They feel like the resources are less. They feel like the teaching is less. They feel like it's inferior.

While Burton feels like there is room for improvement at MRDSU, particularly in the area of instruction, he is proud that the institution is ranked high for many of its academic programs.

Subtheme: The Value of Academic Programs at HBCUs

One topic that came up repeatedly without specifically asking the participants, was the reputation of the academic programs at MRDSU. As Burton noted previously, MRDSU is nationally known for many of its academic programs and the success of its students in specific professions and graduate school completion.

> The reason I chose MRDSU is I like something that is bigger than I am. I like being able to say I was a part of this. I say again something bigger than yourself and you can put your mark on it. This is a historical black college. It's number one in a couple of things. It's really big around the state because it's monumental.

Burton really appreciated that the school has a good reputation. Even though he is a sociology major, he takes great pride in the reputation the school has in many different programs.

Calvin also believes the quality of the academic programs is a draw for students. The University is known for his specific field, and he feels like he is getting the best education there:

> I call it the black Harvard of [my field]. I went to a conference, which is where I met Dr. Xavier. I was looking to transfer to MRDSU anyway. He sold me. He sold this university as being top notch and it is. It really is. There's a lot of help here if you want it, if you need it. Here they have something to help graduate students. I think they're far ahead to help graduate students, more than [the predominately white state institution I attended previously] was. I think I developed here more than I did anywhere else as far as academics, as far as [my field].

After beginning his Master's program at another university, Calvin was pleased to be at a university that had his program and treated him well.

Melody shared that she believes students should choose an institution based upon the quality of their specific major. As noted previously, she did not choose MRDSU because it was an HBCU but because it had her major:

> I chose this school because I wanted to go to veterinarian school initially when I separated. This school has a good program in [my field] and it's just the closest one. So I came here. I thought about [the predominantly white state university] because they do have [my program] but those are the only two I know in this state. This was just the closest. That's why I close to come here. It was really my only option.

Theme: HBCUs Provide a Welcoming Environment

"You can bring your brains here and we will treat you like at home."

All of the students noted the family atmosphere of the university. They all felt like the school fostered a very welcoming environment. This is one of the reasons that most of the participants were only considering HBCUs. Joseph captured this sentiment when he stated:

> HBCUs, we invite you over here. You can bring your brains here and we will treat you like at home. There's a sense of belonging. You can get your education and not be judged. You got your brother beside you, pushing you, going the whole nine. It's a support thing. We gotta stick together you know?

Joseph only considered HBCUs coming out of high school. Once he left and joined the military, he was still committed to earning his degree at MRDSU.

Burton is proud of his school. He loves the way he feels when he encounters MRDSU alumni off campus. He described that connection and the welcoming environment in the following way:

> A lot of kids need and like representation. They like seeing black teachers. They like seeing fellow black people being successful. They can feel comfortable. They can feel like themselves. They can continue to help and grow with each other. Some people go to PWIs and transfer here. They don't feel at home. They don't feel comfortable at a point in time. Same thing with Army Airborne. We are a family regardless of where we come from. It's unity. Everybody has a sense of themselves from something bigger. Everybody likes to be part of a whole. We all love Virgina Tech Hokies. We all love the Wolfpack. We all love the Tarheels. It's part of being something else. When you see something like that, you feel a sense of unison and togetherness.

Burton felt isolated at times as one of the few African Americans in his unit, so he was excited about being in an environment where he would feel welcome and like he was expected to be there. He felt some of the other soldiers were surprised that he was in such an elite unit (Airborne). He was glad that he did not have to experience that in college.

Calvin had attended two HBCUs for his bachelor's degree before attending MRDSU for his master's degree. The first one he attended was a small private HBCU in Louisiana. He described it this way:

> It was a small community of 1,000 students. You can just wake up and your class is right there. That was my first experience. I wasn't at first used to people treating me like family because being from LA, people don't say "Good

> Morning" to you. I couldn't believe young people would say "Good Morning," and I would start feeling my pockets to see if they were taking anything. I'm just saying. It was different. It was very, very different.

Theme: PWIs Have Too Many Racial Problems

"Schools like that are not for your best interest."

Most of the participants of the study agreed that there is racial bias and discrimination in the military. This includes microagressions, implicit bias, unfair promotion practices, name-calling and harassment. While all of the participants were proud that they served in the United States Armed Forces, they acknowledge that it is an institution with flaws. The lack of diversity and the discrimination that was experienced by participants contributed to their desire to attend an HBCU. Burton was part of a predominately white Airborne unit and was eager for a change. He described an encounter that took place in his unit:

> A lot of jokes they thought were funny were not funny. I had a guy named John in my unit. He was black in skin but he was white. So, he would fit in with the other guys. One day they made jokes and they made elephant noises about his ears and his nose. He had a big nose, big ears. They would run and say "I'm gonna chase you." If it was me, we would have been fighting because to me this just isn't funny. He took it as a joke and it was funny for them.

His lone black comrade probably did not think it was funny but did not know how to assertively and effectively handle the blatant disrespect. Burton spoke a lot about the lack of diversity in his military experience and his desire to attend a school where he could be comfortable.

In other cases, it was actual experiences at PWIs and accounts from friends that led the participants to MRDSU. Calvin attended a predominately white state institution in the American Midwest. He chose that school because they had his program. He realized very quickly that he was at the wrong school. Before he ever attended a class he had problems with the staff.

> I was getting a computer and paying for it with the scholarship. "Let me see your ID." They didn't ask other people for their ID, so I just gave them my ID. They checked it. They called downstairs and I knew the guy was a veteran in front of me. We had a get together and every Thursday. They had dinner for the veterans and I'm like he didn't have to go through all of this. The ladies were giving me all this hassle, calling, "Have him come down here." I had the Ipad and I was bringing it up to the counter but before I get to the counter, "Excuse me, Sir, what are you going to do with that?" She says, "Oh let me have that and she walks to the counter for me."

Calvin was later followed in the bookstore, and falsely accused of plagiarism by a professor. After that, Calvin said he would never attend another PWI.

While Langston never attended a PWI, he interacted with students who did, during an internship at a Pacific Northwest technology firm. He stated that there were students from Stanford, Harvard some other schools. They shared some of their experiences at PWIs and Langston contrasted those experiences with his at MRDSU:

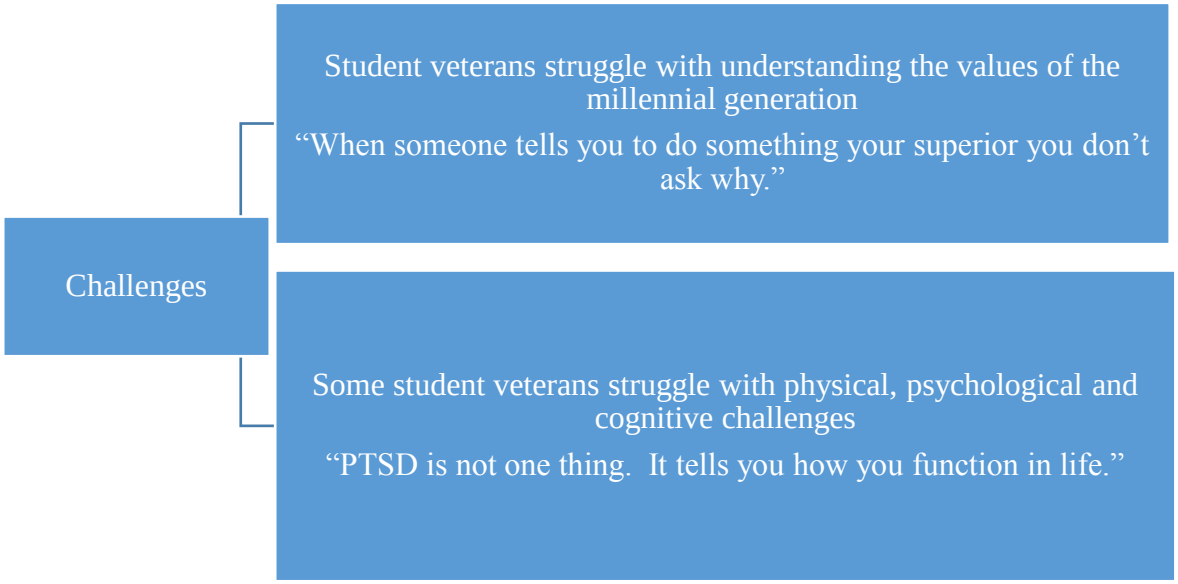
> Just speaking to the black students there or just minority students in general, the environment was completely different. They had to deal with things, especially with the whole election stuff going on, they had to deal with racist comments.

> There's a video on line that has a white student that pulled a black girl's hair out. They said that stuff that goes on all the time. They're really disrespectful to minority students. You don't get that here at an HBCU.

Previous experiences and accounts from colleagues and friends impacted some of the participants' decisions to attend an HBCU.

The next section will address the second research question: What are the challenges facing African American veterans at MRDSU? Before sharing the actual challenges that the veterans faced, the beginning of this section will cover the military culture in general and how it impacts a soldier's values. Some of the challenges faced by the veterans at MRDSU stemmed from ideological differences between them and traditional students because of their military training. Most of the participants stated that the military changed them in very significant ways. They developed traits and acquired skills that have been helpful in their pursuit of higher education.

Figure 4



Challenges

Acculturation is the process of adopting the cultural traits or social patterns of another group. The participants of this study came from different branches of the military, but their description of the acculturation process had many similarities. Some of the participants enlisted in the military because they were at a crucial point in their development and they knew their next move would determine their future. They felt the military could not only provide funds for college, but actually help them develop skills and tools that would benefit them for the rest of their lives. Joseph started school at MRDSU and left to join the military for the following reason:

> I decided to join to get steered in the right direction, for a sense of urgency and belonging so I'm not out here doing just anything. It helped to straighten me out because I was a wild child. It helped me out a whole lot. I came out focused. They break you down. They tell you what you can wear and what you can't wear. What time you need to wake up. It kind of humbles you.

Joseph felt like the military acculturation process changed him in the ways that he wanted. He was able to return to school and he know that he had the maturity and discipline to be successful.

Burton explained the acculturation process in a slightly different way but he agreed that they mold you and you have to conform or you won't be successful in the military. He described it this way:

> I was able to assimilate into the Army personality. The Army has its own set personality. I was able to assimilate into that, which worked out. It doesn't really go away. I still got the hat on and the demeanor. But being black in the military

> depends on where you're at and who you know. At a point in time we all are green.

While Burton realized that he had some personal differences with many of the men he served with, he knew that they all shared the military mission and culture and in the end they were assembled for a common cause.

Calvin joined the Marines, who are known to have the toughest boot camp. He also joined at a crucial time in his life and was eager to make a change in his life. Joining the military was his best option to do so at that time. He said the following about his decision:

> I didn't know what I was getting into. I didn't know what the Marines were all about…until I had that rude awakening when I put my feet on those yellow lines and I was getting yelled at. So I learned right away. I heard it was the hardest in boot camp but I wish somebody had told me right before.

His first experience in boot camp helped bring about that change he desired.

Academic Challenges

Theme: Student Veterans Struggle with Understanding the Values of the Millennial Generation

"When someone tells you to do something your superior you don't ask why."

While the veterans experienced personal growth in many areas, most of them mentioned challenges that they have faced as they transitioned to student life. One challenge that most of the participants mentioned was relating to traditional students who don't take education as seriously as they do. Since they have developed traits that would help them succeed in the military, they often struggled with going to school with students

who have not had the same training. Burton expressed his frustration with his classmates' lack of responsibility and accountability:

> My academic challenge would be a lot of group work. Working in a team, I don't like. I can be a brute. I can be abrasive. I can be brash. If you wanna get the job done, we can get the job done. We can get it done today. Get it done right so we can leave. We need to meet, get it done right so we can turn it in. Don't email me. Don't miss meetings. You don't need to make excuses. Don't give me any bull crap. Get it done and get it done right. If you got a problem with that, we can talk about it. Tell me why you think I'm wrong, but it has to make sense. That's my biggest thing, people out here playing games with my grade. I don't do that. The biggest thing is young adults who don't get that.

Burton is not much older than his peers but he has no patience for excuses when it comes to school work. He has waited a long time for the opportunity to go to school and he does not want to deal with such issues.

Another student who had very strong feelings about his civilian classmates is Nolan. He said he has developed tunnel vision from the military so he knows how to focus, but he acknowledges that it is a challenge:

> The biggest academic challenge is trying to understand the millennial generation. You're in class and you hear the things they're talking about and you're like, "What the hell?" And how they dress when they come to class in pajamas. I'm like who does that? They know to stay away from that guy because I'll speak my mind. It's trying to understand the younger culture. It's the biggest challenge because if I'm sitting in class and I'm trying to learn and your cellphone is going

> off, you're disturbing me. But this is not Iraq so I can't do certain things as if I'm in the military. So your phone is going off and you're talking to your friend about last night. I'm trying to learn about blood flow to the heart and I cannot understand because your phone is going off and you're snapchatting and on facebook, whatever they do. That's the biggest challenge. Distractions.

Social media and communicating with friends is very important to many of Nolan's classmates. He feels like the students are more interested in socializing than their academics and he doesn't understand that.

Langston is a computer science major and he noted that students are often disrespectful to teachers. He feels it happens less in his major but he does see it:

> Times have changed a little bit. It also depends on the major. I don't really deal with those issues, but it depends on the students that are in there. Typically, when you have an engineering class they don't have time for doing all this extra stuff. One guy was expecting the professor to teach everything to him like it's remedial math. When you're in college, you're expected to learn here. It's not your place to be telling the teacher how he should teach because you don't even have your degree yet. In the military that doesn't really happen. You wanna start mouthing off to someone. That's fine let's go do this crap work or let me write you up.

Langston explained that he was not allowed to be disrespectful in the military so he would not bring a bad attitude to college. He has respect for authority and what his professors have accomplished. He does not feel like he is in a position to critique them because he has not yet achieved what they have achieved.

Melody was also a bit baffled by some of her classmates. It was annoying for her to see them make excuses and challenge the authority of the professor. She explained it this way:

> When someone tells you to do something your superior you don't ask "Why?" You just do it. There is no "Why?" in the military. There's no "but I had to do this." You just do it and if you had a problem with it maybe you could come back after you did it and maybe say, "I had this going on, respectfully." There's no disrespect. You just do what you're told.

Since Melody is in her second year, this will probably get better as the students mature and adjust to college.

Theme: Physical, Psychological and Cognitive Challenges of Student Veterans at MRDSU

"PTSD is not one thing. It tells you how you function in life."

Two of the participants—Calvin and Burton—revealed that they have disabilities that they sustained from their military service that impact them academically. Burton has issues with his feet, vertigo and migraines and he has received disability benefits as a result. Calvin has traumatic brain injury (TBI) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). These injuries have led to cognitive challenges. They are fully capable of learning the material but sometimes they need more time or other accommodations. Calvin initially had trouble accepting that he had PTSD but once he understood the diagnosis, he was able to make progress:

> PTSD is not one thing. It tells you how you function in life. So I had to humble myself to deal with depression, nightmares, lack of sleep. I needed to stop

> pretending. I realized that pretending hurt me more than if I had just had some humility and said, "Hey I'm having problems." When they did the evaluation for PTSD, she said, "I'm sorry to say you have PTSD." "I said you're lying. I ain't got that." She said, "You can accept it, get some help, move on with life, but I can tell you it's not gonna leave like that." I was all about, "Let's fix it, so I can get on with my life." She said, "It's not like that. It's something you gotta manage.

Calvin needed to understand that he may not get rid of PTSD, but he can manage it and have a productive life. He needed to get help so he could complete his studies. He has to recognize all of his triggers and make adjustments to be comfortable in his environment:

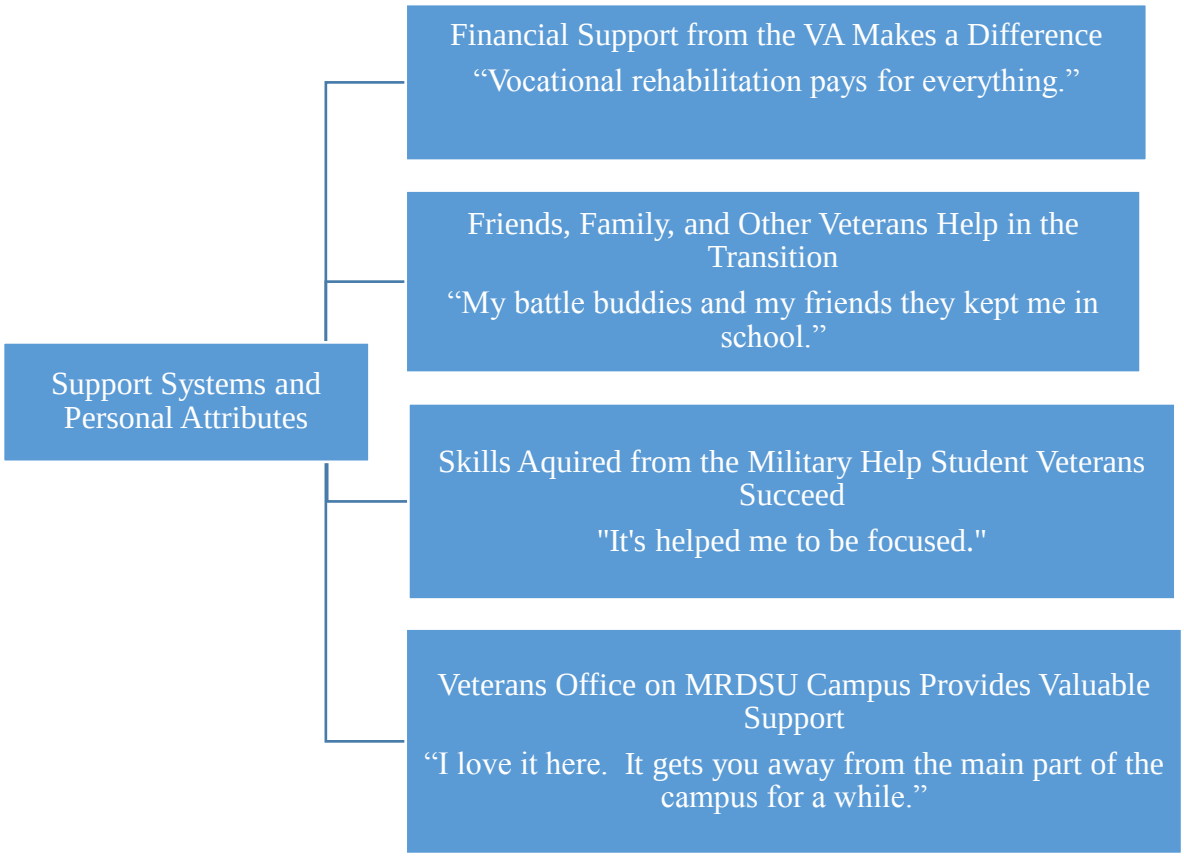
> I'm OK but I have a lot of stuff I have to deal with, so during presentations, I have to look up because when I see people walking around, reaching in their pockets, I immediately get distracted. These are some of things that I have to adjust to, so I tell people, "I'm not gonna look at you." I'm looking back somewhere so I can't see people move or put their hands in their pockets. I don't like people wearing hoodies over their head or when they have their hands in their pockets. I'm not good with crowds. The medication does pretty good to help me stay focused and calm down the alertness. Doors, anything.

One of the reasons that Burton does not like group work is because his service related issues affect his ability to concentrate and study. He can't do things at the last minute because that is stressful for him. He needs to be able to work around the migraines and the vertigo:

> Sometimes I get vertigo. I get headaches. I get migraines here and there. I don't really talk about it. I don't let people know because it's none of their business. So every now and then I need a break. I can't study.

Burton is very private about what he is dealing with, but Calvin is very open about his cognitive issues. None of the other participants mentioned any injuries or trauma that affected them academically, but that question was not asked specifically. Not all veterans are open to disclosing such matters. As Burton said, "That's no one's business." Every veteran has their own way of dealing with trauma and hardship.

Figure 5



Support Systems and Personal Attributes

The final four themes will directly address the second research question: What support systems have facilitated the success of current veterans at Martin R. Delany State

University? The participants also shared the specific support systems that are helping them succeed as students. Most of the veterans appear to be adjusting well to higher education. Even though some of them had a lot to overcome they are thriving in their new environment. All participants were asked what has helped them achieve the success they desired at MRDSU. They shared the individuals, organizations, resources and institutions that have had an impact on their transition.

Theme: Financial Support from the VA Makes a Difference

"Vocational rehabilitation pays for everything."

All of the veterans have used military tuition benefits at one time or another. All but one is using them now. Some are using the Post- 9/11 GI Bill. One is using vocational rehabilitation benefits. One receives disability benefits in addition to Post 9/11. One is using Chapter 1607 for reservists. One is using the Montgomery GI Bill. Three of the veterans were working at the time of the initial interview. Robin works full-time and Melody works part-time. Nolan works in a lab on campus. The others are managing with their military benefits. One veteran, Langston said he saved money before he separated from the military. He wanted to make sure that he would be OK when he left the Navy and started school, so he prepared himself financially:

> There were different resources to make sure that your transition is a not a bad one. People have expectations when they get out of the military. It all depends on what their ambitions are. It's a process getting out to of the military. I took two and a half years to save up money for when I got out. If I couldn't find work, or couldn't find a job, I got some time to get myself in order. But if you didn't prepare for that, then what are you doing?

Theme: Friends, Family, and Other Veterans Help in the Transition

"My battle buddies and my friends they kept me in school."

The support systems that the participants described as most helpful were family, friends and other veterans. While some colleges need to do more to serve veterans, nothing can take the place of friends and family. There are so many matters that come up in a student veteran's life. Robin experienced tragedy and she described what she would have done if she had not received the support that she needed:

> I probably wouldn't even be in school. Honestly. Because like I said I got deployed and I came back. My dad passed. I got to a point where I was just like I don't even want to go to school anymore. I was just kinda depressed. My battle buddies and my friends they kept me in school.

Robin was not only dealing with returning from Afghanistan and re-enrolling in school, but the death of a beloved parent. Her friends and family helped her handle all that was going on.

Melody counted on her family as well. She was able to look to her husband and her dad who are also veterans. Even though she was stationed in her home state and remained for college, it was an adjustment. When asked how she got through the transition and who made the biggest difference, she said:

> I guess my family. I didn't really have a problem adjusting. It was just adjusting to civilians in general. Especially younger students here. I'm 23 and my husband's 25. My dad, he's a veteran too, so if anything it was just talking to people who understood how it felt not being in the military anymore.

Langston also spoke of the influence of his family, “I’ve got family that are really supportive and pointing me in the right direction.”

Another source of support that was mentioned by some of the veterans was faculty. One participant who does not currently use his military benefits or any of the services offered by the veteran’s office at MRDSU, was grateful for the support he received from faculty. One of the reasons Nolan is not using his benefits is because the dean of his college recommended that he apply for a generous scholarship and he won it. When asked if any of his professors were veterans he responded, “No, they’re not veterans but they support me to the fullest. My whole department supports me.”

Calvin has shared his PTSD diagnosis and traumatic brain injury with his professors, and he was surprised with their willingness to make accommodations for him. They have gone out of their way to find alternative ways to assess his progress in class and they allow him to take exams in the Veteran’s Office. He shared that his professors have given him extra time to work on assignments:

> Some of them have invited me to their office to talk about the assignment. My professor found out when she talked to me I could regurgitate the material back to her. Putting it on paper was a different thing, coming out of the military. There are still a lot of things that I’m finding out about my challenges.

It is clearly frustrating for him that his cognitive ability has been affected by TBI and PTSD, but he just humbles himself and asks for help so he can complete his degree.

Theme: Skills Acquired from the Military Help Student Veterans Succeed

“It’s helped me to be focused.”

As previously stated, the military clearly has its own culture. Boot camp is when most recruits get their first taste of what military life will be like. While the institution has its flaws, the participants all spoke of useful skills and traits that they acquired as a result of their military service. The personal growth that they experienced has had an impact in their success at MRDSU. Joseph shared the following:

> It taught me to be on time for class and to pay attention to detail. It taught me to read that syllabus. I pay attention to homework due dates. That's stuff I never paid attention to before. "Everybody pass up your homework." You didn't read the syllabus. I try to pay close attention to detail, be on time, early if I can.

Robin agrees that the military taught her to be on time and adds that it also has helped with time management and maintaining priorities:

> It's helped me to be focused with my coursework and stuff. It helps me when I have to delegate stuff. My 50 page paper here. We gotta start on this paper. Oh, we still gotta go to work full time. I still gotta make time to work out so I can maintain my height and weight and my PT. It's helped me delegate different tasks throughout my life and career.

Calvin focused more on how the military has shaped his character:

> Discipline. To be consistent. To be somewhere on time. Say what you are going to do, particularly your work. In the military, they make sure what you say, is what you are gonna do. Being more observant and anything you say you need to back it up with any data you have. Anything you don't know, you seek it for yourself. Don't depend on others to help you.

Langston also focused more on how the military impacted his character. He has developed a great respect for authority. In addition to being more focused, he said that he is "more respectful of people and professors. I didn't really complain too much about anything. To me it's just like you're here. This is your job." He takes the education process seriously and intends to take advantage of the opportunity that he has. In summary all of the participants expressed a sense of personal growth and credits the military with helping to shape them at a crucial point in their development.

Theme: Veterans Office on MRDSU Campus Provides Support

"I love it here. It gets you away from the main part of the campus for a while."

One theme that was an important issue for all of the veterans was the military and veteran friendliness of the campus. Several of the students experienced deployments while they pursued their undergraduate degree so they had different needs. Most of the participants spoke positively of the veteran's services offered by MRDSU. They all get their benefits processed (if they were using them) and most of them said they met with the staff regularly or from time to time. While the veterans appreciated the office space and the care of the staff, they all had suggestions for improvement which will be discussed in great detail in Chapter Five.

The actual office where the benefits are processed is away from a lot of the main buildings. When asked about the veteran friendliness of the campus and the house that serves as the headquarters of the Veteran's Center, Calvin shared, "I love it here. It gets you away from the main part of the campus for a while. It's not crowed back here. This is a big school. Too big." When asked how he would be doing if he did not have access to

the veteran's office and the support from faculty on campus he responded, "Really bad. I think I wouldn't be finishing more than likely." Joseph also added:

> This place right here you can come in and do your homework. You can come in here and be quiet. You can't get that everywhere. I work better here than at home. It comes in handy. It is a study area. The library is quiet but it's just too many people.

Another student that appreciated the space and the support from the staff is Burton. He gets his benefits processed and visits the office regularly. He said the following:

> The veteran's office here. The VA liason, Regina, is great. I see her about every other day to go and talk to her. See how she's doing because she understands. She relates. She's there for me around the area so she can relate here and there. I talk to the director, Noel, and other veterans. I met this guy who's in grad school. We'll talk here and there. So it's a spot to yourself over there. You get to chill on a break between class when you have a break, just talk to some people. So that's definitely helpful.

When asked what his experience would be like without this support he responded, "I would probably be to myself more and more focused on my grades. And probably just more angry." Burton is a combat veteran with a strong military identity and he did not say that he was receiving formal professional counseling to help with his transition to civilian society but he has developed his own support system to help him succeed.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

> *[Veterans] don't need care packages and quilts. They need a nation to understand the skills and values and discipline they have acquired--and the assistance they still require--and then give them an opportunity to make a difference on the home front . . . Saying 'thank you' at an airport is not enough. Standing for an ovation at a baseball game is not enough. To do right by our veterans—to recognize their value to our society and fulfill our solemn obligation to those who volunteered to protect the rest of us—we first have to understand what they have accomplished and what they offer our nation"*
>
> Howard Schultz and Rajiv Chandrasekaran, *For Love of Country*

Overview

This final chapter provides a cumulative discussion of the data collected in response to the two research questions. This chapter includes: the research questions and the themes that emerged from the interview data; a summary of the findings presented in Chapter Four, linked to the related literature and situated within the context of the previously defined theoretical framework; and finally implications and recommendations for HBCUs, the United States Military, and future student veterans.

Review of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the educational experiences of African American veterans at historically black colleges and universities. The study reveals some of the reasons African American veterans choose to attend HBCUs, the challenges they

faced as student veterans and the support systems that impact their success at MRDSU. The study focuses on five male and two female African American student veterans who were enrolled at MRDSU at the time of the interviews. It utilized a case study design and the research questions that guided the inquiry were:

1) What are the social, political and economic factors that have impacted the enrollment of post-9/11 African American military veterans at Martin R. Delany State University?
2) What has facilitated the success of current veterans at Martin R. Delany State University?

Research Question One

The three themes that emerged from the interview data regarding the first research question are: "You don't sell the family house" (HBCUs Are Valuable Institutions); "You can bring your brains here and we'll treat you like at home." (HBCUs Provide a Welcoming Environment); and "Schools like that are not for your best interest." (PWIs Have Too Many Racial Problems). Each theme presented in this chapter will be discussed in the context of the related literature and Critical Race Resilience Theory (CRRT).

Theme One: HBCUs Are Valuable Institutions

"You don't sell the family house"

The student veterans chose to attend an MRDSU because they believed the institution, and HBCUs in general, have value. They specifically stated that MRDSU has historical significance, promotes self-knowledge and offers highly ranked academic programs. Most of the interviewees were aware of negative perceptions that some individuals have of HBCUs, but they did not share those same views. Ultimately, the

student veterans who participated in this study believed MRDSU offered them academic and social experiences that they could not find anywhere else.

The value of HBCUs has been widely described in historical texts like Anderson's *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1934* (1988). After American slavery came to an end, many HBCUs were established to provide educational opportunities for the recently emancipated Africans. The student veterans in the study took pride in the fact that they attended a college that was pivotal in educating African Americans after emancipation. Herbold's "Never a Level Playing Field" (1994) and Humes' "How the GI Bill Shunted Blacks into Vocational Training" (2005) extensively covered the period after World War II when the GI Bill was passed. They detailed how African American veterans had few options when it came to higher education and many were steered away from four-year institutions. The veterans who persisted and enrolled in college typically enrolled at HBCUs. Throughout history, these institutions have played a significant role in providing opportunities for African Americans and diversifying many professions in the United States as a whole.

One of the tenets of Critical Race Resilience Theory (CRRT) is that storytelling is used to analyze myths about race that attempt to make people of African descent inferior to people of European descent. HBCUs are not only valuable because of their historical significance. They also promote self- knowledge. Most of the participants stated that they learned about themselves because of the curriculum and the mission of MRDSU. African American professors and leaders are committed to making sure the students learn their history. Another tenet of CRRT states that critical race resilience is enhanced through connection or relatedness to others. When Burton asserted, "You don't sell the

family house," he was explaining that he has a specific connection with the institution and the entire University community.

Theme Two: HBCUs Provide a Welcoming Environment

"You can bring your brains here and we'll treat you like at home."

Most of the participants believe that MRDSU provides a welcoming environment for African American students. They believed the friendliness, the unity and the school pride make the educational experience more rewarding. Even the students who indicated that MRDSU was not necessarily their first choice, acknowledged that they appreciated the level of comfort they felt at an HBCU and the opportunities for leadership and engagement with all aspects of the campus. Most felt the curriculum and school events like homecoming reflected their preferences as African American students.

The literature on the learning environment of the HBCU spoke of this welcoming atmosphere. For people of African descent, Afrocentricity has been a welcome prescription for the ideological domination caused by hundreds of years of colonization. Antonio Gramsci called this domination, hegemony (Gramsci, 1967). Asante (1987) asserted that Afrocentricity places the African subject within the context of history and removes Europe from the center of the African reality. It calls for a psychological orientation in which African ideals are placed at the center of analysis that involves African culture and behavior (Asante, 1998). This orientation is evident in at MRDSU. In Freeman's *African Americans and College Choice* (2004), she addresses the impact of race, gender and social class on the type of college a student selects or whether that student will attend college at all. The participants in her study chose HBCUs to get back to their cultural roots and to learn in an environment where they would not be considered

a “minority.” Many of them were convinced by a trusted mentor that an HBCU was the best option. Even though Freeman focused on high school students and this study is on adult students, the findings are quite similar.

CRRT contends that racism is normal, not aberrant in American society and liberalism does not have the mechanism to institute the major changes needed to address the damaging effects of racism. It also assumes that critical race resilience is expressed and affected by multilevel attachments, including family, school, neighborhood, community and society. Many of the participants believed that even though progress has been made in race relations and inclusivity in higher education, they found that it was not enough for them to choose a predominately white institution. They believed that they would develop more at an HBCU because the environment would support them as scholars. Their academic resilience was affected by multilevel attachments like their community and their school of choice, MRDSU.

Theme Three: PWIs Have Too Many Racial Problems

“Schools like that are not for your best interest”

Student veterans at MRDSU were discouraged by the microagressions, implicit bias, name-calling and harassment. One student who had previously attended a PWI, had such a horrible experience that he said “never again” would he attend a PWI and transferred to MRDSU to complete his graduate degree. Another student who has interacted with students from other top schools spoke about the discrimination his colleagues at a summer internship witnessed and experienced on their campuses, particularly during the contentious 2016 presidential campaign. Almost all of the veterans

had experienced some form of racism in the military and many of them did not want to experience the same treatment when they pursued their education.

Predominately white institutions have had a history of exclusion. According to Altbach, Gumport & Berdahl in *American Higher Education and the Twenty-First Century* (1999), higher education has evolved in many ways in the United States, but traditional colleges and universities have been marked by their exclusion of women and people of color in their early years. The first institutions of higher learning were designed for White Anglo Saxon Protestant (WASP) men. The education of African Americans and Native Americans was suppressed to maintain hegemonic domination and ideological domination. The earliest colleges for WASP males were built in the seventeenth century using the labor of enslaved Africans and the capital their servitude produced. The first institutions of higher education in the United States were private protestant seminaries—Harvard, Yale and Brown. The Morrill Land Grant Act led to more public universities to address the needs for agricultural, mechanical and technical education. Herbold (1994) and Humes (2005) provide many details about how this exclusion continued after world War II. While the GI Bill was a race neutral bill, it was not able to operate as such, in a segregated society. African American veterans were turned away from HBCUs because they were filled to capacity. Veterans were not allowed to attend many PWIs particularly those in the South.

As disheartening as it is to hear Derrick Bell's assertion that racism in America is permanent, it is inescapable that some students would never even consider attending a PWI in 2017 because of racism. While there has been progress, racism is still the norm in American society. Another tenet of CRRT is that competence is needed in daily

functioning. The students that did not want to attend PWIs, primarily made that decision because they knew they would experience racism that would require major coping skills.

Review of Question One

Theme One

HBCUs Are Valuable Institutions "You don't sell the family house."

Description

- Have historical significance
- Promote self-knowledge
- Perceptions others have of HBCUs are often inaccurate
- Offer highly ranked academic programs

Framework Components

- Uses storytelling to analyze myths about race that render Blacks one down
- Enhanced through connection or relatedness to others

Theme Two

HBCUs Provide a Welcoming Environment "You can bring your brains here and we will treat you like at home."

Description

- Friendliness
- Unity
- School Pride

Framework Components

- Racism is normal, not aberrant in American society
- Liberalism does not have the mechanism to institute the major changes needed to address the damaging effects of racism
- Expressed and affected by multilevel attachments, including family, school, neighborhood, community and society

Theme Three

PWIs Have Too Many Racial Problems "Schools like that are not for your best interest."

Description

- Microagressions
- Implicit bias
- Name-calling
- Harassment

Framework Components

- Racism is normal, not aberrant in American society
- Competence is needed in daily functioning

Research Question Two

The student veterans shared many factors that contributed to their academic success at MRDSU. Before moving on to the themes that describe these support systems and personal attributes, the most common challenges faced by the veterans will be discussed as well as some of the reasons for these challenges.

Common Challenges

Theme One: Values of Millennial Generation Students

"When someone tells you to do something your superior you don't ask why."

One challenge that all of the participants spoke of was the difficulty they had connecting with traditional aged millennial college students. This disconnect was intensified by the age difference and the lasting effects of the military acculturation process. Even the veterans that were the closest in age to the traditional students had issues with their millennial classmates' values and their attitude toward the academics. The student veterans struggled with their classmates' lack of respect for authority, their tardiness, their unprofessional attire, and their poor work ethic during group projects.

Vacchi (2012) describes this acculturation process as military socialization. He describes military socialization as "the common thread for all veterans" and explains that "contemporary veterans come from a professional, all-volunteer standing military, seasoned by the highest-quality training, equipment, standards, and expectations," (p. 17). The current student veterans have a level of excellence that was required in the military. They carry those standards even after separation. This can create a disconnect with traditional students. Whiteman, Barry, Mroczek, & MacDermid Wadsworth (2013) did a

quantitative study to address this phenomenon because they were concerned that veterans faced social isolation from their inability to connect with civilian students.

From a CRRT perspective, the student veterans who were able to overcome these differences exhibited resilience in that they were able to overcome life stress and develop coping strategies to manage their frustration in their new environment.

Theme Two: Physical, Psychological and Cognitive Disabilities

"PTSD is not one thing. It tells you how you function in life."

While the second challenge faced by veterans was only reported by two of the veterans, it is significant because many veterans have visible and invisible disabilities that they acquired during their military service. These include physical, psychological and cognitive disabilities. The challenges shared by the participants in this study included PTSD, TBI, and chronic foot problems. Both participants received disability benefits.

According the Joint Economic Committee of the United States Congress, 28% of veterans in the workforce have a service-connected disability (2015). Approximately one third of those deployed in Iraq or Afghanistan will experience either PTSD, traumatic brain injury, or major depressive disorder/symptoms (Tanielian & Jaycox, 2008). Advancements in body armor, military technology and medical treatment have led to the survival of many veterans in these most recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. While survival rates are encouraging, many of these soldiers who go on to enroll in college need assistance for their cognitive issues. Whiteman et al. (2013) indicate that many campuses are equipped to deal with students with these issues but they will need to expand their services and tailor them specifically to the veteran population.

The veterans' desire to pursue their education in spite of physical, psychological and cognitive disabilities shows great resilience. Their determination to achieve their academic goals after being in a war zone confirms two of the theoretical assumptions of CRRT. It is a biopsychosocial spiritual phenomenon and it occurs across the life course with individuals, families and communities experiencing unique paths of development. The veteran's persistence is evidence of a multilayered biological, psychological, social and spiritual phenomenon that is difficult to explain. Each veteran has his or her own path and the decision to pursue a degree after a traumatic experience indicates maturation and development.

Support Systems and Personal Attributes

Theme Three: Financial Support from the VA Makes a Difference

"Vocational rehabilitation pays for everything."

Now that some of the challenges have been outlined, it is appropriate to begin the discussion of the different support systems and personal attributes that contributed to the success of the participants of this study. Six of the seven participants of this study were using financial benefits from the military at the time of the interview. Only three of the seven participants in this study worked (one full-time and two part-time) while attending school full-time. While most of the participants stated that they could use more money to make ends meet, their military benefits allowed most of them to focus primarily on their studies.

According to the American Council on Education (2014), 42% of veterans worked in the 2011-2012 academic year, and that excludes work-study. While some people believe all veterans receive education benefits, only 59% received veteran's

education benefits in the 2011-2012 academic year (ACE, 2014). Many veterans have to rely on other forms of aid to finance their education and/or they have to work.

Critical race resilience is influenced by diversity including ethnicity, race, gender, age, economic status, and physical and mental ability. Individuals who persevere, in spite of emotional trauma, racial discrimination and financial difficulties, to use their tuition assistance benefits, demonstrate critical race resilience.

Theme Four: Friends, Family, and Other Veterans Help in the Transition

"My battle buddies and my friends, they kept me in school."

Most of the veterans ranked family, friends and other veterans very high when they were asked who offered them the most support. They stated that their friends and family encouraged them to stay in school and really made a difference in their transition out of the military and into higher education.

Some scholars argue that family and friends can be adequate support for student veterans. Elliott et al. (2011) documented that support from friends and family was correlated with fewer incidents of PTSD symptoms among student veterans, reservists and active duty service persons. Other studies (Whiteman, et al., 2013) suggest "that emotional support from peers may be insufficient to buffer against the psychological problems prevalent among student service members/veterans," and universities must invest in counseling and psychological services specifically for veterans to fully meet their needs.

This particular theme relates to CRRT because it takes a special type of resilience for a former soldier to open up to friends and family enough to receive their support. Some veterans hold it all in because they are taught to handle life and death situations on

a regular basis. Critical race resilience is enhanced through connection or relatedness to others. For some student veterans, this connection and relatedness to family, friends and other veterans is exactly what they need.

Theme Five: Skills Acquired from the Military Help Student Veterans Succeed

"It's helped me to be focused"

Military socialization is a reality. All of the veterans said that the military instilled values in them and forced them to learn necessary skills. According to Burton, the military is an institution and in order for a cadet to be successful, he or she must assimilate to the military culture. The veterans indicated that they learned how to be on time, respect authority, read instructions carefully, and maintain a standard of excellence. They all knew that if they failed to follow instructions, they would face undesirable consequences.

Vacchi (2012) emphasized that veterans are molded and shaped into soldiers during boot camp. They are expected to unlearn youthful habits in order to learn the military way. Veterans assimilate based upon how long they stay in the military and whether or not they engaged in combat. The results of this study confirmed Vacchi's assertion.

One of the tenets of CRRT is that competence is needed in daily functioning. Student veterans are succeeding in higher education. The participants of this study believe the skills and dispositions they acquired in the military are a contributing factor. Joseph returned to MRDSU after joining the military, and he recognized that there was a major difference in his study habits and the way that he approached his school work after

boot camp and military service. He felt like he acquired the skills he needed to mature and transform into a successful student.

Theme Six: The Veterans Office on MRDSU Campus Provides Valuable Support

"I love it here. It gets you away from the main part of the campus for a while."

Several of the veterans that participated in this study appreciated the space in the veteran's office. Calvin loves the facility and he appreciates that it gives him the opportunity to get away from some of the louder and busier parts of the campus. The students stated that they visited the office to get benefits processed, to study, to interact with other veterans, and to talk to the staff.

Some HBCU campuses are really making an effort to recruit and serve veterans. Cooper (2014) described some of these universities. As previously stated, students are looking for a place where they can be comfortable and where they can receive assistance in navigating campus and VA bureaucracy. There has been progress over the years, but more HBCUs need to establish fully-staffed offices dedicated to veterans.

There are two aspects of CRRT that are exhibited in student veterans' choice to utilize the Veterans Center. Their resilience is enhanced through connection or relatedness to others, and expressed and affected by multilevel attachments, including family, school, neighborhood, community and society. Their desire to connect and develop attachments to their school gives them a greater opportunity to overcome challenges and succeed in school and life.

Review of Question Two

Common Challenges Faced by Student Veterans

Theme One

Values of Millennial Generation Students "When someone tells you to do something your superior you don't ask why."

Description

- Respect
- Punctuality

Framework Components

- Resilience is linked to life stress and people's unique coping capacity

Theme Two

Physical, Psychological and Cognitive Disabilities "PTSD is not one thing. It tells you how you function in life."

Description

- Physical, Psychological, Cognitive Challenges of Student Veterans at MRDSU

Framework Components

- Resilience is biopsychosocial spiritual phenomenon
- Resilience occurs across the life course with individuals, families and communities experiencing unique paths of development

Support Systems and Personal Attributes That Facilitate Success

Theme Three

Financial Support from the VA Makes a Difference "Vocational rehabilitation pays for everything."

Description

- Money helps student veterans focus on their studies
- Most participants were full time students who did not work

Framework

- Resilience is influenced by diversity including ethnicity, race, gender, age, economic status, and physical and mental ability

Theme Four

Friends, Family, and Other Veterans Help in the Transition "My battle buddies and my friends they kept me in school."

Description

- Needed someone who understood
- Needed encouragement to stay in school

Framework

- Enhanced through connection or relatedness to others

Theme Five

Skills Acquired from the Military Help Student Veterans Succeed "It's helped me to be focused"

Description

- Following instructions
- Being on time
- Having a standard of excellence

Framework

- Involves a transactional dynamic process of person-environment exchanges
- Competence is needed in daily functioning

Theme Six

Veterans Office on MRDSU Campus Provides Valuable Support "I love it here. It gets you away from the main part of the campus for a while."

Description

- A place to study
- Supportive staff
- Process benefits

Framework

- Enhanced through connection or relatedness to others
- Expressed and affected by multilevel attachments, including family, school, neighborhood, community and society

Implications of the Study

The findings of this study reveal that HBCUs provide a welcoming and supportive environment for African American veterans, that allows them to focus on their studies. What these institutions may lack in military friendliness, they make up for with an atmosphere that is free from the racial problems at PWIs. One participant stated that for him, being an African American and a veteran is a "huge duality." Even though he served his country, people still see his race first. Every other aspect of his identity is secondary to his race. As proud as all of the veterans were of their service, they were grateful that they were at an institution that celebrated them as black people. While HBCUs have their

own issues to overcome, the veterans knew that they would feel comfortable and welcome. This study also revealed that some veterans have invisible disabilities that they sustained from their military service. Professors must be compelled to accommodate these physical, psychological and cognitive disabilities.

The current president and his administration will have a major impact on HBCUs and veterans. The 45th President, Donald J. Trump, has already announced plans for a larger military force. After two wars, the military had been downsizing. He clearly wants to reverse this trend. It remains to be seen what this administration will do to recruit and retain good soldiers. If the military population surges again, it can be expected that the needs of student veterans will remain a salient issue.

Early in his presidency, Donald J. Trump invited HBCU presidents and chancellors to the White House. More than 85 HBCU leaders attended. Vice President Pence declared, "The President and I admire the contributions of HBCUs." He also ensured them that the Trump Administration is committed to making sure that HBCUs "get the credit and attention they deserve." Many were skeptical before the meeting and disappointed afterward. While many institutions expected more from the first African American president, Barack Obama, many were pleased that he expanded the Pell grant and took other measure to improve access to higher education. All HBCU students will likely be impacted by this current administration.

One of the findings of this study is that African American student veterans value the history, the Afrocentric curriculum, and the quality of the academic programs. The current Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, made some controversial statements not long after her confirmation. After a meeting with HBCU leaders, she stated:

> A key priority for this administration is to help develop opportunities for communities that are often the most underserved. Rather than focus solely on funding, we must be willing to make the tangible, structural reforms that will allow students to reach their full potential. Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have done this since their founding. They started from the fact that there were too many students in America who did not have equal access to education. They saw that the system wasn't working, that there was an absence of opportunity, so they took it upon themselves to provide the solution. HBCUs are real pioneers when it comes to school choice. They are living proof that when more options are provided to students, they are afforded greater access and greater quality. Their success has shown that more options help students flourish. Their counsel and guidance will be crucial in addressing the current inequities we face in education. I look forward to working with the White House to elevate the role of HBCUs in this administration and to solve the problems we face in education today. (Washington Post, 2017)

Many people have criticized her lack of knowledge about the history of HBCUs. It was not a choice for many African American students to attend HBCUs. It was their only option due to segregation. The participants of this study were proud to attend a university that celebrated their heritage and accurately taught them the history of HBCUs and their impact on society.

Recommendations for HBCUs

The themes that are highlighted in the findings reveal the sentiments of the majority of the participants. The recommendations in this section will include all of the

suggestions shared by the participants in an effort to help HBCUs serve veterans better. While most of the veterans were satisfied with the veteran-friendliness of the MRDSU campus, all of them had ideas that would help HBCUs help veterans. These suggestions included: more staff for the veteran's office; better registration policies for veterans; more training for faculty and staff on the unique needs of student veterans; free college applications; more scholarships; and more fully online degree programs.

One of the ways HBCUs can improve their veteran and military friendliness is by establishing a veteran's office on campus that is fully staffed with one or more VA Certifying Officials, a director, counselors, advisors and tutors. While some HBCUs have veteran's offices, they are often understaffed and unable to adequately serve the veterans that attend the institution. The office also needs a space where the students can study, relax and get away from the busyness of the campus. One participant who had attended a community college that was very military friendly was not impressed with the veterans' services offered at MRDSU. The community college set the bar very high. He did not have to deal with the various layers of bureaucracy that exist on college campuses. The veterans' office at that veteran-friendly community college was a one stop shop that dealt with financial aid, registration and pretty much everything he needed to be successful.

In addition to a fully-staffed student veteran's office, HBCUs must train staff and faculty so they can appropriately assist students when they have to be deployed or leave school to fulfill other military obligations like trainings. For example, when students are suddenly deployed or mobilized they may need to withdraw from specific classes or all classes. The Office of the Registrar must designate a way to indicate that the withdrawl

was due to military service and in no way penalize the student for fulfilling their military obligations.

Faculty also must be trained to serve active duty service persons and reservists when they are deployed or mobilized. When students are able to remain enrolled in their classes, the professors must be flexible with deadlines because of the time difference. The faculty must remain in contact with the student and recognize that internet service may not be as dependable as it is in the United States.

Veterans with physical, psychological, and cognitive challenges and disabilities need specialized instruction. When necessary, professors must employ instructional techniques that consider these differences. Veterans who suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder often have nightmares that cause sleep deprivation. PTSD and TBI can also affect a veteran's ability to perform on certain types of assessments and examinations. A veteran who participated in this study revealed that he suffered from vertigo and migraines that make it difficult for him to study. He has to do his work when he is feeling his best so he can meet deadlines. Professors need training to understand the various challenges that veterans face so they can help them achieve their academic goals.

Veterans are looking for convenience. Many of them have made major sacrifices in service to the country and they still have to manage disabilities that they acquired in the military. HBCUs would be considered more military and veteran friendly if they offered student veterans some basic privileges that are offered at other institutions. Some of these colleges and universities offer free applications for veterans as well as early registration and priority housing. The free application for admission would attract veterans because they don't lose anything if they are not admitted. If they are admitted,

there is a greater chance that they might attend. Offering veterans early registration acknowledges that veterans have families and other adult responsibilities. They need more flexibility when it comes to class meeting times. Priority housing demonstrates the university's commitment to a nontraditional student's need for privacy. These students should not be asked to share a room with a traditional aged freshman student.

All of these adjustments would help attract more student veterans. One participant who loves his HBCU, admitted that many HBCUs stand in the need of a major rebranding effort. One change that could help these institutions appeal to more adult students is offering more online courses and completely online degree programs. For-profit colleges and universities are recruiting many veteran students because they have night classes and online programs which meet the demands of many adult students.

HBCUs could do more to promote the involvement of student veterans in campus activities and in service to the surrounding community. Campuses can introduce SALUTE (Service, Academics, Leadership, Unity, Tribute, and Excellence), the veteran's honor society to recognize student service and achievement and give veterans the opportunity to connect with one another. Another way to get the student veterans connected and aid in the transition to college is a summer institute that takes place before the school year starts. That would give veterans the opportunity to meet and become acclimated to the campus. Larger campuses can offer general education courses dedicated to veterans.

Marketing and recruitment are crucial for many colleges and universities. HBCUs that want to recruit veterans can establish a presence with the military community by advertising in veteran's magazines and participating in college and career fairs on

military bases, particularly those that are nearby. When recruiters communicate with potential students, they must help the veterans connect their military specialization to a specific major. Many veterans are first-generation college students and they may need help realizing that they are college material and that their training in the military can be translated to a major and a rewarding career.

Recommendations for the United States Military

While veterans are responsible for educating themselves about their education benefits, the United States Military could do a better job of clarifying these benefits. When a soldier gets to boot camp, they should fully understand the benefits that will be available to them while enlisted and after they separate. The exit process is also a crucial time for them to be encouraged to explore all of their options as they pursue a new career in civilian society.

Over 750,000 women have served in the Armed Forces after September 11, 2001 and the percentage of women in the military after 9/11 is double the percentage of women in recent wars (JEC, 2015). Women are important, and should be treated with respect. The military must do a better job of addressing racial and gender discrimination, and educating its personnel to respect the contributions of everyone. Some of the participants expressed deep hurt that they felt as the result of racism and sexism. No one should be subjected to that type of treatment in the workplace. The military instills so many great attributes into its service persons like discipline, focus, and respect for authority. They need to educate their units about the seriousness of these issues and compel perpetrators to stop or face severe consequences.

Recommendations for Potential Student Veterans

During the Oath of Enlistment, each veteran makes a promise to defend the country, and obey the Commander and Chief. While they are doing that, they should also promise themselves that they will take advantage of every benefit they have earned during their service. This means that they should do whatever is necessary to ensure that they will receive their benefits once they separate. They often have to make decisions when they arrive at boot camp so they must do their own personal research and be informed before they arrive. This may involve consulting with other veterans to learn what they had to do. When possible they should enroll in courses at an accredited and reputable university while they are still active duty.

When they are preparing to separate, they should save money to make sure that they have enough to support them while they are looking for employment and waiting for education benefits to begin. They also need to make sure that they are using the right program for the service they provided. Depending on the length of time and the capacity in which they served, the benefits may be different. Some people prefer the Post-9/11 GI Bill and others prefer the Montgomery GI Bill. Other variables may include the city you live in. Some qualify for vocational rehabilitation, which may pay more than those programs. Either way the veteran is responsible for getting the best package possible for his or her situation.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was limited to the military and academic experiences of African American male and female post-9/11 veterans that attended one specific historically black university, MRDSU. Qualitative data were used to answer the research questions. Here are some suggestions for future research:

1. Continue this research with a quantitative study that answers the same interview questions with survey data from as many as ten different military and veteran friendly HBCUs. The results from the quantitative study can be combined with the qualitative data from this study for more comprehensive results.
2. Investigate the experiences of African American student veterans at a military friendly predominately white institution. Some of the students at MRDSU wanted better services for veterans. It would be interesting to use a qualitative research design to learn how African Americans enjoy their experience and make progress toward graduation at a military friendly PWI.
3. Conduct a qualitative study on African American female veterans to learn more about their experiences as women in the military and how it empowered them to succeed in higher education and in their careers after separation. It would be interesting to learn what coping skills they developed to confront racism and sexism in a white male dominated military. The female population in the military has increased rapidly so the study could see how their treatment and opportunities have evolved over the years.

4. Explore the reasons why some African American veterans choose not to attend college. This could be a mixed methods study that has ten interview participants and as many as one hundred survey participants that meet the criteria.
5. Examine the experiences of African Americans that attended an FPCU to learn about their experiences as students and as graduates who sought better opportunities. This study would discover if the university fulfilled its promises and if the degree was as valuable as they were told it would be.

Conclusion

African American post-9/11 student veterans are a compelling group. Many have overcome personal, educational and military challenges. Their persistence and success in education is crucial. Their educational accomplishments can open new doors for them, and improve the outlook of generations that come after them. The GI Bill was implemented to help veterans adjust to life after military service. This race neutral policy has been impacted by a society that still grapples with race, gender and class. Measures must continue to be taken to ensure that African American student veterans have every opportunity to succeed.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

African American Veterans

Interview Protocol

The purpose of this study is to explore the academic achievement of African American Post-9/11 veterans at historically black colleges and universities. This exploratory case study will inform policy makers and higher education administrators on the impact and quality of student services for veterans on college campuses. It will also provide valuable information about other support systems that lead student veterans to achieve their academic goals in higher education.
The objective of this study is to answer the following research questions: What are the support systems that have facilitated the success of Post-9/11 veteran students at Martin R. Delany State University? What motivates African American veterans to attend HBCUs with so many other higher education options?

Introduction

1. Please tell me about yourself. What is your name, hometown, marital status, military branch, specialization and final rank? Please share whatever else you feel is important.
2. Do you have children? How old are they?

Educational Background

3. What was your high school experience like?
4. What did you do immediately after high school and why?
5. Had you taken college classes prior to enrolling in Martin R. Delany State University? What were the classes and where did you take them?

College Selection

6. Why did you choose Martin R. Delany State University?
7. Were you recruited by other institutions? Please name them.
8. Did you consider any other colleges or universities?
9. What factors caused you to enroll in college?
10. Why did you specifically choose a historically black university? Was it always your first choice to attend one?
11. Do you believe historically black colleges and universities are still needed in 2016? Why or why not?
12. Do you have any ideas about why the for-profit colleges are so popular among veterans now? Can you think specific examples from other veterans who have attended?

Academic and Financial Support

13. Are you currently using military benefits to fund your education? What program are you using?

14. Have you faced any challenges obtaining your benefits to pay for your education? What were they and how did you overcome them?
15. What do you think would lead to more veterans using their military benefits to pursue college degrees?
16. What are your biggest academic challenges? What outside challenges are impacting your academic success?
17. Are any of your professors veterans? If so, how have they supported you?
18. What support systems helped you make the transition from the military to Martin R. Delany State University? Please be specific. Were there people, organizations or institutions that had an impact?
19. What support systems are helping you achieve success in college now? Do you believe these support systems will help you graduate? What type of support do you need? How can your school provide it?
20. How do you think your experience would be different if you did not have this support?
21. How has your military experience and training helped you succeed in college?

HBCU Experience

21. How would your academic experiences be different if you were at another type of institution?
22. What do you think HBCUs could do to better recruit, retain and graduate student veterans?
23. Do you think historically black colleges are overlooked by veterans? Why or why not?

Final Thoughts

24. Do you believe your race impacted your experiences in military service? How and why?
25. Do you believe your experience would be different if you had served in a different branch of the military? How and why?
26. Do you have any final comments?

APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Month Year

Dear Student Veteran,

Thank you so much for reading this email. My name is Dymilah Hewitt and I would like to invite you to participate in my research project. I am a doctoral candidate at UNC Charlotte in the Urban Strand of the Curriculum and Instruction Program. My dissertation will explore the various factors that lead to the academic achievement of African American Post-9/11 Veterans at historically black colleges and universities.

I will be on campus conducting individual interviews with student veterans at Martin R. Delany State University in month year. The interviews will last between 60 and 90 minutes. Would you please consider participating in an interview session? Your responses will help the faculty, staff and administration at colleges and universities as they attempt to recruit, retain and graduate student veterans.

Individual interviews can be scheduled at a time that works for you. The best days for me will be month year (Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday) from 9 AM to 3 PM. Please email me and suggest a time.

Thank you so much. I look forward to meeting you. If you have questions, please call me.

Dymilah Hewitt

Doctoral Candidate at UNC Charlotte

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT

College of Education
Department of Middle, Secondary and K-12 Education
9201 University City Boulevard, Charlotte, NC 28223-0001

Informed Consent for Individual Interviews
{To be signed by all student veterans who agree to participate in individual interviews}

Project Title: The Experiences and Academic Successes of African American Post-9/11 Veterans

Project Purpose
The purpose of this research study is to help fill the gap in the research on veterans by including the voices of African American student veterans, particularly those attending HBCUs. This data can help to inform higher education policy. It can also help HBCUs develop programs and services for veterans. You are invited to participate in a research study on the experiences and academic success of African American post-9/11 veterans. This research study focuses on the academic achievement of African American veterans but it also explores the evolution of their higher education options and the shift in the type of institutions they have selected from World War II to the present.

Investigator
The principal investigator is Dymilah Hewitt, a doctoral candidate in Curriculum and Instruction with a concentration in Urban Education at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. The chair of her dissertation committee is Dr. Greg Wiggan, Associate Professor in the Department of Middle, Secondary and K-12 Education at UNC Charlotte.

Eligibility
You are invited to participate in this study if you are an African American post-9/11 veteran who is currently pursuing a degree or recently graduated from Martin R. Delany State University. Participants can be on the Post-9/11 GI Bill, the Montgomery GI Bill, Vocational Rehabilitation or any other Department of Defense or Veterans Affairs tuition assistance program. It does not matter how the veteran participant funds his or her education. You may not participate in this study if you have not served in a branch of the United States Armed Forces.

Overall Description of Participation
If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a 60-minute initial interview with the researcher, Dymilah Hewitt. This interview will be audio recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. After the researcher has analyzed the interview data, she

will contact you for a follow-up interview for clarification, further probing and to make sure that she has captured your true sentiments about your experiences. The follow-up interview will take 30 to 60 minutes. They will also be audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Initial interviews will be done in person. Follow-up interviews may be done over Skype or the telephone. There will be 10 participants in this study.

Length of Participation

Your participation will take approximately 60 minutes for the first interview and 30 minutes for the second interview. The time between the first and second interview will be approximately two to four weeks. Each participant will have the opportunity to read the transcript of each interview to make sure the researcher has accurately captured the participant's sentiments. It may take up to 60 minutes to review the initial interview transcript and up to 30 minutes to review the follow-up transcript. The total amount of time would be 3 hours.

Risks and Benefits of Participation

The project may involve risks. While the study focuses on the experiences and academic success of military veterans, the researcher will ask questions about your military experience that may cause you to remember traumatic experiences during your military service. For this reason, the interviews will take place on campus so the participants will have access to the Health Center or Counseling Services. The direct benefits to you as a study participant include the opportunity to reflect on the internal and external factors that have contributed to your academic success. Benefits to society may include information that can help colleges and universities serve veterans better. Your participation can also benefit other veterans who will enroll in college in the future.

Compensation/Payment/Incentives

Every participant will receive a $25 Target gift card upon the completion of the second interview.

Volunteer Statement

You are a volunteer. The decision to participate in this study is completely up to you. If you decide to be in the study, you may stop at any time. If you decide not to participate in the study or if you stop once you have started you will not be eligible for the gift card.

Confidentiality Statement

Any identifiable information collected as part of this study will remain confidential to the extent possible and will only be disclosed with your permission or as required by law. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the digital recording, your confidentiality for things you say on the digital recording cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will try to limit access to the digital recording. The following steps will be taken to ensure this confidentiality: comments during the recorded interviews will be de-identified; participants will be given pseudonyms; and data will be stored in a password protected computer and flash drive. Recorded interviews will be immediately saved on the computer and erased from the digital recorder. Transcribed interviews will be destroyed three years after the publication of the dissertation and related publication projects.

Statement of Fair Treatment and Respect

UNC Charlotte wants to make sure that you are treated in a fair and respectful manner. Contact the Office of Research Compliance if you have questions about how you are treated as a study

participant. If you have any questions about the actual project or study, please contact Dymilah Hewitt or Dr. Greg Wiggan.

Approval Date

I have read the information in this consent form. I have had the chance to ask questions about this study, and those questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I am at least 18 years of age, and I agree to participate in this research project. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form after it has been signed by me and the principal investigator of this research study.

_____ _____

Participant Name (PRINT) DATE

_____

Participant Signature

_____ _____

Investigator Signature DATE