

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL CASE STUDY OF FACULTY AND STAFF EXPERIENCES IN
GREEN ZONE TRAINING TO SUPPORT STUDENT VETERAN TRANSITION INTO
HIGHER EDUCATION

by

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ABSTRACT

CHRISTINE REED DAVIS. A Phenomenological case study of faculty and staff experiences in Green Zone training to support student veteran transition to higher education. (Under the direction of DR. JAE HOON LIM)

The enactment of the federal G.I. Bill in 1944 and subsequent amendments over the past 76 years have provided greater access to higher education for veteran service members (Servicemen's Readjustment Act, 1944; Steele et al., 2018; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018a). Military-affiliated students represent the largest number of non-traditional learners entering higher education (Osborne, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2016; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2013; VA Campus Toolkit, 2019) with continued growth estimated in future years (VA Campus Toolkit, 2019). This current and anticipated influx of student veterans necessitates post-secondary institutions to prepare for the unique strengths, challenges, and stressors presented by student veterans in their transition from the military to college.

This phenomenological case study explored the experiences of 12 faculty and staff members in a campus-based Green Zone professional development training program intended to support the transition of student veterans into higher education. Empirical research focused on faculty and staff experiences in Green Zone training is nonexistent. Aiming to fill a void in scholarly knowledge, this study investigated how faculty and staff experienced the phenomenon of Green Zone training. The exploration was guided by four research questions: 1) What are the initial motivations of participants to engage in Green Zone training?; 2) How do faculty and staff characterize their overall experiences in the Green Zone training program?; 3) What kind of perspective changes did participants experience during the training?; and 4) What are the post-

training outcomes of participants' attendance in Green Zone training? An iterative cycle of inductive analysis yielded 12 major themes and 31 subthemes from participant narratives that were triangulated by additional contextual data. Due to the interpretive nature of the study, no single theoretical framework guided the research. Instead, highlighted thematic findings were situated against theories of organizational culture and transformative learning to provide robust context to the experiences of faculty and staff in Green Zone training. Additional scholarly literature added insight to discussion of research discoveries. Findings of the study showed that organizational culture was a contributory element in participants' overall experience in the Green Zone program, while engagement in learning that exposed them to real-life experiences of a veteran served as a pivotal point of new understanding and connection to the material. An unexpected discovery of the research was the cognitive tension that participants experienced in navigating competing ideological forces to redefine the concept of a supportive campus community for all students. Implications of this study inform application of professional development practices for higher education leaders and training practitioners in support of student veterans and other invisible and marginalized student populations.

DEDICATION

This research reflects five years of my academic focus, and a lifetime of personal and professional commitment. As the granddaughter, daughter, and sister of veterans, the topic of how colleges and universities prepare for military personnel on our campuses is one that is close to my heart. The experiences of my grandfather, Lloyd Avery, my father Allen Reed, and my brother and sister-in-law, Derek and Shannon Reed, were at the forefront of my mind throughout my research. The stories from the many student veterans (most notably Christopher Brasel, Alex Swanston, and Curtis Chancey) with whom I have had the honor of interacting helped to shape my understanding of the need for such research. I am privileged to serve these veterans with my scholarship and to help positively shape the institutional preparation for generations of future student veterans.

My devotion to this doctoral journey was made possible through the support of my husband, Scott, and my children Cooper and Emma, who provided me the space, motivation, and encouragement to focus on this labor of academic passion. Each of you has served as a rock of strength and grounding force for me when I questioned my own abilities. Scott, I could not have made it through the past several years without your constant cheerleading and personal sacrifices. Now, let's figure out what Chapter 6 looks like for us.

“Dissertating” and “deaning” are difficult tasks to take on by themselves, never mind at the same time, but doing them both during protests for racial injustice, a campus shooting, and a global pandemic created an extra layer of challenge and fatigue for me. I am forever grateful to my informal doctoral cohort who kept my spirits up, especially Emily and Rachael who never failed to be there to support me in both roles. I am thankful to my Dean of Students Office family who gave me grace and words of inspiration along the way. To Sharisse, who made sure I carved

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Finally, I would not have made it through this dissertation journey without my Chair, Dr. Jae Hoon Lim, who consistently provided me with encouragement, wise guidance, and reminders of my abilities. Dr. Lim's research interest in student veterans has inspired my own curiosity and excitement about how I can contribute scholarly literature in support of these students. I am thankful for her unending patience, words of praise, and availability at the oddest of hours. My next goal is to be published alongside this insightful and tireless scholar.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Military-affiliated students represent the fastest growing population of non-traditional learners in higher education (Osborne, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2016; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2013; VA Campus Toolkit, 2019). Federal legislative and financial support for veterans participating in civilian education began with the implementation of the 1944 G.I. Bill (Altschuler & Blumin, 2009; Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Servicemen's Readjustment Act, 1944) and has resulted in an increased level of access for military-affiliated students to post-secondary education over the past 76 years (Steele et al., 2018; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018a). Since implementation of the 2008 Post-9/11 G.I. Bill, military-affiliated student enrollment in higher education has continued to grow (Osborne, 2014). The number of beneficiaries who received G.I. Bill educational benefits increased from 500,000 to almost 900,000 between 2009 and 2018, with a peak of over one million recipients in 2013 (Osborne, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2016; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2013; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018d). An additional 220,000 beneficiaries are estimated to utilize higher education benefits in future years (VA Campus Toolkit, 2019). Federally legislated access to higher education and the current and future influx of military-affiliated student enrollment compels institutions to be cognizant of, and responsive to, the needs of this ever-growing population.

A joint report released by the American Council on Education and the NASPA—Student Affairs in Higher Education association (Molina & Morse, 2015) outlined the similarities and differences amongst military-affiliated undergraduate students. Molina and Morse (2015) asserted that military-affiliated students shared a common factor in

representing a diverse population of students in higher education; however, military service obligations represented the primary difference between veterans and active duty, National Guard, and reservist military personnel.¹ Because of distinctions in service obligations, veterans differ from other military-affiliated students in that they were once fully entrenched in military culture but are no longer engaged in the ongoing organizational activity, structure, and intrinsic support systems of military life (Lighthall, 2012). The impacts of transitioning out of the military and integrating into the civilian academic community make the experiences and needs of veterans different from other military-affiliated students (Falkey, 2016; Vacchi & Berger, 2014); therefore, this study focused on the distinctive military-affiliated population of student veterans in higher education.

Overview of Literature

The background of military training, adherence to a highly structured hierarchy, reintegration into civilian life, and for some, involvement in combat experiences make student veterans a unique campus community with transition experiences unlike their civilian peers. A review of scholarly literature related to student veterans in higher education identified several areas of transitional strain within this distinct community, including acculturating from military to academic norms (Arminio et al., 2015; Arminio et al., 2018; DiRamio et al., 2008; Kelley et al., 2013); navigating the campus climate of colleges and universities (Arminio et al., 2015); renegotiating an identity from soldier to

¹ Title 38 of the United States Code §§ 101-111 (United States Code, Veteran's Benefits, n.d.), defines a veteran as an individual who has previously served in active duty status, or has been discharged from duty in a manner other than dishonorable. Whereas active duty, National Guard, and reservists have ongoing obligations to the military, either in the form of full-time service or "drilling periods" (Molina & Morse, 2015, p. 3) of two weeks per year and one weekend per month.

student (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Kelley et al., 2013; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010); and coping with mental health concerns (Albright & Bryan, 2018; Barry, 2015; Bryan et al., 2014). Transitional challenges faced by student veterans in the higher education environment manifest in a variety of ways. Common indications of transitional stress for student veterans include a higher need for social support than civilian peers, psychiatric symptoms that impact health and academic functioning, feelings of on-campus isolation, and frustrations relating to faculty members and fellow students (Barry, 2015; Bryan et al., 2014; Kelley et al., 2013). Furthermore, transitional stressors can act as a barrier to student veteran success in the academic setting.

Institutional commitment to engage faculty and staff in supporting roles for student veteran transition is a recommended best practice (Albright & Bryan, 2018; Cook & Kim, 2009; McBain et al., 2012). Attending to the needs of student veterans involves cross-divisional collaboration between institutional units to create “veteran-friendly campuses...where programs and people [are] in place to assist with the transition between college and the military” (Ackerman et al., 2009, p. 10). An exemplar of a successful cross-divisional initiative is Green Zone professional development training. Developed at Virginia Commonwealth University in 2010, Green Zone training aims to educate faculty and staff about the strengths, challenges, and unique stressors of the student veteran transition and create a visible campus network from whom student veterans can seek assistance and support (Kane, 2016; Nichols-Casebolt, 2012). Over the past ten years, the Green Zone training model has been implemented at 100 (Virginia Commonwealth University, 2020) of the 7,021 postsecondary institutions in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018), representing a slow expansion of

knowledge within higher education related to student veterans and their unique transitional needs.

Faculty and staff understanding of, and perceptions about, the military-affiliated student population can have a considerable impact on successful transition of student veterans into the higher education environment (Albright & Bryan, 2018; Blaauw-Hara, 2016; Gonzales & Elliot, 2016; Lim et al., 2018; Vaccaro, 2015). Despite the surge in military-affiliated student enrollment and a recognition of best practices related to institutional training initiatives (American Council on Education, 2010, Dillard & Yu, 2018; Kane, 2016; Nichols-Casebolt, 2012), many institutions are deficient in training faculty and staff on issues related to student veterans (Cook & Kim, 2009; DiRamio, 2017; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Lim et al., 2018; McBain et al., 2012; Osborne, 2014). As a result, a scarcity of empirical research exists that explores faculty and staff experiences in training programs, such as Green Zone, focused on student veteran transition and support.

Epistemological Propositions

A qualitative phenomenological approach to inquiry was undertaken in this study. Such investigation focuses on social construction of reality through descriptions of the essence and meaning of lived experiences using words, artifacts, observations, or images as points of examination and interpretation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Mertens, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Vagle, 2018). The tradition of qualitative research views research “as a fundamentally collaborative and dialogic process” (Mertens, 2015, p. 345). A phenomenological approach to qualitative research recognizes the influence of the researcher’s subjectivity and relationship with the phenomenon “in the dynamic

intentional relationships that tie participants, the researcher...together” (Vagle, 2018, p. 32). Grounded in the propositions of qualitative and phenomenological research, I acknowledge the interactive nature of the research process and co-construction of knowledge that occurred between participants and myself as the researcher.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this phenomenological case study was to investigate the lived experiences of faculty and staff in university-sponsored Green Zone professional development training intended to ease the transition of student veterans into the college setting. The following research questions directed the study:

1. What are the initial motivations of participants to engage in Green Zone training?
2. How do faculty and staff characterize their overall experiences in the Green Zone training program?
3. What kind of perspective changes did participants experience during the training?
4. What are the post-training outcomes of participants’ attendance in Green Zone training?

Methodology

The inquiry was framed through a phenomenological methodology intended to understand sense-making and common threads in the experiences of individuals within a specific lived phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Merriam & Tisdale, 2016; Patton, 2015; Vagle, 2018; van Manen, 2001). A qualitative methodology utilizing a single case study design (Creswell, 2006; Jones et al., 2014; Merriam & Tisdale, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016) guided this investigation. Case study was the most appropriate design for this research because the case of faculty and staff experiences in Green Zone training was

“clearly identifiable and limited in scope” (Jones et al., 2014, p. 96) within the context of an institution of higher education. The phenomenological nature of this qualitative case study allowed for a rich inquiry into how faculty and staff experienced the phenomenon of Green Zone training in support of the student veteran population.

Research Site, Participants, and Data Collection

The research was conducted at a large, public institution of higher education in the Southeast that offers multiple services for student veterans. Study participants were recruited through purposeful and maximum variation sampling (Jones et al., 2014; Merriam & Tisdale, 2016; Mertens, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016) of faculty and staff who participated in Green Zone training, which was the phenomenon under study.

A dual data collection method was utilized in the study. First, semistructured interviews were used as the primary method to gather narratives about participants’ experiences in the training program. Two sets of semistructured interviews (Jones et al., 2014; Merriam & Tisdale, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Vagle, 2018) were conducted with 12 Green Zone training participants to gather descriptive details about experiences in and reflections of the training. Additionally, one semistructured interview and one follow-up email questionnaire were conducted with Green Zone training facilitators as a method of data triangulation (Ravitch & Carl, 2016) to enhance the internal validity of the study. Second, documents related to Green Zone training were reviewed as a source of background and augmentation (Bogdan and Bilken, 2006; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Shenton, 2004; Yin, 2018) to the narrative data collected through semistructured interviews. Collection of contextual Green Zone training documents included Veteran Services Office (VSO) website information, electronic marketing for the training

program, training session PowerPoint slides, and anonymous evaluation responses from training participants submitted to the Human Resources department.

Contextual Theories

Due to the interpretive and inductive nature of this research, no single theoretical concept framed the study. The goal of a phenomenological study is to understand lived experiences through descriptive inquiry rather than conclusive assertion (Vagle, 2018). As a result, theories of organizational culture (Schein, 1984, 1992, 1993; Schein & Schein, 2017) and transformative learning (Mezirow, 1978, 1991, 2000, 2002) informed interpretation rather than offered definitive suppositions about the meaning of the data. Organizational culture theory purports that subcultures exist within organizations, and the ongoing cultural growth of an organization depends upon negotiation and alignment of subcultural values and assumptions (Schein, 1984, 1992, 1993; Schein & Schein, 2017). The theory of transformative learning proposes that individuals can make a shift in beliefs and attitudes based upon the actual process of learning, rather than solely through the acquisition of new knowledge (Hodge, 2011; Mezirow, 1978, 1991, 2000, 2002). In this study, organizational culture theory provided a contextual lens through which to situate faculty and staff experiences in Green Zone training within the larger institutional context, while transformative learning theory informed the interpretation of individual meaning-making in the training experience. Highlighted thematic findings developed through inductive data analysis were situated against these theories in an effort to provide robust context to the phenomenon of Green Zone training experienced by faculty and staff.

Significance of the Study

This research explored faculty and staff experiences in a Green Zone professional development training program and aims to address three significant areas of impact. First, the study influences scholarly knowledge by filling a void in the current research related to faculty and staff training in support of student veterans on college campuses. Second, research findings help to illuminate an understanding of faculty and staff attitudes towards student veterans and motivations to participate in training to support this population of students. Third, the study offers professional development practice recommendations for faculty and staff training programs related to support for student veterans specifically and more broadly for support of other marginalized and invisible student populations. As a whole, this study is significant in that it serves as catalytic research to shift the tone of discourse on the topic of support for student veterans in the higher education setting. The overarching intent of the current research was to move colleges and universities away from placing the primary onus of responsibility for transition success on student veterans, towards more holistic institutional accountability and organizational awareness of the unique characteristics and transitional needs of student veterans.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of the study, the following definitions of terms were applied:

Adjunct Instructor: “Professors who are hired on a contractual basis, usually in part-time positions” (Resilient Educator, 2020).

Faculty: “The teaching and administrative staff and those members of the administration having academic rank in an educational institution” (Merriam-Webster, Faculty, n.d., para. 9).

G.I. Bill: “Department of Veterans Affairs education benefit earned by members of Active Duty, Selected Reserve and National Guard Armed Forces and families. The benefit is designed to help service members and eligible veterans cover costs associated with getting an education or training.” (G.I. Bill, n.d., para. 1).

Green Zone: A location recognized by United States military personnel as a place of safety (Nichols-Casebolt, 2012).

Higher education: A term used to describe education provided by a college or university.

Military-affiliated: Active duty, National Guard, reservists, and veterans of the U.S. military receiving educational benefits.

Non-traditional student: Characterized as “being independent for financial aid purposes, having one or more dependents, being a single caregiver, not having a traditional high school diploma, delaying post-secondary enrollment, attending school part time, and/or being employed full time” (U.S. Department of Education, 2015, p.1).

Post-secondary education: A term used to describe schooling post earning a high school diploma or General Equivalency Diploma.

Staff: “The officers chiefly responsible for the internal operations of an institution or business” (Merriam-Webster, Staff, n.d., para. 8).

Student veteran: Any student who has previous military service, including active duty, National Guard, or Reserves, regardless of deployment status, combat experience, or G.I. Bill use.

Veteran: “A person who has served in the active military, naval, or air service and who was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable” (United States Code, Veteran, n.d., para. 43).

Summary and Organization of the Study

The influx of military-affiliated students into higher education urges deliberate attention and education for faculty and staff about the unique strengths, challenges, and transitional stressors of student veterans. Participation in Green Zone professional development training is regarded as best practice to support student veteran transition from a military to academic environment. As a lack of literature exists that explores faculty and staff experiences in professional development training to support student veterans, this research intended to fill a gap in scholarly knowledge and offer professional practice recommendations related to institutional support for student veterans.

The remainder of the study is organized into four subsequent chapters. Chapter 2 introduces a review of scholarly literature regarding student veterans in higher education, faculty and staff perceptions of military-affiliated students, faculty and staff training programs to support student veteran transition, and the contextual theories utilized to interpret the findings of the study. Chapter 3 outlines the research design and methods utilized in the study, role and positionality of the researcher, research site and participants, protection of human subjects, approaches to sampling and data collection, data analysis and interpretation techniques, and strategies for quality applied in the research. Major discoveries drawn from inductive analysis of data and thematic interpretations of the research findings are presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 provides a summary of the research, discussion of significant outcomes and contribution to the

scholarly body of knowledge, implications for professional practice, and recommendations for future research. The study culminates with bibliography of referenced literature and appendices.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The growing number of student veterans enrolling in postsecondary education bring a complexity and diversity of pre-college experiences owed to military service. Such complexity compels institutional efforts to facilitate successful transition from the military to academia. Previous scholarly literature has focused on the experiences of student veterans navigating their transition into higher education and made recommendations for veteran-focused institutional support services (Campbell & Riggs, 2015; DiRamio et al., 2008; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Naphan & Elliott, 2015; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010; Schiavone & Gentry, 2014). In addition to broad support programs and services, individual faculty and staff play a significant role in fostering or hindering the successful transition of student veterans into the university environment. As integral agents of institutional efforts, faculty and staff should be cognizant of, and responsive to, the needs of these unique nontraditional students in order to facilitate positive transition into the university environment.

A scarcity of literature centers on intentional efforts to prepare faculty and staff for the strengths presented and challenges faced by student veterans in the higher education setting. The study aimed to address the existing gap in scholarly research on this topic and inform faculty and staff training initiatives that support the transition of student veterans into higher education. This chapter presents a review of literature related to veterans in postsecondary education, and is divided into four sections as summarized in Table 1: an overview of student veterans in higher education; faculty and staff perceptions of student veterans; faculty and staff training to support student veteran

transition; and contextual theories that will inform analysis of data and implications of the research findings.

Table 1

<i>Sections of Identified Literature</i>	
Category	Sources
Student Veterans in Higher Education	The G.I. Bill (Altschuler & Blumin, 2009; Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Fulton & Sponsler, 2015; Labaree, 2016; Military Benefits, 2018; Military.com, 2018; Montgomery G.I. Bill Act, 1987; Osborne, 2014; Servicemen's Readjustment Act, 1944; Steele et al., 2018; Thelin, 2004; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2006; U.S Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018a; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018b; U.S Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018c; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018d; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018e)
	Enrollment Growth (Osborne, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2016; U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, 2013; U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, 2018d; VA Campus Toolkit, 2019)
	A Unique Student Population of Strengths (Arminio et al., 2015; Blaauw-Hara, 2016; Boerner, 2013; Kelley et al., 2013; Lighthall, 2012; Livingston et al., 2011; Hart & Thompson, 2013; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010; Vaccaro, 2015; Vacchi, 2012)
	Transitional Stressors from Military to Higher Education (Albright & Bryan, 2018; American College Health Association, 2014; Arminio et al., 2015; Barry, 2015; Bryan & Bryan, 2014; Bryan et al., 2014; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Jones, 2013; Kelley et al., 2013; Read et al., 2011; Rudd et al., 2011; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010)
Faculty and Staff Perceptions of Student Veterans	Outward and Invisible Demonstrations (Arminio et al., 2018; Barnard-Brak et al., 2011; DiRamio et al., 2008; Gonzales & Elliott, 2016; Hart & Thompson, 2013; Lim et al., 2018; Livingston et al., 2011)

	Gaps in Awareness for Faculty and Staff (Albright & Bryan, 2018; Cook & Kim, 2009; DiRamio et al., 2008; McBain et al., 2012; Osborne, 2014; Schavione & Gentry, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2016)
Faculty and Staff Training to Support Student Veteran Transition	<p>Institutional Training Deficiencies (Cook & Kim, 2009; DiRamio, 2017; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Lim et al., 2018; McBain et al., 2012; Osbourne, 2014)</p> <p>Recommendation for Best Practice (Ackerman et al., 2009; Arminio & Grabosky, 2013; Arminio et al., 2015; Arminio et al., 2018; Cook & Kim, 2009; Dillard & Yu, 2018; DiRamio, 2017; DiRamio et al., 2008; Gonzales & Elliott, 2016; McBain et al., 2012; Osborne, 2014; Schiavone & Gentry, 2014)</p> <p>Green Zone Training (Ackerman et al., 2009; American Council on Education, 2010; Arminio et al., 2015; Aurora Foundation, 2019; DiRamio, 2017; Kane, 2016; Nichols-Casebolt, 2012; Poynter & Tubbs, 2008; Virginia Commonwealth University, 2020)</p>
Contextual Theories	<p>Organizational Culture Theory (Fralinger & Olson, 2007; Schein, 1984; Schein, 1992; Schein, 1993)</p> <p>Transformative Learning Theory (Hodge, 2011; Mezirow, 1978; Mezirow, 1991; Mezirow, 2000; Mezirow, 2002; Whitelaw et al., 2004)</p>

Student Veterans in Higher Education

The G.I. Bill

Federal legislative and financial support for military veterans participating in civilian education began with the implementation of the 1944 G.I. Bill (Altschuler & Blumin, 2009; Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Serviceman's Readjustment Act, 1944; Thelin,

2004). The Servicemen's Readjustment Act (1944), otherwise known as the G.I. Bill, was passed in an effort to counteract mass unemployment of military service members and aid in veteran transition back to civilian life after World War II (Altschuler & Blumin, 2009). The G.I. Bill entitled veterans to benefits that included unemployment compensation, federally guaranteed housing loans, as well as educational and training assistance that ranged from one to four years (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Revered as "one of the largest and most comprehensive government initiatives ever enacted in the United States" (Altschuler & Blumin, 2009, p. 73), the G.I. Bill set the stage for continued access to higher education for future generations of military personnel.

Since the expiration of the original G.I. Bill in 1954, the federal government has enacted multiple pieces of legislation to afford educational privileges to veterans (Steele et al., 2018; Labaree, 2016; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018a). In 1954, Congress passed the Korean G.I. Bill. The terms of the Korean G.I. Bill provided benefits for veterans who served from 1950 to 1954 but reduced the timeframe of educational benefits from 48 months to a maximum of 36 months (Military Benefits, 2018; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018b). The 1966 Veterans' Readjustment Benefits Act, or the Vietnam G.I. Bill, restored educational benefits to veterans after the expiration of the Korean G.I. Bill in 1954 (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2006). The Vietnam G.I. Bill was the most successful veteran educational benefit program up until its expiration in 1989. Under this third edition of G.I. Bill legislation, approximately 76% of eligible veterans enrolled in postsecondary institutions, compared to 43.4% under the Korean G.I. Bill, and 50.5% under the 1944 G.I. Bill (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2006).

Continued support for veteran access to higher education benefits proceeded through the end of the decade. Passage of the 1977 Post-Vietnam Era Veterans' Educational Assistance Act provided up to \$2,700 in federal funding to match the personal contributions of veterans and active duty members towards their education (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2006). The Montgomery G.I. Bill Act was ratified in 1987 to provide up to 36 academic months and \$69,000 for tuition or training based upon the type, timing, and length of military service for active duty and military reservists (Military.com, 2018; Montgomery G.I. Bill Act, 1987). In 1991, the Persian Gulf Conflict Supplemental Authorization and Personnel Benefits Act recognized the Persian Gulf Conflict as a war to determine eligibility for veteran benefits to education and other services, including an authorization to increase monthly educational benefits enacted under the Montgomery G.I. Bill (U.S Department of Veterans Affairs, 2006).

United States military response to the global war on terror increased at the turn of the 21st century. After the 2001 terrorist attacks on the U.S., the Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008, otherwise known as the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill, awarded benefits to military personnel and veterans who served on active duty after September 10, 2001 (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018a). Praised as the most substantial educational benefit for veterans since the 1944 G.I. Bill, the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill provided up to 15 years of funding for tuition, books, supplies, and housing allowances, as well as the transfer of educational benefits to qualified family dependents (Osborne, 2014; Steele et al., 2018).

Since its implementation in 2008, subsequent amendments to Post-9/11 G.I. Bill allowances continued to enhance benefits for military-affiliated access to higher

education. The 2009 Yellow Ribbon G.I. Bill Education Enhancement Program allowed public and private institutions to enter into agreements with the Veterans Administration to fund tuition expenses that exceeded the 15-year cap of Post-9/11 benefits (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018e). The Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2015 required all postsecondary public institutions to provide in-state tuition rates to qualified veterans and dependents, regardless of state residency status (Fulton & Sponsler, 2015; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018a), further widening access to education for veterans at institutions across the country. Finally, the most recent and extensive amendment to the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill was passed in 2017. The Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act, or Forever G.I. Bill, provides expansions of educational benefits including elimination of the 15-year term of Post-9/11 benefits, expanded work study options, and reserve duty that counts towards Post-9/11 G.I. Bill benefits (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018a; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018c).

Although no program has provided the same financial commitment to a fully funded education since the original 1944 G.I. Bill (Altschuler & Blumin, 2009), passage of the 2008 Post-9/11 G.I. Bill and ensuing amendments have removed monetary barriers and increased veteran access to higher education, leading to an escalation of military-affiliated growth on college campuses.

Enrollment Growth

Benefits of the G.I. Bill offer military personnel the opportunity to pursue civilian education at federal expense, which has contributed to a marked increase in the number of military-affiliated students matriculating into higher education. Since the

implementation of the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill, military-affiliated student enrollment at colleges and universities has increased from 500,000 to 893,725 between 2009 and 2018, peaking at over 1.1 million students in 2013 (Osborne, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2016; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2013; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018d; VA Campus Toolkit, 2019). The rise in postsecondary enrollment is not anticipated to ebb. Federal estimates project an additional 220,000 service members will utilize higher education benefits in future years (VA Campus Toolkit, 2019). Data confirm that the impact of federally legislated access to higher education, and the continued influx of military-affiliated enrollment, calls for institutions to holistically prepare for the strengths, challenges, and transitional needs presented by these distinctive scholars.

A Unique Student Population of Strengths

The background of professional and tactical training, mission-driven ethos, and for some individuals, combat settings, makes student veterans a unique campus community with life experiences unlike their civilian peers. Despite shared conditioning in a military culture based on values of collectivism, goal-orientation, structure, hierarchy, and masculinity (Arminio et al., 2015; Kelley et al., 2013), student veterans are a population that reflects a diversity of experiences based upon age, gender, military branch, role, intensity of service, and motivations (Lighthall, 2012; Vaccaro, 2015; Vacchi, 2012). Such diversity affords a variety of strengths on which student veterans rely in their transition from the military to higher education.

While not a homogenous group, commonalities exist among strengths that student veterans offer in the educational setting. Boerner (2013) referred to military-affiliated

students as the “quintessential nontraditional students” (p. 23) in reference to their levels of maturity, diverse experiences, and drive. Scholarly research findings highlighted positive characteristics related to student veterans’ leadership skills, determination to succeed, self-awareness, self-reliance, and humility (Blaauw-Hara, 2016; Livingston et al., 2011; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). Kelley, Smith, and Fox (2013) maintained that student veterans hold many advantages in the higher education environment that traditional-aged students do not possess, including exposure to professional training and development, financial independence from parents, greater self-worth, a strong sense of community, and a high value on education. Hart and Thompson (2013) conducted a study which reported that faculty recognized the benefits of broader cultural understanding and worldviews which student veterans infused into class discussions and projects. Placing an emphasis on the strengths that student veterans bring to campus is an important factor in creating a positive baseline from which to engage faculty and staff in support of student veteran successes and transitional tensions.

Transitional Stressors from Military to Higher Education

Despite their aforementioned strengths, student veterans’ transition into higher education is often a taxing process marked with multiple stressors and challenges. Transitional stressors experienced by student veterans manifest in a variety of ways including acclimation from military to academic culture, navigating changes in identity, and coping with mental health issues.

The transition of military-affiliated students into higher education settings is distinctively complex due to their prior indoctrination into military culture. Arminio, Grabosky, and Lang (2015) cited a common challenge facing student veterans entering

college as the culture shift from a “highly structured, routine-based military to the less structured environment of a college campus” (p. 21). Military culture centers on a collective mindset, strict adherence to hierarchical authority, linear transfer of information, and conservative social norms (Arminio et al., 2015; Kelley et al., 2013). In contrast, academic culture is rooted in individualism, collegial relationships, democratic principles, critical assessment of governance structures, construction of knowledge through experience, and liberal social norms (Arminio et al., 2015; Kelley et al., 2013). The conflict between structured military and loose academic cultures leads to confusion and frustration for some student veterans regarding how to navigate the organizational environment and customs of higher education. Student veterans can experience a series of cultural incongruities surrounding institutional structure, social standards, orientation of authority, sense of purpose, and the role of teaching and learning (Kelley et al., 2013). The disparities between strict military and progressive higher education norms often necessitate an adjustment of previously established expectations and identities in order to acclimate to new academic surroundings.

Renegotiating identity from soldier to student presents a unique challenge for veteran students. DiRamio and Jarvis (2011) asserted that a higher education environment “where identity is more loosely defined” (p. 27) challenges the structured identity that many student veterans develop and solidify during military service. Military personnel adhere to expectations that individual identity is secondary to the collective identity of the group or unit, and that every task and role is focused on a specific purpose (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Kelley et al., 2013). Acclimation to the college environment requires student veterans to renegotiate their concept of identity away from a collective mission-

driven framework towards a more individualized perspective, where purpose is fluid and determined by individual interests. Transition research conducted by Rumann and Hamrick (2010) found that reconciling differences and recognizing similarities between military and academic expectations was an integral part of identity and role renegotiation for student veterans. Study participants reported primary categories of identity incongruity as differences between military and academic life, applying aspects of former military roles to the new academic environment, and mental health stressors owing to military experiences (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010).

Exposure to combat and other psychological stressors cause some student veterans to contend with the visible and invisible impacts of military service, including coping with mental health issues at higher rates than their civilian peers. Research on the prevalence of psychological distress in college students found that over 40% of post-9/11 student veteran participants screened positive for post-traumatic stress disorder, compared to nine percent of the general college student population (Bryan & Bryan, 2014; Read et al., 2011; Rudd et al., 2011). Similarly, 24% of student veteran participants screened positive for depression, compared to 12.1% of the general college population (American College Health Association, 2014; Bryan & Bryan, 2014; Rudd et al., 2011). Additional research on the impact of coping with mental health factors related to anxiety, depressive symptoms, post-traumatic stress disorder, and suicidal ideation has reported a negative effect on the academic adjustment and grade point averages of student veterans (Barry, 2015; Bryan et al., 2014). Psychological stressors heightened by the unique transitional difficulties of assimilating from familiar military culture into unfamiliar academic norms can create barriers to student veteran success and institutional comfort.

Institutional attention to broad programs and services including G.I. Bill benefit certification, specialized orientation, counseling and career services, peer mentoring, and veteran-focused student organizations can assist in addressing the unique strengths and stressors that distinguish student veterans from other nontraditional students. Jones (2013) asserted that recognition of the distinctive qualities brought to campus by military-affiliated students, combined with institutional resources dedicated to easing the challenges of integrating into a university environment, was of “key importance for veteran success in higher education” (p. 2). However, beyond broad institutional initiatives, individual faculty and staff perceptions of and interactions with this student population also play a critical role in the positive educational achievement of student veterans.

Faculty and Staff Perceptions of Student Veterans

Faculty and staff play different, but equally significant functions, in support of student veterans transitioning into higher education. Staff provide guidance and assistance with administrative, psychosocial, and extracurricular needs, while faculty serve as the facilitators of academic and professional preparation for student veterans. Due to these important roles, the ways in which faculty and staff perceive, understand, and demonstrate biases towards student veterans can alleviate or exacerbate the transitional strain of this population.

Outward and Invisible Demonstrations

Faculty

Empirical research focused on faculty attitudes and behaviors towards student veterans is scarce because most studies place student veteran experiences at the core of

the research. However, several recent studies explored the explicit and implicit viewpoints of faculty related to military-affiliated students.

Barnard-Brak, Bagby, and Sulak (2011) surveyed 596 faculty members regarding views on military service, involvement in U.S. military conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, and ability to address the needs of combat veterans in the classroom. Results of the survey found that instructors who held negative attitudes towards the military reported less respect for the service of student veterans and felt less confident and equipped to assist student veterans impacted by mental health concerns. Similar to research conducted by DiRamio, Ackerman, and Mitchell (2008) that reported faculty assumptions of student veterans as “terrorists” (p. 68), findings by Barnard-Brak, Bagby, and Sulak (2011) demonstrated the manner by which faculty member perceptions of military service can negatively affect support of, and resources for, student veterans in postsecondary education.

Gonzales and Elliot (2016) conducted a survey of 160 community college and four-year faculty “in the interest of linking faculty input to student success” (p. 36). The study utilized quantitative structural equation models to explain the connection between prior faculty association with military and attitudes towards student veterans. Analysis of the data revealed that faculty members who had contact with the military outside of an academic context were more likely to be familiar with student veterans at their institution, more likely to report feeling comfortable assisting student veterans, and more comfortable discussing military-related issues in class than faculty who had no association with military personnel (Gonzales & Elliot, 2016). As a result of their findings, Gonzales and Elliot (2016) recommended the practice of training faculty on

military culture and the common experiences of military-affiliated individuals in order to develop supportive networks for student veterans on college campuses and address misconceptions that lead faculty to hold negative beliefs about student veterans.

While a two-year study of student veterans in college writing classes found that “most faculty report high achievement among veterans, as well as a high sense of initiative, professionalism, and leadership” (Hart & Thomson, 2013, p. 4), recent research conducted by Lim et al. (2018) found major points of disparity between faculty and student veteran perceptions of values and expectations. The research team facilitated a series of in-depth qualitative interviews centered on the student veteran experience, faculty “points of misunderstanding and misjudgment” (Lim et al., 2018, p. 292), and consequences of a hidden curriculum as experienced by student veterans. The findings of the research demonstrated social and cultural assumptions that faculty apply to student veterans operate as a hidden set of expectations underlying academic performance, therefore creating an invisible barrier for student veterans in the classroom setting.

Staff

Similar to the paucity of research about faculty perceptions of student veterans, there is also a dearth of empirical literature on staff views and attitudes towards military-affiliated students. Two key studies influence the current investigation. In a qualitative grounded research study, Livingston, Havice, Cawthon, and Fleming (2011) noted staff perceptions as experienced by 15 student veteran respondents during the re-enrollment process following active military duty. Participants reported positive perceptions of faculty, but noted that staff attitudes towards student veterans were apathetic, unhelpful, and indifferent. The authors found that the student sub-culture of student veterans was

reported to go unnoticed by the institution, which led the participants to feel isolated and required student veterans to navigate the re-enrollment journey without institutional support (Livingston et al., 2011).

Arminio et al. (2018) conducted multi-site case study research that explored the perceptions of student veterans held by administrators who were navigating their understanding of the student veteran experience. Framed in a theoretical model of acculturation (Berry, 2005), researchers conducted interviews with 18 college administrators at two higher education institutions and analyzed data to unearth hidden cultural themes in participant responses (Arminio et al., 2018). Interactions with student veterans led staff participants to release expectations about these students and unlearn assumptions in order to reframe personal understanding of the non-dominant military culture, while student veterans experienced a shed of former military culture and assimilating to the dominant institutional culture. The findings of Arminio et al. (2018) are significant to the current study in that they demonstrate the importance of mutual accommodation between campus stakeholders and student veterans in shared awareness and learning of both military and academic culture in the higher education setting.

Gaps in Awareness for Faculty and Staff

The past decade has produced research and reports focused on broad assistance and institutional support of student veterans transitioning into higher education (Cook & Kim, 2009; DiRamio et al., 2008; McBain et al., 2012; Osborne, 2014; Schiavone & Gentry, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2016), but knowledge gaps continue to exist for individual faculty and staff. Albright and Bryan (2018) conducted a five-year survey of 14,673 faculty and staff members focused on knowledge about and comfort

level in addressing student veteran mental health needs. Results of the survey reported wide disparities in military competency, mental health awareness, and common challenges faced by student veterans compared to faculty and staff self-assumed roles in creating a supportive environment for student veterans on campus. The findings of Albright and Bryan (2018) call attention to the necessity of intentional faculty and staff training to support student veterans in academe. Summary data from the survey is outlined in Table 2.

Table 2

Summary Results of Albright and Bryan (2018) Survey

95.62%	93.89%	75.06%	70.07%	43.66%
Affirmed the role of faculty, staff, and administrators in creating a supportive environment for student veterans and connecting student veterans to campus resources	Reported all faculty, staff, administrators at their institution should take a course on military competency and student veteran mental health	Did not feel sufficiently prepared to approach a student veteran to discuss concerns about behaviors observed	Did not feel sufficiently prepared to recognize signs of psychological distress exhibited by student veterans	Did not feel knowledgeable about common challenges facing student veterans

Faculty and Staff Training on Student Veteran Transition

The development of institutions that support the transition from military service to college student, while recognizing, affirming, and advancing the contributions of student veterans, serves as an ongoing reinforcement of the educational ideals immortalized by the 1944 G.I. Bill. Addressing the challenges and opportunities presented by student veterans requires cross-divisional collaboration between institutional units to create

veteran-friendly campuses that support transition beyond processing educational benefits (Ackerman et al., 2009).

Lim et al. (2018) emphasized that interactions with student veterans by administrators and faculty “function as a critical conduit for civilian socialization and can either facilitate or hinder the social/cultural integration and academic success” (p. 292) of the student veteran population. However, a scarcity of literature exists related to efforts to train faculty and staff in support of this conduit between military service and academic attainment. Transitional research on student veterans has reported student experiences with campus efforts to acclimate these students to higher education (Campbell & Riggs, 2015; DiRamio et al., 2008; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Naphan & Elliott, 2015; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010; Schiavone & Gentry, 2014), effectively placing the responsibility of transitional learning on students rather than sharing the responsibility with institutional stakeholders. Intentional focus on correcting faculty and staff training deficiencies, while simultaneously orienting student veterans to the educational environment, can serve to shift the institutional power dynamics that determine who requires education, training, and assimilation.

Institutional Training Deficiencies

Despite a surge in the student veteran population, colleges and universities are lagging in providing training to faculty and staff on veteran issues, but are making progress towards prioritizing these efforts. The American Council on Education (ACE) conducted two surveys that assessed programs and services for student veterans provided by institutions of higher education (Cook & Kim, 2009; McBain et al., 2012). The “From Soldier to Student” survey, conducted in 2009, was an effort to gauge institutional

preparedness for an expected increase of veterans entering higher education after enactment of the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill. The survey offered the first national synopsis of programs, resources, and services that public and private colleges and universities had in place to serve military-affiliated students.

Responses from the 723 participant institutions indicated that 57% were providing dedicated programs and services for military personnel and student veterans (Cook & Kim, 2009). Specifically related to focused training for faculty and staff, 44.4% of respondents reported faculty and staff sensitivity to issues related to the student veteran population as a concern for their institution (Cook & Kim, 2009). However, only 42.7% of respondent institutions provided training to faculty and staff on the topic (Cook & Kim, 2009). Citing a recognition that faculty and staff training was point for future institutional improvement, 58.6% of survey respondents indicated that investment in professional development around student veterans was a top priority for becoming a veteran-friendly campus (Cook & Kim, 2009). Findings of the survey confirmed that “campuses clearly have more work to do to include [sic] training faculty and staff to understand the issues veterans and service members face” (Cook & Kim, 2009, p. 10) and illuminated the shortage of training opportunities provided to faculty and staff in preparation for incoming student veterans.

The subsequent survey examined changes in institutional policies, programs, services, and resources to serve military-affiliated students based upon amendments to Post-9/11 G.I. Bill benefits and increased student veteran enrollment since 2009. Based upon responses from 690 institutions, McBain et al. (2012) noted a five percent increase in campuses providing programs and services specifically dedicated to military personnel

and student veterans, and a 10% increase in expanded training for faculty and staff regarding the transitional needs of military-affiliated students. A promising result of the 2012 survey was that 70.1% of participant institutions reported that providing professional development for staff was part of a five-year action plan, and 63.3% reported the same priority for faculty (McBain et al., 2012). Responses to the ACE surveys reveal a clear recognition that faculty and staff training to assist in student veteran transition should be an institutional priority. These findings provide support for scholarly testaments of best practice and informs the present research.

Recommendation for Best Practice

The engagement of faculty and staff related to student veteran proficiencies, transitional concerns, and military cultural competence is a recommended best practice to establish a veteran-friendly institution (Ackerman et al., 2009; Albright & Bryan, 2018; Arminio & Grabosky, 2013; Arminio et al., 2015; Cook & Kim, 2009; Dillard & Yu, 2018; DiRamio, 2017; DiRamio et al., 2008; McBain et al., 2012; Osborne, 2014; Vacarro, 2015). Ongoing professional development for student services and academic units, partnered with student veteran or military representatives, can assist faculty and staff in gaining better insight into transitions that student veterans experience from military to higher education and reduce negative stigma surrounding military-affiliated students (Ackerman et al., 2009; DiRamio, 2017). Specialized training programs for faculty and staff can serve to engender trust between student veterans and the institution, ascertain opportunities to realign practices that affirm the strengths of student veterans, and illuminate ways to provide support in and out of the classroom.

Green Zone Training

The creation of intentional cross-divisional training and collaborative partnerships with backing from intuitional leadership is an important step in organized assistance for student veterans (Ackerman et al., 2009; American Council on Education, 2010; Arminio et al., 2015; DiRamio, 2017). An exemplar of a cross-divisional initiative aimed to support these students on campus is the Green Zone training program for faculty and staff (Kane, 2016; Nichols-Casebolt, 2012). Green Zone training was developed in 2010 at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) and co-funded by the Aurora Foundation and the Virginia Wounded Warrior Program (Aurora Foundation, 2019), with the intention to create a visible network of faculty and staff to whom student veterans could seek out for assistance and support. The program was modeled in format after the Safe Zone program to provide Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) students with safe spaces on college campuses (Poynter & Tubbs, 2008). The term Green Zone references “a location recognized by post-9/11 military personnel as a safe place, and the logo is a universal image for all branches of the military” (Nichols-Casebolt, 2012, p. 27). The Green Zone logo is represented in Figure 1.

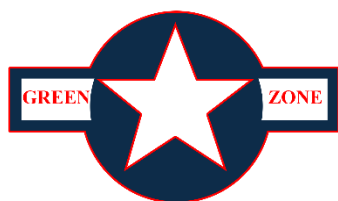


Figure 1. Universally recognized Green Zone logo.

The Green Zone program at VCU has three key requirements of participants: (1) a willingness to work with military-affiliated students needing assistance; (2) training session attendance; and (3) an agreement to publicly acknowledge military-student support through the display of a Green Zone sticker in offices. Facilitated by the Director

of Military Student Services, the training program is designed as a 90-minute interactive session utilizing a multimedia presentation and a panel of military-affiliated students. Training includes multiple points of information for participants, such as: background and demographics of VCU military-affiliated students; diversity of the military population; commonly used military terms; video interviews with current military students; emotional cycles of deployment; transition strengths and difficulties; psychosocial symptoms and effects; physical and non-visible disabilities; juggling parenting, work, and school; campus, local, and federal resources; and suggested strategies to engage in dialogue with military-affiliated students (Aurora Foundation, 2019; Kane, 2016; Nichols-Casebolt, 2012; Virginia Commonwealth University, 2020). The panel consists of four current military-affiliated students who share personal stories of transition experiences from the military to VCU and answer questions posed by training participants (Kane, 2016; Nichols-Casebolt, 2012). Upon completion of the program, each participant receives a Green Zone logo sticker that they are asked to display in their workspace and are added to an electronic mailing list that provides ongoing information about resources and upcoming events for military-affiliated students (Nichols-Casebolt, 2012).

The goal of Green Zone training at VCU is to educate all participants in basic knowledge about the assets and challenges of military-affiliated students, as well as interpersonal strategies and resources available to support the successful transition and integration of student veterans into the university environment. Provost support for the pioneer program at its inception sent a strong confirmation of institutional backing to develop a veteran-friendly campus culture. Within two years of its launch, 150 faculty

and staff members were trained in the Green Zone program curriculum, and 70% of surveyed military-affiliated students reported an awareness of faculty or staff from whom they could seek assistance (Nichols-Casebolt, 2012). The VCU Green Zone training model has been replicated or adapted at 100 institutions and organizations across the country to strengthen faculty and staff support of student veterans (Virginia Commonwealth University, 2020). Utilizing the concept developed at VCU, colleges and universities have developed Green Zone trainings specific to the unique characteristics of their individual institutions and populations of student veterans.

While the Green Zone program concept serves as an example of best practice in providing focused training to faculty and staff related to student veterans, a scarcity of empirical research exists that has explored participant experiences in the program. The purpose of the current study is to investigate the complex phenomenon of faculty and staff experiences in an institutional training program, based upon the foundation of the VCU Green Zone training model, through an application of two theories that illuminate motivation of participation, patterns of disequilibrium and deep understanding, and consequences of new learning.

Contextual Theories

Due to the interpretive nature of the research, no single theory or concept guided the present study. Instead, two theories informed analysis of the data and implications of the findings. Participant responses were examined through these theoretical lenses to explore the relationship between experiences in Green Zone training and the impact of organizational culture on motivation for program participation, and effect of training on

transformative learning and intentional awareness of assumptions related to student veterans.

Organizational Culture Theory

Culture is an abstract concept that is often difficult to concretely define, but has a strong influence on organizations, including institutions of higher education. Schein (1984) described organizational culture as a set of basic assumptions invented by a group to manage difficulties related to external adaptation and internal integration. A central element of the basic assumptions is that they are proven reliable over time and able to be passed along to new members (Schein, 1984). Aspects of an organization's culture provide a sense of group identity and defines expected values, actions, reactions, and behaviors among affiliates.

As the seminal scholar of organizational culture theory, Schein (1992) developed a model that outlined three distinct levels in organizational cultures. First, artifacts represent self-evident, physically, or verbally identifiable elements of an organization. Second, espoused values reflect stated rules and expectations for group behavior within an organization. Finally, assumptions represent deeply embedded, usually unconscious, behaviors shared by members of the organization. These cultural levels outline spoken and unspoken rules of convention and structure that define member success or failure within an organization.

Schein (1993) asserted that various subcultures exist within organizations, and that alignment and negotiation between subcultures is critical for the cultural growth and transformation of the organization. Fralinger and Olson (2007) applied Schein's theory of organizational culture and subculture in the assessment of cultural change and decision

making within a university setting. Utilizing the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI), researchers investigated how academic departmental culture affected the perceptions, thoughts, and feelings of students. Pre-test surveys were completed by 50 undergraduate students in the Health & Exercise Science department to assess the current organizational culture and preferred organizational culture of the department, with the intent to evaluate whether departmental mission and goals were being met (Fralinger & Olson, 2007). Survey results identified that the current and preferred organizational cultures were in congruence, as perceived by student participants. The authors suggested the need for additional scholarly research about existing and desired cultures that foster effective environments for student success as perceived by faculty, staff, and students within university settings. The findings and recommendations of Fralinger and Olson (2007) informed analysis of current research respondents related to the institutional culture of support for student veterans and motivation for Green Zone training participation.

Transformative Learning Theory

Transformative learning theory asserts that changes in the frame of reference or perspective that define a person's lived experiences, beliefs, and attitudes is considered a form of learning (Mezirow, 1991). Traditional approaches set the concept of learning as the "acquisition of new knowledge or skills" (Hodge, 2011, p. 499). The premise of transformative learning moves beyond conventional skill and knowledge acquisition towards a recognition that the process of learning also includes critical awareness, reflection, and reframing of individual assumptions and perceptions (Mezirow, 1978, 1991, 2000, 2002).

Mezirow (1978, 1991, 2000) developed a model of transformative learning that included stages of (1) disorienting dilemma; (2) self-examination of feelings; (3) critical assessment of assumptions; (4) recognition that personal discontent and the process of transformation are communal; (5) exploring new roles and relationships; (6) planning a new course of action; (7) acquiring knowledge and skills; (8) conditional trying of new roles; (9) building competence and self-confidence; and (10) reintegration into life based on conditions of a new perspective. These stages can be both non-linear and iterative. Similar to the phases of the transformative learning model, Mezirow (2002) outlined four processes of transformative learning, which expanded the scope of personal reflection with the inclusion of a process focused on intentional awareness of biases towards other groups.

The paradigm of transformative learning takes into consideration personal orientations brought into situations by individuals and serves to make meaning of experiences through critical reflection that leads to challenging perspectives about oneself and others in order to make sense of the world (Hodge, 2011; Mezirow, 1991, 2000). Whitelaw, Sears, and Campbell (2004) investigated the process of transformative learning within the context of faculty professional development and transformation of teaching philosophy and practice. Three themes emerged from the study: alignment/misalignment of expectations with experience; change in pedagogical style; and relevance of the presence or lack of transformative learning experiences for faculty. The research of Whitley, Sears, and Campbell (2004) informed the current body of research in its aim to investigate transformative learning experiences of faculty and staff within the Green Zone professional development experience.

The theories of organizational culture and transformative learning served as the lenses through which the current study explored the phenomenon of Green Zone training, examined the experiences of faculty and staff in the training program, and interpreted the impact on the participants under study.

Summary

Recent changes in G.I. Bill funding have increased the amount of educational benefits available to military personnel, resulting in greater access to higher education opportunities for student veterans. College enrollment of military service members has been on a marked rise since 2009, making them the largest population of nontraditional students entering the postsecondary education environment. The literature reviewed in this chapter outlines the unique diversity, strengths, and sets of transitional stressors owed to prior military service that makes military-affiliated student transition into higher education different from civilian nontraditional student transition. While broad institutional programs and services are recommended to assist in addressing the general needs of student veterans, individual faculty and staff play critical roles in facilitating or hindering the successful transition and professional preparation of student veterans. Participation in Green Zone training represents a best practice to educate and prepare faculty and staff for the distinctive assets and transitional needs that student veterans bring to the campus and classroom environment. Previous studies have primarily focused on student veteran experiences preparing for and transitioning into postsecondary education. A dearth of literature exists that investigates faculty and staff experiences in learning about and formulating support strategies for student veteran transition. The study aimed to bridge this gap in empirical literature within the context of organizational

culture and transformative learning in order to offer transferrable recommendations for faculty and staff professional development training to other institutions of higher education.

CHAPTER 3: METHOD

Chapter 1 introduced the scope and purpose of this research while Chapter 2 summarized significant scholarly literature and contextual theories utilized to interpret findings of the study. This chapter outlines the methodological practices taken to address the key research questions that guided the investigation and led to the interpretation of findings.

Overview of Research Epistemology and Methodology

A qualitative system of inquiry was utilized to explore the experiences of faculty and staff in the Green Zone training program. Qualitative investigations provide an understanding about how individuals experience and make meaning of their natural world using words, artifacts, observations, or images as points of data analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Mertens, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This research was situated in a constructivist paradigm, which asserts that the nature of knowledge and reality is intersubjective and socially constructed through an individual's lived experiences in which multiple subjective worldviews are an integral part of the socially formed reality (Creswell, 2007; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Mertens, 2015). Within the social constructivist philosophy, a phenomenological methodology was applied to the inquiry. Phenomenology aims to gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which people are in relationship to, and make meaning of, phenomenon in their everyday lives (Vagle, 2018). Therefore, a phenomenological approach was most appropriate for this research as it intended to investigate the complex phenomena of how faculty and staff members relate to, and make meaning of, their experience within Green Zone professional development training.

Research Design

The current study employed a phenomenological single case study design (Creswell, 2006; Jones et al., 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016) intended to investigate faculty and staff experiences in the Green Zone training program at one institution. Phenomenological research studies the composition, meaning, and essence of phenomena as they are lived and experienced by individuals (Mertens, 2015; Patton, 2015; Vagle, 2018; van Manen 2001). Patton (2015) emphasized that the intent of phenomenological examination is to describe and understand the subjective point of view and conscious meaning-making of participants engaged with a phenomenon. Such an inquiry requires the intentional identification and analysis of a specific phenomenon of study. Case study design encompasses an in-depth analysis of a system or unit defined by specific boundaries with an intensive focus on detailed description of the unit under study (Jones et al., 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2014). Green Zone training was a “clearly identifiable and limited in scope” (Jones et al., 2014, p. 96) phenomenon within the context of faculty and staff training in higher education. A case study approach was most applicable to this phenomenological research because it seeks to focus on questions related to the what, how, and why of a specific and bounded phenomenon under investigation (Yin, 2014). Inquiry into the nature of these questions and the phenomenon of interest guided the direction of the research.

Research Questions

The purpose of this phenomenological case study was to investigate the lived experiences of faculty and staff in university-sponsored Green Zone professional

development training intended to ease the transition of student veterans into the college setting. The following research questions directed the study:

1. What are the initial motivations of participants to engage in Green Zone training?
2. How do faculty and staff characterize their overall experiences in the Green Zone training program?
3. What kind of perspective changes did participants experience during the training?
4. What are the post-training outcomes of participants' attendance in Green Zone training?

Role of Researcher

The researcher maintains a primary role in numerous aspects of qualitative methodology, including decisions about the focus of inquiry, determining who will be studied and where the study will be situated, recognizing and negotiating the impact of personal intersections within the research, and serving as the human instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Mertens, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Implementation of the current research was born out of my personal connection to, and interest in, student veterans and their transition from highly ordered military cultures to a less structured academic environment. As a higher education professional, this personal connection piqued my curiosity about the ways faculty and staff support this unique population of students. The phenomenological method of inquiry that was implemented in this study reflects the value and commitment I hold in regarding the lived experiences of others as legitimate sources of knowledge and sense-making. Following the tradition of qualitative scholarship, I engaged in the decision-making and coordination of every aspect of this study, from determining the topic of inquiry to interpreting the findings.

Positionality Statement

I am a Caucasian, able-bodied, heterosexual female who holds a senior-level administrative position at the institutional site under study. While I do not have a history of direct military service, I hold personal and professional connections to the military and veteran population. On a personal level, I have a long history of military service in my family, including three grandfathers, a biological father, and a stepfather who served both domestically and internationally in the United States Air Force. In addition, my brother and sister-in-law both served for 20 years in the Marine Corps, were deployed twice to areas of combat, achieved undergraduate and graduate degrees through usage of G.I. Bill educational benefits, and experienced challenges transitioning from military into civilian life. Such personal connections to the military benefited my role as a researcher because they provided familiarity with aspects of military culture and terminology, experiences of service personnel in the context of higher education, and firsthand observation of transition into civilian life. I maintain a positive view of the military-affiliated population, which may have lent both insight and bias to my research design, findings, and recommendations for professional practice

In my administrative role at the site of research, I assisted in the creation of the Veteran Services Office (VSO) nine years ago and currently have an indirect line of supervision for VSO staff who facilitate the Green Zone training program. I also develop interactions and relationships with student veterans based upon my professional role. Additionally, I have been an advocate of supporting student veteran transition by championing and funding the creation of a dedicated Veterans Lounge space and a memorial Veterans Park on campus, serving as a keynote speaker at several on-campus

conferences and events related to veteran support, and encouraging the formation of the Green Zone training program at the site.

My positionality as a senior-level administrator represents a status of institutional authority, which may have affected faculty and staff participation in the current research based upon previous positive or negative interactions with me in my administrative role. I was aware of the possibility of a perception of undue influence on the research process based upon my role of institutional authority, professional connection to VSO staff who served as Green Zone training facilitators, and my own advocacy and support for student veterans. I was cognizant of the tension that may have arisen due to my dual roles of professional and researcher and aimed to combat perceptions of positional influence on the research process by asking a volunteer research assistant to implement some elements of the study protocol. This included having the research assistant administer in-person recruitment of some participants at Green Zone training sessions and conducting in-person interviews with the two Green Zone training facilitators in my line of departmental supervision; however, I conducted all other interviews and data analysis within the study. As a phenomenological researcher, I was committed to the concept of introspection and reflecting upon the ways in which my personal biography and biases contributed to my interpretations of participant experiences. I employed the practices of reflexive journaling and engaging with peer debriefers to assist me with recognizing the implicit and explicit connections and pre-assumptions I held throughout the process.

While I engaged in multiple triangulation strategies and self-critical reflections throughout the study, I acknowledge that the discoveries made and knowledge created were co-constructed outcomes between me as the researcher, participants of the study,

and current scholarship on student veterans. As I moved through interpretation of participants' lived experiences and application of conceptual frameworks, I realized that meaning-making cannot be "isolated or held in abstraction from its context" (Allison, 2005, p. 98). With this in mind, I positioned myself to become an active co-contributor to the investigation, reflection, and interpretation of multiple truths that characterized the essence of the phenomenon under study.

Research Site and Participants

Research Site

The study was conducted at a large, public research university in the southeastern United States that was founded as an evening college center to educate veterans returning from World War II. The selected site offers multiple services to student veterans including a dedicated VSO and Veterans Lounge, an active chapter of the Student Veterans of America organization, and veteran scholarships and apprenticeships. The site was chosen based upon its history of serving student veterans in higher education, current organizational structures to support student veterans, presence of a Green Zone training program, and accessibility of data gathering due to my employment at the institution.

The university's VSO is staffed by four full-time employees and provides G.I. Bill benefit certification, transition guidance, oversight of the veterans' lounge, programming, and work-study opportunities to enrolled military-affiliated students. In August 2019, the VSO began offering Green Zone professional development training sessions to faculty and staff in collaboration with the university's Human Resources Learning and Organizational Development (LOD) department, which coordinates session registrations and post-training evaluations. Green Zone training is also available to

individual departments upon request to the VSO. Two staff members from VSO, one of whom is a veteran, facilitate the Green Zone training sessions.

Green Zone Training

Adapted from the Green Zone model established at Virginia Commonwealth University (2020), the institution's training program is a 90-minute session facilitated by the non-veteran Director of VSO and one VSO staff member who is a military veteran. According to the Green Zone facilitators, the primary intent of the training session is to educate faculty and staff on contrasting elements of military and post-secondary cultures through key points of contextual information. The training provides context to military culture that includes indoctrination into a hierarchical command structure involving highly regimented and structured environments, detailed orders, and integrated support structures. As veterans transition from the military into higher education, they enter into a highly unstructured environment that does not rely on the same level of regimentation nor provide the same systems of support. Green Zone training intends to provide context to faculty and staff understanding of military and academic cultures in an effort to increase awareness of the strengths, challenges, and needs of student veterans as they transition from the military to higher education. Ultimately, Green Zone training aims to provide participants with tangible strategies to be better advocates and support systems for student veterans on campus.

The foundation of the Green Zone training session is a PowerPoint presentation that covers topics related to the institution's population of student veterans, concepts of military culture and mission-driven warrior ethos, military terminology, combat and combat adjacent deployment, service-connected disabilities, societal perceptions of

veterans, stressors faced by military families, transition to higher education, the G.I. Bill, cause and effect of behaviors in the classroom, mental health, and institutional efforts to support student veterans. While the session is primarily facilitated by the Director of VSO, several slides related to military service, deployment, and transition from military service to college student are presented by the military veteran VSO staff member who shares personal stories and experiences. The training presentation concludes with a question and answer session between participants and facilitators, information about specific actions participants can take in their faculty or staff role to support student veterans, and recommended next steps, which include display of a Green Zone decal to establish a student veteran friendly space in campus offices and classrooms.

One week following completion of the Green Zone training session, a follow-up letter is sent to each training participant by the VSO Director. The letter provides a thank you for showing commitment to student veterans and includes a Green Zone placard that participants are encouraged display as a physical representation of support. Included in the letter is a web link to university resources, as well as information about additional online courses offered through PsychArmor, a company that has collaborated with the statewide higher education system to provide specialized content designed to enhance awareness and sensitivity about military-affiliated student experiences. The follow up letter with additional resources serves as a complement the 90-minute training session.

Participant Selection

This research focused on faculty and staff experiences in the Green Zone training program. As such, it was necessary to select participants who had a knowledge of the experience under investigation (Jones et al., 2014). Due to the case study design of the

research, a purposeful sampling strategy was employed to investigate “one in-depth case that provides rich and deep understanding of the subject” (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 129). In addition, maximum variation sampling (Jones et al., 2104; Merriam & Tisdale, 2016; Mertens, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016) was used to seek variation in the gender diversity of the participant sample.

Participants were selected using purposeful sampling guided by the phenomenon to be studied (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As the phenomenon under investigation was a bounded single case of faculty and staff experiences in Green Zone training, sampling involved a “deliberately sought and selected” (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 107) purposeful unique sample (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) of faculty and staff who participated in the training program. While Creswell (2007) asserted that the ideal case study sample size should be no more than five participants to allow for in-depth identification and analysis of themes, this study included 12 participants in an effort to aim for data saturation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) in the cross-section of faculty and staff research volunteers. Maximum variation sampling (Mertens, 2015) was utilized to ensure gender balance within the sample.

Participant Recruitment

Access to recruit research participants was negotiated through the primary Green Zone training facilitator and the institution’s Human Resources LOD department. Recruitment was conducted in two phases. Initial recruitment was done through in-person training sessions; however, modifications to the research protocol were made to account for disruptions to campus operations because of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions

related to social distancing, statewide stay at home orders, and the cancellation of on-campus Green Zone training sessions for the remainder of the spring semester.

During the first phase of recruitment, with permission from the primary Green Zone facilitator, training participants received information about the research study through a 3–5 minute presentation at the end of two training sessions offered in August 2019 as part of the pilot study and in February 2020 as part of the full study. In an effort to avoid any undue perception of influence on recruitment due to my role as a senior-level campus administrator, a research assistant conducted recruitment at the conclusion of the Green Zone training sessions. The research assistant read a script to training participants that explained the purpose and scope of the research and indicated that participants would be contacted via email following the training session with an invitation to participate in the research study. In addition, a printed flyer was also provided to participants outlining the information shared in the recruitment script. Two follow-up emails were sent on my behalf to training participants from the Human Resources LOD department, with an invitation to volunteer for the research study. As a result, three participants volunteered during this phase of recruitment.

When the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the cancellation of the remainder of Green Zone trainings for the spring semester, participants were recruited through outreach to past Green Zone training sessions via an email sent on my behalf, either through the Human Resources LOD department or through departmental training coordinators who had arranged for individualized Green Zone training sessions within their specific units. Contact information for departmental training coordinators was shared with me by the primary Green Zone facilitator. Outreach to participants from six

previous Green Zone training sessions was conducted. This recruitment resulted in nine additional volunteers for a total of 12 research participants involved in the study.

Once volunteers sent an affirmative response, participants received an email to schedule an initial 30–60 minute interview and request the participants' choice of a private, on-campus location for the interview, or due to COVID modifications, a virtual interview format. Follow-up interviews were scheduled after data analysis of the initial interview had been conducted. All follow-up interviews were conducted virtually.

Initial participant recruitment resulted in a homogeneous sample of eight female participants. As a result, a maximum variation sampling strategy was undertaken to recruit male participants in an effort to intentionally “maximize variation within the sample” (Mertens, 2015, p. 332) and provide a balance of gender perspectives within the research. Based upon my knowledge of five males who had shared with me that they had engaged in Green Zone training, I conducted personal outreach to them with an invitation to participate in the research. This strategy resulted in the inclusion of four male participants to the study.

As a method of data triangulation, Green Zone training facilitators were invited to participate in one 30–60 minute semistructured interview and one follow up email inquiry. Facilitators were recruited via an email sent by the research assistant, who coordinated details related to the initial face-to-face interview dates, times, and locations. Follow-up interviews were coordinated via email responses to written questions after thematic analysis of training participant responses had been conducted and compared to the first set of facilitator interviews.

Participant Demographics

A total of 12 volunteers served as the primary data set. All participants reported employment in a staff role at the university. Two participants indicated that they also served as adjunct faculty members. Eight participants identified as female and four participants identified as male. Of the sample, 11 participants self-identified their ethnicity as White or Caucasian, while one participant self-identified her ethnicity as Puerto Rican. Participant demographics are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3

Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Gender Identity	Self-Identified Ethnicity	Role	Course Instructor
Boyd	Male	White	Staff	Yes
Caroline	Female	Caucasian	Staff	No
Charlene	Female	White	Staff	No
Emilia	Female	White	Staff	No
Leah	Female	White/Jewish	Staff	Yes
Marianne	Female	White	Staff	No
Noah	Male	White/European descent	Staff	No
Patricia	Female	Puerto Rican	Staff	No
Rachael	Female	White/Caucasian	Staff	No
Sam	Male	White	Staff	No
Sarah	Female	White/Caucasian	Staff	No
Vincent	Male	White/Caucasian	Staff	No

Note. n = 12

Positional roles of participants ranged from administrative support staff to Vice Chancellor level titles as demonstrated in Table 4. Institutional divisions of student affairs, academic affairs, and institutional integrity were represented in the participant sample.

Table 4

<i>Participant Roles</i>	
Professional Titles	Number of Participants
Academic Advisor	3
Adjunct Instructor	2
Associate Director	2
Coordinator	1
Director	4
Executive Assistant	2
Specialist	1
Vice Chancellor	1

Note. Some participant roles reflect multiple titles.

Data Collection

Data was collected during a 10-month period through semistructured interviews and document review. The use of dual data collection methods followed the recommendation of Jones et al. (2014) regarding the importance of providing substantial details of a case, including the integration of multiple sources of data within a particular case setting.

Semistructured Interviews

Based upon the qualitative nature and phenomenological lens of this research rooted in exploring the lived experiences of faculty and staff members, interviews were utilized as the primary method to collect narrative data from research participants. Vagle (2018) asserted that the goal of an interview process is to gain “as much as possible from those who have experienced the phenomenon” (p. 91). Similarly, Jones et al. (2014) emphasized that personal interviewing as a means of data collection provides an opportunity to gain an in-depth comprehension of “a particular everyday phenomenon” (p. 90). Narrative data was collected through two sets of interviews with Green Zone training participants in order to gather a rich description of experiences and two sets of interviews with training facilitators for data triangulation purposes.

Interviews were conducted in a semistructured format, which represented a balance of structured and less structured open-ended questioning that allowed for adaptability and conversational improvisation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Vagle, 2018). The semistructured approach to interviewing permitted the content of the interview to be loosely constructed around the topic of Green Zone training and conversation to emerge in an organic nature that permitted participants to share experiences they believed were relevant and “define the world in unique ways” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 110). The flexibility of the semistructured interview style also allowed me to respond to unanticipated pieces of information from participant responses that invited further exploration on the topic of study.

Narrative data was collected through individual semistructured interviews with both Green Zone training participants and facilitators. Two sets of interviews were conducted with training participants to examine their lived experiences in the training

program. The initial interview lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. Prior to the start of semistructured interviews with each research participant, the purpose and scope of the research as well as an agreement to participate in the study was presented to volunteers via an electronic consent form. Interviewees were informed that participation in the research was voluntary and consent could be withdrawn at any point in the process without penalty (Shenton, 2004). Furthermore, participants were afforded the opportunity to ask any questions about the research topic or process and engage in free-flowing conversation in an effort to develop a sense of rapport.

The training participant interview protocol explored topics related to participant role at the university, connections to the military, interactions with student veterans, overall experiences in Green Zone training, and impact of training on new understanding. The second set of interviews with participants were conducted with follow-up interview protocol crafted after thematic analysis and emergent findings were developed from the first round of interviews.

Facilitator interview protocol examined motivation for the implementation of Green Zone training at the institution, intended learning outcomes for participants, reflections about the facilitation experience, and impacts of Green Zone facilitation on their interactions with student veterans. Interview data collected from Green Zone facilitator interviews were triangulated as a form of internal validity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016) to compare the framing and intent of Green Zone training to how training participants experienced the program. Facilitator responses were coded for emergent participant themes, and follow-up interview protocol was crafted after thematic

analysis and emergent findings were developed from the first round of training participant interviews.

All interviews were audio-recorded on a cellular device that was pass-code protected and transcribed verbatim by an external transcription service that provided a non-disclosure agreement. Direct transcription of participant responses ensured the accuracy of respondent testimonies. In line with Glesne's (2010) qualitative inquiry recommendations, manual notetaking during interviews was minimized in order to reduce distraction and allow maximum capacity to be attentive to participant responses. Each research volunteer and training facilitator received an emailed copy of their written transcript for member checking purposes (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Member checks allowed each study participant the opportunity to review information collected during the individual interview and to verify, correct, or confirm the transcript as an accurate reflection of their responses.

Document Review

The review of documents as a secondary data source provided background to, augmented, and corroborated data from the primary data source of participant interviews (Shenton, 2004; Yin, 2018). According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), "review of existing, relevant, and contextual documents is an essential component of the data collection and analysis process" (p. 171). Documents offered perspective to the complexity of participant experiences by providing a source of data triangulation to the interview data.

Within this research, collection of documents evolved from the topic of inquiry. Following Bogden and Bilken's (2006) definition of official documents, review of institutional websites and materials developed for internal audiences and training

included the VSO website, electronic marketing for Green Zone, training PowerPoint slides, and 71 anonymous evaluation responses submitted by training participants to the Human Resources LOD department. Documents related to the specific content of Green Zone training were provided by the program facilitators and documents related to faculty and staff participation in training were provided by the institution's Human Resources LOD department. A form was developed for each document that collected data about the author, authenticity, purpose, and nature of the information (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) that was considered during the data analysis process.

Data Analysis Procedures

A process of general inductive coding was performed to analyze and interpret the data from training participant interview responses and included multiple detailed readings and review of the raw data to develop themes without a reliance on pre-conceived concepts (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Thomas, 2006; Vagle, 2018). Given that the research was conducted as a phenomenological case study intended to understand the common experiences of individuals in a certain phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015; Vagle, 2018; van Manen, 2001), analysis of responses was conducted in a series of iterative phases.

The initial phase of data analysis involved an unrestricted and inductive review of the transcripts without reliance on the research questions to direct the analysis. A process of holistic coding was applied to the first read of each transcript in order to gain an overarching sense of the narrative as a whole and categories that developed (Creswell, 2006; Saldana, 2016; van Manen, 2001). In addition to noting the holistic essence of the data, in vivo coding was utilized to honor the participant voice when their language

specifically reflected an experience being described (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Saldana, 2016; Tracy, 2013). Saldana (2016) advocated the use of in vivo coding as a method to preserve participant meanings of their own viewpoints and actions. Next, primary-cycle coding was conducted during a second reading of transcripts to closely examine and assign descriptive words or phrases that depicted the essence of the texts (Tracy, 2013). Tracy (2013) described the stage of primary-cycle coding as focusing on “what is present in the data” (p. 189) as a way to express the central activities and experiences of participants. Similar to Charmaz’s (2014) initial coding process, segments of text were reviewed and coded using gerunds in order to interpret participant responses in language that reflected action rather than preconceived topics. The application of initial coding strategies allowed the ability to view categories, codes, and themes that emerged naturally through both the essence and direct use of the participant’s own words, rather than what was expected to be discovered through reliance on the research questions, existing theory, or literature. These analytic strategies also permitted flexibility in the consideration of new elements of knowledge that informed the saliency of the research questions posed.

Following the holistic, in vivo, and chunked primary-cycle coding of the data, a third reading of the text was performed to further expand the first sets of codes into more developed descriptions. As the preliminary coding process resulted in numerous codes, a secondary phase of analysis began with axial coding in an effort to pull various codes into broader relational categories of themes (Jones et al., 2014; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Tracy, 2013). Subsequently, thematic analysis was used to compare axial coding themes and find commonalities in experiential accounts as a way to further group categories into

wider descriptive classifications (Nowell et al., 2017; van Manen, 2001). Once commonalities were discovered, the descriptive categories were juxtaposed against the guiding research questions in order to describe: (1) initial motivations of participants; (2) how faculty and staff characterized their overall experiences in Green Zone training; (3) changes to perspective experienced by participants during the program; and (4) post-training outcomes of participants' attendance in Green Zone training.

The iterative nature of the data analysis fostered the reexamination of codes and themes in an ongoing "hermeneutic spiral" dialogue, through which allowed the interpretive meaning of data to take shape and evolve (Vagle, 2018, p. 32). Suggested by Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2007) as a form of constant comparative analysis, member checking was used to solicit collaborative feedback from faculty and staff participants on the accuracy of descriptive thematic categories developed through the data analysis process.

Emergent thematic codes from participant narratives were applied to Green Zone facilitator interviews, training materials, and anonymous responses to evaluations as a source of data triangulation. This reiterative approach to data analysis provided an opportunity to revisit and reflect upon participant meaning-making through multiple reviews of primary and secondary sources. A loose analysis outline (Tracy, 2013) was developed to connect themes to secondary data sources as a way to guide further analysis and inform the inductive nature of the study.

Due to the inductive and interpretive quality of the research, no single theoretical concept framed the study. Instead, theories of organizational culture (Schein, 1984, 1992, 1993; Schein & Schein, 2017) and transformative learning (Mezirow, 1978, 1991, 2000,

2002) informed interpretation of thematic findings. Highlighted discoveries identified through the data analysis process were compared to theoretical frameworks as a way to explain how faculty and staff experienced the phenomenon of Green Zone training.

Strategies for Data Quality

In phenomenological research, the researcher is involved throughout all phases of the study, which Vagle (2018) asserted requires “sustained engagement with the phenomenon and the participants who have experienced the phenomenon” (p. 72). Such sustained engagement created interaction between my own positionality and prior knowledge, and data within the study. Recognizing my role as a phenomenological researcher, I applied three types of strategies to acknowledge this interplay and its influence on my analysis of the phenomenon under exploration.

First, I engaged in the practice of journaling to exercise my critical reflexivity (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Vagle, 2018) as a researcher. This strategy facilitated examination and introspection about how my viewpoint and experience affected aspects of the research process. According to Probst and Berenson (2014), reflexivity “is both a state of mind and a set of actions” (p. 814). Consistent with this assertion, the act of journaling was used to document my personal reflections, ideas, and discussions with thought partners in an effort to maintain relational competence and recognition of my positionality and assumptions (Jones et al., 2014) throughout the research process.

Second, multiple sources and methods of data collection were utilized in an effort to achieve triangulation and corroboration of emergent findings (Jones et al., 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The engagement of multiple research

participants, in addition to the use of qualitative interviews and document review as dual methods of data collection, aimed to counteract concern that findings of the study were “simply an artifact of a single method, a single source” (Patton, 2015, p. 674) by obtaining consistent data through numerous means. The triangulation of data sources and methods connected multiple and distinct pieces of information to form thematic categories within the study.

Third, the solicitation of critical feedback from peers, colleagues, faculty, and research participants was utilized to promote ethical decision-making, reflexivity, and assessment of subjectivity throughout the research process. Based upon Ravitch and Carl’s (2016) concept of dialogic engagement, “the dialectics of mutual influence” (p. 371) were examined through collaborations with others. A research assistant was asked to conduct facets of the research process in which my professional role might have been perceived as unduly influential. Additionally, I engaged in peer debriefing with colleagues knowledgeable in the areas of educational research and veteran services to discuss protocols, dependability, data analysis, findings, and conclusions (Mertens, 2015; Shenton, 2004).

Finally, codes and themes developed from the data analysis process were shared with research participants in order to solicit collaborative feedback on the accuracy of descriptions developed through the data analysis process (Leech & Onwuebuzie, 2007). The intentional application of each of the aforementioned strategies allowed me to engage in interrogative self-reflection, challenge my assumptions, actively search for evidence in the data that was discordant with my initial interpretations, and remain open to the critical input of others.

Ethical Considerations, Risks, and Benefit

Ethical Considerations

Recognition of issues related to control and power in the research relationship is a central tenet of qualitative inquiry (Jones et al., 2014; Mertens, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Tracy, 2013). Due to the relational nature of qualitative research, Ravitch and Carl (2016) asserted that it is imperative to frame relational considerations as ethical issues. In line with this guidance, I took steps to attend to the careful and intentional development of ethical authenticity in my relationships with research participants. Primary areas of attention to ethical considerations were related to the mitigation of influence that my professional role may have had on the research process, provision of voluntary and informed consent, and protection of participant privacy and confidentiality.

In order to alleviate the perception of undue influence on the research process due to my professional role at the institution, I engaged a research assistant employed by the College of Education, as well as the Human Resources LOD department and unit training coordinators to communicate information to faculty and staff during the recruitment phases. Neither the research assistant nor staff in Human Resources or individual units where Green Zone trainings were coordinated reported to me in my professional capacity. Therefore, I did not have direct interaction with training participants during either in-person or email recruitment processes. This action served to lessen the possibility that individuals assumed there was an expectation to participate in the research due to my professional role as a senior-level administrator. In addition, the research assistant conducted interviews with Green Zone training facilitators, whose office falls under my professional area of responsibility. Utilization of a neutral interviewer attempted to

alleviate, though not completely eliminate, potential discomfort around dynamics of positional authority that exist between me and those with whom I had a reporting relationship.

The concept of consent constitutes an agreement on the part of participants to engage in the research process in a manner that is “both informed and voluntary” (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 360). As such, intentional steps were taken to provide participants with information about the purpose, goals, and procedures within the study, as well as to ensure the voluntary nature of participation in the research. During the recruitment phase of the study, all communication utilized to recruit participants emphasized the voluntary nature of participation, clarified the distinct separation of my roles as researcher and professional, outlined the rationale of investigating faculty and staff experiences in Green Zone training, and expressed the intent of research to develop new knowledge about professional development practices to support student veterans. This information was repeated during the semistructured interview process, both verbally and through the informed consent form provided to each participant. Participants had the opportunity to ask clarifying questions, stop the interview process, decline to answer questions, or rescind consent to participate at any point in the research process without negative consequences. Providing consistent detailed information to participants about the topic and processes of the research, along with frequent declarations about the voluntary nature of participation, sought to reduce the impact of implied power over volunteers.

Efforts to protect participant confidentiality and data privacy served to further safeguard the relational nature of this research. Confidentiality refers to the treatment of

information that participants have disclosed in a research process with the understanding that such information will not be shared without participant consent (Jones et al., 2014). In the current age of digital tools used to support research procedures, attention to the privacy of digitally collected and stored data holds an equally important consideration to participant confidentiality. Specific steps were taken in this study to protect the confidentiality and data security of research volunteers including: maintaining secured electronic and hard-copy storage of files; allowing participants to choose a private location or virtual format for interview sessions; conducting remote interviews in a secured virtual format; assigning pseudonym identifiers to volunteer names; utilizing a third-party transcription service with a non-disclosure clause; and destroying all identifiable electronic and paper files at the conclusion of the data analysis process.

Potential Risks and Benefit

In the field of higher education, participation in professional development training is encouraged and viewed in a positive light; consequently, minimal risks were expected for participants in the study. One potential risk that I anticipated was participant apprehension surrounding confidentiality due to the small sample of interviewees engaged in the study. To diminish this risk several steps were taken to protect participant confidentiality and privacy. First, all identifiable documents were securely stored separate from the narrative data repository. Second, pseudonyms were assigned to each participant prior to transcription by a third-party service. Third, personally identifiable information was redacted from data collection, analysis, and findings. As a result, while I know the identity of interview participants, it is difficult for outsiders of the study to directly link a specific quote or narrative to an individual participant referenced in the research findings.

The primary benefit of this study existed in the opportunity that participants were provided to reflect upon the content of the Green Zone training, their experiences in the training, and professional and personal outcomes of the training. It is hoped that such reflection served to positively impacted ways that participants understood and interacted with the student veteran population, which in turn benefits student veteran transition experiences at the institution.

Pilot Study

During the fall 2019 semester, a pilot case study was approved by the Institutional Research Board and conducted to refine research questions, data collection procedures, and interview protocol. The Green Zone training session through which the study was piloted consisted of 24 individuals, 22 of whom were staff members and two of whom were faculty. In total, three training participants and two facilitators volunteered to participate in the semistructured interview process. Each of the participants who participated in the pilot study disclosed during the interview process that they did not interact with student veterans as a part of their professional capacity. While the participants shared narratives about their motivation for attending Green Zone and information learned from the training, the lack of contact with student veterans limited my ability to explore questions around the impact of the Green Zone on post-training interactions with this specific student population.

Study Adaptations

Numerous lessons were learned through the pilot study that led to adaptations for the full study. First, while the operational recruitment protocols developed for the pilot study worked well, I learned that audio files needed to be assigned a pseudonym prior to

being submitted to the third-party transcription service. I neglected to do this with the first interviewee, which resulted in the participant's true name being footnoted on each page of written transcription and unable to be redacted. Second, I realized that the training I have received in my professional role influenced the formality of how I conducted the interview process. At the start of the first two pilot interviews I instinctively asked each participant to state and spell their names for the record, which is a technique utilized in formal investigations that I have conducted in my professional role. This is a habit which I consciously avoided during subsequent interviews in the full research process. Third, the pilot study included a homogeneous sample of female participants. As a result, I engaged in maximum variation sampling in the full research study in order to ensure a more balanced representation of genders in the study.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to describe the methodological approaches to the current research. Utilizing a phenomenological single case study design, this inquiry investigated the experiences of faculty and staff in Green Zone professional development training at a large, public research university in the Southeast. Data was collected through semistructured interviews with purposefully selected participants as well as document review of institutional materials directly related to student veterans and Green Zone training. An iterative data analysis process involving general inductive coding of narrative data was applied in an effort to identify common thematic categories that explained the essence of how participants experienced the phenomenon of Green Zone training. Data triangulation and document analysis was accomplished through reiterative application of emergent themes from participant data in support of the thematic

categories that were developed to address the guiding research questions. Due to the interpretive nature of the study, no conceptual framework or theory steered the investigation in a deductive manner; rather, a set of contextual theories informed interpretation of the data and implications of the findings discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this phenomenological case study was to investigate the lived experiences of faculty and staff in university-sponsored Green Zone professional development training intended to ease the transition of student veterans into the college setting. The research was guided by the following questions:

1. What are the initial motivations of participants to engage in Green Zone training?
2. How do faculty and staff characterize their overall experiences in the Green Zone training program?
3. What kind of perspective changes did participants experience during the training?
4. What are the post-training outcomes of participants' attendance in Green Zone training?

This chapter outlines the major findings for each research question, which are presented in the form of interpretive thematic descriptions. Throughout the heuristic inquiry of primary and follow-up interviews, numerous salient aspects of lived experiences in Green Zone training emerged from participant stories. These narratives were positioned alongside the guiding research questions in an effort to provide further focus on the rich essence of multiple realities shared by the participants. The composition of the chapter has been organized to highlight 12 compelling themes and 31 sub-themes that reflect co-constructed knowledge formed from participant stories and descriptive analysis. The intent of this organization is to bring to light the evolution of participant reflections about their experiences in Green Zone training. Major findings and interpretations are presented with multiple layers of evidence, such as select narratives from the participants coupled with data collected from Green Zone facilitator

interviews. Document review of training materials and anonymous evaluation survey results from Human Resources have been added as further evidence offering more robust insight into emergent findings and interpretations presented throughout the chapter.

Research Question One:

What are the initial motivations of participants to engage in Green Zone training?

The first area of investigation for this study was to understand participant motivations for attending Green Zone training as part of their professional development. Understanding motivation and what participants brought into the training environment set the stage to provide context to their in-training experiences and post-training outcomes. The responses from participants showed that their motivations were characterized by several factors that fell under three large themes, intersections of community, rarity of training, and altruistic curiosity.

Intersections of Community

Compelling stories of community emerged throughout the interview process as participants described their motivations to partake in Green Zone training. Throughout the thematic examination of these narratives, an undertone of intersection between personal, professional, and military communities flowed through the responses. Familial connection, admiration for the military, and support of professional colleagues emerged as important undercurrents that fueled participant desires to engage in dedicated training about the student veteran population.

Family Service in the Military Community

While all participants described some level of connection to the military community, none reported personal military service. The strongest association with the military was through family members, with 11 of the 12 participants indicating that

members of their family had served or were currently serving in the military. Several participants described their extended family history of military service as going back for generations. Caroline, an executive assistant for a campus vice chancellor, described her family affiliation with the military as having deep roots, sharing,

I am an Army brat, and my military family goes so far back, all the way to the Revolutionary War. My father was a colonel in the Army. He was there for 27 years. We moved every three years as a child. So I was only on Army bases my whole life until high school...And my dad's dad was in World War II...

Everybody in my family has been in the military in some capacity, usually in war.

Generational military service was echoed by Sarah, a senior research analyst, who shared that she was named after her great-grandfather, who served in the Armed Forces and provided an air of mystery to her family stories. Sarah recalled,

My immediate family has military background as well as extended family on both sides. So my dad was a Marine, my mom was in the Navy, my dad's brother was in the U.S. Army, and he actually retired after 30 years in the Army. His son was in the Army. My great-grandfather, who I was named after, was a colonel in the United States Armed Forces...we would always joke and talk about how cool it was that he couldn't tell us what he really did. All we knew was he was an advisor in Homeland security and worked in the Pentagon, but beyond that, we don't know what he really did because his job was confidential.

Two participants also recounted being raised in a military family and growing up on or around military bases. Boyd, a divisional vice chancellor, shared that he was born

on a naval base and “moved coast to coast with my parents” living on various naval bases throughout his childhood. Boyd quipped that he “broke a long family tradition” of military service when he did not join the armed forces. Noah, a departmental director, grew up close to an Army National Guard base where his father was a sergeant major. Noah remembered that growing up less than a block from the armory allowed him the opportunity to spend a lot of time in the company of service members, recalling, “as a kid, I was over there all the time, hanging out with the soldiers.” In sharing their family memories, Caroline, Sarah, Boyd, and Noah appeared to be filled with pride and nostalgia for their family history of military service.

These narratives provided intimate context to participants’ personal experiences with the military. Additionally, comments submitted through anonymous evaluations of eight Green Zone training sessions supported the narratives of family connection to the military community. Out of 71 training participant responses to the Human Resources survey question regarding personal affiliation to the military, one respondent shared they were a veteran, and 42 comments indicated a family military connection that included parents, siblings, grandparents, uncles, cousins, spouses, and children with military service.

Respect for the Military Community

Positive feelings for the military community were also expressed by all interview participants. Descriptors such as “fraternal,” “familial,” “brotherhood,” and “community-based” were used by multiple interviewees to characterize the military. A sense of respect for service members appeared to arise primarily from two sources, personal family connection and admiration for self-sacrifice.

Family connection as a source of respect for the military community was emphasized by several participants. Charlene, a departmental director, shared that her father and uncles enlisted in the military in the 1950s, and as a result of their service she felt “a ton of admiration and respect for veterans.” Patricia, a student services specialist, explained that whenever she encountered a person in a military uniform or an individual that self-identified as a veteran, she would see her father and brothers, and “feel an immediate sense of respect” for the individual. Similarly, Caroline shared her appreciation for the military community that rose out of her family connection, stating, “I always feel like the military is my family, so I always have a soft spot for anybody in the military or anybody whose family is in the military.” Finally, after explaining his own strong family history of military service, Boyd described why he considered himself positively predisposed to veterans. He disclosed that having grown up in a military environment, he was more inclined to “venerate people who have made the decision to serve our country” rather than discount or disrespect someone’s background due to their affiliation with the military.

Admiration for military community self-sacrifice was also expressed by Noah, who shared that he held an appreciation and respect for “the commitment and dedication to serving our nation, including being in harm’s way for many service personnel.” Leah, an academic advisor, described the sense of pride she felt towards those who choose military service, stating “I don’t fully understand the complexities which encourage people to serve in the military, and I think that part of what makes me proud is that there are people who do.” Recognition of selflessness and service to country led each of these participants to develop a sense of respect and pride for the military community.

In addition to sharing the pride she felt towards service members, Leah offered an additional unique perspective in which she equated her reverence for the military community with the sense of community-centered kinship she felt as a member of the Jewish faith. Leah explained that she had intentionally volunteered with a veteran organization due to the sense of community she perceived as being similar to her Jewish background, and in an effort to become a part of the military community. Leah shared,

I feel like coming from a Jewish background as well, it's very much community-based. Very interested in community building and very familial. The community of military members, veterans, retired service members is such a strong community it's really fraternal. It's very much a brotherhood, a family that has always been really attractive to me. I knew that I wanted to volunteer with an organization that was related to the military in some way, just because I wanted to try to give back to the community, but I also wanted to feel like a member of that community. So by volunteering and by planning events and by engaging every day with these veterans and former military members I was able to be a civilian member of that community.

Leah's desire to engage with the military as a civilian volunteer served as an outward demonstration of her respect for the military community, specifically the community of veterans. This respect and personal experience within that community, combined with her work with student veterans as an academic advisor and instructor, led her to sign up and participate in Green Zone training when offered on campus.

Supporting and Valuing the Community of Campus Professionals

While family connection to and personal respect for the military community were represented in many participant responses, the importance of cultivating a campus community of professionals and supporting valued campus colleagues was also reflected. Participants described the value of making connections with other professionals on campus through their engagement with the Green Zone training program.

Two participants spoke most strongly about their desire to be a part of building a supportive campus community of fellow professionals. Charlene shared that professional training initiatives such as Green Zone built “a community of people.” Charlene emphasized this point by stating that while she felt the content of training was an important factor, what she considered “the most valuable piece of these types of training is the community it builds within the institution, however loose it is.” Furthermore, Sam, an associate director of a departmental advising center, expressed his belief that professionals on campus needed to “be a part of a community” that actively shared resources and information. For Sam, training opportunities such as Green Zone assisted in creating a “community structure” that “helps all of us also get on the same page so there aren’t any gaps in information.” Both Charlene and Sam were motivated to participate in the Green Zone training program to build and support the professional networks within the campus community.

Several participants also discussed the importance of showing support for professional colleagues from the Veteran Services Office (VSO), who coordinated the training sessions. Rachael, a departmental director, shared that “it’s an opportunity to support other campus colleagues who are important campus partners for us.” In the same vein, Sarah disclosed, “I’m proud of the work that our Veteran Services Office does, and

I want to be supportive of our student affairs partners.” Speaking of the culture of support within her campus division, Marianne, an executive assistant, explained that colleagues were encouraged to support one another in their initiatives across campus.

As well as supporting their professional peers, participants also indicated that they valued the proficiency of community experts from the VSO. Six of the 12 participants explicitly stated that they desired information, perspective, guidance, and tips about working with student veterans at their institution from staff who were experienced with the institutional population. Emilia, a counselor, noted,

I really wanted to know what they saw, and their take on what they saw, and what they think the students need, both the mental and the health side of the university.

So, my goal is to help students transition to civilian life. One of those tasks is effectively negotiating a university system.

Likewise, Rachael expressed a desire to hear from her VSO colleagues about how to apply best practices and things to avoid when interacting with student veterans. She indicated that she was interested in hearing “tidbits,” “takeaways,” and the things she could focus on “doing, or not doing” to make the transition easier. In her estimation, these pieces of information were most valuable coming from the “campus experts” who possessed intimate knowledge of the students with whom she would be interacting.

Several responses to the anonymous Human Resources survey offered corroborating support to the sentiment of being motivated by respect for fellow professionals. Respondents indicated a desire “to support VSO in their work” and “wanted to learn from Jack and Charles [facilitators].” The participant narratives combined with survey comments provided insightful context to the interpretive concept

of supporting and valuing the campus community as a motivating factor for attending Green Zone training.

Qualitative interview and document review data affirmed the thematic interpretation of interwoven community connections that motivated participants to engage in Green Zone training. Responses suggested that participants valued the ideals of relationships, service to others, collaboration, and shared knowledge that are critical elements to community building. Participants seemed to have a desire to develop, promote, and preserve a sense of community connection within their workplace.

Rarity of Focused Training

The rarity of campus-based professional development training, specifically related to student veterans, was a salient story shared by all participants. Further discussion of this sentiment revealed that many participants believed that the scarcity of such focused training represented a gap in their training, which led to seeking out self-directed learning on the topic of student veterans.

A Deficit in Professional Development

While participants expressed that they have taken part in campus-based training on a variety of student issues, eight of the 12 participants shared that they felt the lack of focused training about student veterans was a deficit in their professional development. This deficit served as a motivating factor in signing up for Green Zone training. Underscoring the lack of training juxtaposed to her years as a higher education administrator, Rachael stated,

It's rare that we've ever seen this. I think I've seen one other one and so if you don't jump on it, my concern is will there be more? How long will it take to get

into that? And because there's not a lot of education, so 18, 19 years of doing higher ed work, and in that many years I've only had one other training.

Leah shared her experience of pursuing training at two previous institutions and actively trying to engage in professional development opportunities to further educate herself about student veterans. When asked if she had ever had a training similar to Green Zone, she replied,

None. None. It's actually an interesting thing. I pursued those at other institutions I worked at, at Ivy University definitely. Oak College actually has a very small student population because of the nature of the institution. So at Ivy University, I pursued some of those trainings, and in the capacity that I was in, either I couldn't find them because they didn't exist or I couldn't find them because when I asked questions about them they didn't appear to be relevant to the position that I was in. So I was able to find information about students using their G.I. benefits and student resources on campus, but no specific training for working with student veterans.

Similarly, other participants shared that they had no experience in campus-based training that was dedicated to the student veteran population or military service in general. Caroline expressed her belief that "was a big niche that was missing because there was hardly ever mention of it in any other trainings." Several responses indicated that the topic of student veterans was briefly mentioned in other general student training sessions offered on campus, but only in fleeting fashion. Boyd shared that the only information he often received about student veterans was in training related to students with disabilities, such as post-traumatic stress disorder. And reflecting on her memory of

the way student veterans had been addressed in previous professional development trainings, Patricia shared that it was “very limited” and only “generally touched on” referring them to the VSO. Patricia’s experience further echoed the lack of intentionally focused campus-based training provided to faculty and staff in order to prepare them to interact with and support student veterans.

The responses from participants highlighted that minimal structured professional preparation about student veterans existed for faculty and staff at the institutional level. This experience was additionally reflected through collateral interviews with Jack, director of the VSO, and Green Zone facilitator. Jack shared that while the Green Zone program was developed for a college setting, the training did not have a “defined rigorous curriculum across institutions.” In Jack’s experience, the lack of defined training modules required institutions to create their own content, for which some institutions did not have the time, staff, or resources to create, resulting in no training at all.

Self-Directed Learning Solutions

In response to the lack of institutional professional development opportunities around the student veteran population, several participants reported that they sought out other avenues of learning to enhance their knowledge base. This self-directed learning took the form of webinars, participation in professional electronic mailings related to student veteran issues, and training provided by entities external to campus. Emilia shared that she often traveled off campus in order to attend half-day or day-long seminars about military-affiliated issues that impacted college students. Discussing how he went about his own self-directed learning, Vincent, director of an undergraduate advising

center, revealed that he felt a responsibility to inform others about the needs of student veterans. He shared that,

I started to try to investigate the needs of veterans a little bit more on my own, and in doing that research a little bit more, I learned about some of the issues that veterans are having, returning to work and returning to school. And so I always kind of had it on my mind of how I could either train myself, or make sure that others are being trained on veteran student needs, and I've tried to be at least since that time, I've tried to be more aware of the needs of veterans and how to help my staff understand them.

Additional self-directed learning also took the shape of direct personal interactions with student veterans. Leah reported that she has engaged in conversations with the student veterans that she advised and taught, in order to determine how to best work with the population. She expressed that her development of "best practices" was not due to any type of formal training or instruction; rather they were based on meeting and working with student veterans. Echoing this approach to interpersonal learning, Noah shared,

I've read a lot of books on personal experiences, or the process, and also documentary films...and just conversations with folks. So kind of talking with them about their experiences and service was also sort of an informal training. But aside from that, Green Zone is the first and only one I've had to date in my professional career.

A strong desire for information related to the student veteran population led these participants to fill the void of campus-based training with their own proactive strategies for learning and professional development.

Participant narratives and information collected from Green Zone facilitators provided context to the interpretation that an inadequacy of formalized professional development opportunities served as motivation for engaging with Green Zone training. Recognizing and addressing a gap in knowledge regarding the student veteran population appeared to be a significant priority for these participants in their preparation to support students. The addition of Green Zone training to the institutional Human Resources development offerings mitigate the dearth of structured training available to address faculty and staff interests in learning about student veterans.

Altruistic Curiosity

As participants disclosed the reasons they engaged in Green Zone training, feelings of benevolence for and interest in student veterans were presented as common motivating factors. Such feelings emanated from a perceptiveness of the challenges faced by student veterans, inquisitiveness about the often unseen nature of this specific population, and a preparedness to be of assistance and support in future interactions.

Leaning into Empathy

A sense of care and compassion for student veterans was expressed by multiple respondents during the interview process. Despite not having personal experience in the military, participants conveyed an acknowledgment of the challenges faced by student veterans in transitioning to civilian life. Expressing empathy for student veterans, Sarah asserted it would be a “really hard transition if I were in their shoes.” Caroline similarly

imagined that “getting out of the military, coming to college, the social aspect, trying to get into that world is probably very difficult.” Both Sarah and Caroline were able to conceptualize the difficulties that student veterans might face coming from the military to college life.

Tapping into a personal level, two participants expressed an emotional connection to student veterans that rose up from family connections. Patricia applied parallels in her own life to her perceptiveness of the student veteran experience, revealing:

I identify with them, honestly, from being a Latino student coming from that military background, coming from a family they may not know how to navigate the financial aid system. I try to help, and that everybody has that guidance counselor that told them everything they need to know, I know I didn't. I feel certain people need more help than others, and I try to be there for them. I see my dad, I see my brother, and I just want to help.

Also reflecting on his emotional draw to learn more about student veterans, Noah shared that participating in the training provided him with an opportunity to understand his own father, who was a retired sergeant major in the Army, and how the military “may have shaped his life choices.” Noah stated that he had enrolled in Green Zone training with the hopes of learning more about command structure, military history, and the life of a soldier that could help him “better imagine” what his own father's experiences might have been.

The unique difficulties, pressures, and needs of student veterans appeared to be apparent and impactful on participants. This sense of cognitive empathy elicited a desire

to take advantage of the opportunity to learn more about student veterans and their experiences through the formalized Green Zone training program.

Unveiling a Hidden Population

Some of the interview participants imagined themselves in the shoes of student veterans, while others expressed a desire for training to bring to light characteristics and experiences of a population they perceived to be humble and discreet. Specifically speaking about the reserved nature of student veterans with whom he had interacted, Noah described them “as a hidden population, because unless it comes up, or unless I know that about a student, I don’t know if they’re a veteran or not.” The impression of student veterans as “hidden” also resonated with Vincent, who indicated that once aware of a student’s veteran status, he actively inquired about their experiences, military service, and needed accommodations because otherwise, student veterans would not disclose this information.

Similar to the experiences of her fellow participants, Marianne recalled a student with whom she interacted for weeks before learning he was a veteran,

It’s interesting because I feel like I don’t always necessarily know if somebody’s a veteran or not, unless I sort of open that conversation. So like with the student who sat outside my office area, I started that conversation with him really, just from a higher ed student affairs conversation, because I saw him every day for weeks and wanted to be like “Are you going to class? What’s your major? Oh what are you doing? Where are you from?” and then one day he made a comment about a non-traditional path or something like that. And I was like “Well, what does that mean?” And he’s like, “Oh, well I’m military” and I said “Oh OK! Is

that what your tattoo on your arm is? Let me know if I can support you.” I would have never known if he hadn’t said something.

These narrative examples illustrated the perception of student veterans as a modest and unassuming population, one which participants were interested in discovering more about through structured campus training.

Preparing to Help

For some participants, a futuristic focus and anticipating prospective interactions to support the student veteran population emerged as motivating factors to participate in Green Zone training. According to Vincent, who proclaimed that the nature of student service professionals was to anticipate and learn about student needs, the more he learned about student veterans the better prepared he was to help that population in his dual role of academic advisor and departmental director. Sarah indicated that while she did not currently have regular interactions with student veterans, she hoped that Green Zone training would equip her with better understanding, “so that when I do have the opportunity to have those interactions, I’m being respectful and not unintentionally offending them.” The thought of preparing for future personal encounters with student veterans was also expressed by Caroline, who shared,

You never know when you’re going to interact with a student veteran, or one of the students who come to us who is lost or who needs help with something could be a student veteran. I don’t want to box myself into only learning about my department. I like to have an awareness of everything on campus and not just in my little circle that I am in, so I feel like it [training] will benefit me in the future in ways that I may not know now.

Boyd described his motivation to participate in training as partially being rooted in his professional role, which included providing guidance to faculty members who encountered behaviors of student veterans in the classroom environment. Characterizing these interactions, Boyd explained,

Sometimes faculty tend to kind of freak out a little bit when they have somebody who is a veteran, they've learned is a veteran, who is exhibiting behaviors that are even slightly perceived as aggressive. So trying to understand how to manage responses [to faculty] in the future about our student veterans was also something I wanted to learn.

The concept of preparing to help student veterans as motivation to participate in Green Zone training was endorsed by a response to the Human Resources survey, which stated, "If I ever do come across vet students, I want to have a better understanding of their situation and of the resources available to them." Interview participants and this survey respondent recognized the need to prepare themselves for future interactions with student veterans, which led to engagement with Green Zone training.

A sense of unselfish concern and desire to be of assistance to student veterans seemed to be present in participant motivations to partake in Green Zone training. Responses implied that cognitive empathy and a desire to understand and feel prepared to facilitate successful transitions for this quiet population of students served as compelling factors in commitment to training. Participants seemed to own a sense of personal responsibility to care for and reciprocate service for students who had made sacrifices to serve the country.

Participant motivations to engage in Green Zone training were driven by elements that encompassed respect for community, desire to learn, compassion for others, and curiosity about the students whom they were committed to serving. These are essential elements in the foundation of higher education. While participants had a desire to learn about student veterans, a dearth of previous structured training on the topic required many participants to seek out other avenues of learning to expand their knowledge base. The development of an institutional Green Zone training program provided a rarely seen opportunity to fill a specific void in professional preparation, and fulfilled participants' desires to interact with a network of campus professionals around shared knowledge that strengthened their sense of community connection.

**Research Question Two:
How do faculty and staff characterize their overall experiences in the Green Zone training program?**

Exploring participant reflections about how they described their training experience was the second area of inquiry for this research. Gaining insight into the ways in which participants deciphered and made meaning of their experiences within the training event helped to elucidate how the training affected them. The responses from participants reflected a sense of professional and personal impact realized during the training, which in turn supported positive perceptions of the overall experience. Three major themes emerged from the narratives that reflected an institutional commitment to professional development, the connection participants experienced to the Green Zone material through the act of storytelling by the veteran-affiliated facilitator, and a call to mindfulness for participants.

Institutional Commitment to Professional Development

Many participants expressed that their ability to participate in the Green Zone program was possible because of the institution's clear commitment to their professional development. Stories of commitment to Green Zone training ranged from encouragement by supervisors for individual participation to the implementation of division-wide training sessions. This ardent support demonstrated an institutional value for engagement in professional development opportunities to expand the knowledge base of faculty and staff.

Top-Down Support

As participants reflected on their time in Green Zone training, they acknowledged the benefits of top-down support that led them to take part in the training. Several participants shared that individual supervisors took an interest in making sure they attended a Green Zone session. Leah reported that her departmental leadership was supportive of her "particular interest in working with students who are veterans and encouraged attendance" in training. Marianne shared that her supervisor brought the training to her attention and asked if she was going to sign up, and disclosed "having that kind of support from my boss was phenomenal." Speaking of her manager's attentiveness to an expressed interest in learning more about student veterans, Patricia shared that her supervisor specifically took the time to point out the availability of Green Zone training sessions, so Patricia could start getting to know that community of interest.

Serving as leaders for their respective areas, Boyd and Charlene reflected that they had coordinated a dedicated Green Zone training for staff. Going beyond support for individualized learning, each of these participants expanded their support to encompass

learning for their entire unit. Charlene indicated that her goal was to get staff in her department “exposed to the professional development knowledge” provided by Green Zone training. Boyd, after hearing about the experience of one of his direct reports in a Green Zone workshop, determined that his entire division could benefit from the specific topic of professional development. Boyd recalled,

She informed me that the [Veteran Services] office was doing a Green Zone training, and I asked the entire division to attend. There was a special training that was given specifically to our division. I wanted to make sure that, as somebody who supervises offices where students with a variety of backgrounds and diverse experiences and identities are being assisted, I wanted to make sure that it was clear that I supported their [office] efforts to make sure they’re approaching and meeting every student where they are, and that I understand how they’re doing that.

No participant expressed feeling unsupported in their pursuit of Green Zone professional development training; in fact, the opposite was conveyed. A high level of top-down support, including from departmental and divisional directors, was portrayed and time was allowed away from official job duties to participate in the training session. Experiences of top-down support were also found in document review of the anonymous Green Zone training evaluations. Six of the 71 survey respondents indicated that their participation in training was coordinated by leadership within their department. Responses indicated that training was “scheduled by my director,” “a staff requirement,” and “a professional development opportunity for my team” which supported interview participant experiences of top-down support for professional development.

Demonstration of Institutional Values

The ability to engage in campus-based professional development training about student veterans led some participants to perceive that Green Zone training was an extension of demonstrated institutional values. Regarding student veterans, in particular, Sam shared that he considered Green Zone training to “demonstrate value that this population means something to our community, so we are going to train staff about them.” Sam considered training on the student veteran population to represent a larger institutional predilection towards support for this specific population of students, which resulted in the creation of campus-based professional development training.

For other participants, engagement in Green Zone training demonstrated more localized institutional values. Emilia and Charlene indicated that their departments placed value on the general commitment to learning about the diverse needs of student populations on campus. Both reported that Green Zone training affirmed this value. Similarly, Rachael shared a divisional sentiment of valuing and learning about diverse populations. In addition, she appeared proud to state that her area placed value on being seen as a role model to other divisions on campus, sharing,

We have a commitment in our division to diversity and that’s diversity of all populations, of all our students. It is a commitment that we have to purposely seek and understand other populations outside of our worldview...and Green Zone supported that. We see it as an opportunity not only to grow ourselves personally, but professionally, but also to help send a message to other divisions that we’ve done this. Tag. It’s important you do it as well. We value the opportunities to do that as well.

The development of and participation in Green Zone training was associated with a demonstration of institutional and departmental values for these participants. Jack expressed a similar belief during his collateral interview as the primary Green Zone facilitator. Referencing the partnership between the VSO and Human Resources to coordinate and offer training on campus, Jack shared that such collaboration “suggests a greater institutional commitment” to professional training on the topic. He emphasized his point by stating that the institutional partnership “shows a level of campus support that otherwise wouldn’t be seen if it was just out of our office.” The institution’s commitment to Green Zone training illustrated a broader value of commitment to professional learning and development.

Participants’ experiences in feeling and seeing institutional support demonstrated for their interests in student veterans led them to characterize their involvement in Green Zone training as an outgrowth of institutional commitment to faculty and staff development. As an organization, the university had cultivated an environment where professional development opportunities were championed by both administrative leadership and collaboration efforts between departments. Consequently, participants regarded Green Zone training as an operationalized example of their institution’s investment in their professional growth.

Connection Through Storytelling

An overwhelming sentiment of emotional connection to Green Zone was expressed by each participant as they described their experience in the training session. All participants indicated that the personal stories of military experience and transition as a student veteran shared by Charles, the military-affiliated facilitator, had a captivating

impact on them. Participant narratives highlighted that Charles's personal storytelling allowed them to feel a sense of personalization attributed to the training material in a way they had never experienced in other types of professional development workshops.

Exposed to the Reality of Veterans' Lived Experience

Multiple participants shared that the "gritty," "real," "raw," and "pertinent" personal anecdotes told by Charles captured their attention. Hearing stories of military service and post-service transition helped bring the material to life and provided cogent reflection points for participants. Emphasizing this idea, Noah shared,

I really felt that Charles's candid perspective, he doesn't pull punches, I mean he tells it like it is. His candid recollections and impressions of military life, and just sort of the matter-of-fact way that he presented some of the everyday dangers you know? He was just talking about getting blown up or people getting blown up...it was just an impactful thing, but it was also, he said it in such a way that it's just like that in the military. It's just like, you know, not as surprising as me going into the office and having the crisis of the day or a bunch of emails, you know? It's just sort of like a matter of fact of the job.

Charlene noted that while listening to Charles's stories, she observed that he "never moved away from the door," reflecting that she assumed that his attentiveness to his location within the room was "very real remnant of his service." Caroline spoke about the appreciation she felt for Charles sharing the emotional and physical nature of living with post-traumatic stress disorder because of his military experiences. She revealed that Charles's stories caused her to realize that the mental stress of veterans is often not considered, stating,

I really enjoyed when he shared his personal experience about what PTSD can look like beyond the physical. I was really appreciative of how the emotional side of it can be triggering and some things that we wouldn't even think about, which we always think about fireworks going off and all those physical things, but just the stress and the mental side of it. I was really impressed with him sharing his personal stories with that.

Other participants expressed that the real-world experiences shared by Charles gave a human face to abstract training information. Rachael reflected that it was “one thing to hear facts about the military, but hearing intimate stories of personal experience” gave her additional insight into the factual information presented on PowerPoint slides. In his opinion, Boyd asserted, “pairing a face and first-hand account with the material really drove the Green Zone training home.” Patricia echoed the impact that Charles's stories had on her, sharing that they “transported” her and “made the material stick” more so than any other training she had attended in the past. Additionally, Sarah declared that the experience of interacting with Charles's stories was “more rich than pulling out a bunch of journal articles” and was something that continued to affect her months after the training.

The ability to hear first-hand experiences of military service and interact with Charles during Green Zone training led participants to gain a deeper appreciation for the humanity of the material being presented. Recognition of this element of training was also expressed through responses to the anonymous training survey collected by Human Resources. Fifteen of the 71 respondents provided comments related to Charles sharing “real-life examples” in the training. One respondent expressed, “It gave a meaningful

perspective on how the training information connects to real-life student experiences,” which corroborated the responses of interview participants. During his collateral interview, Charles disclosed that sharing his military and transition experiences was done with intention, stating, “I think it’s important to share my story to show there is a human impact, a toll to pay when it comes to military service.” Providing insight into these personal realities appeared to be a distinctive aspect of the Green Zone training experience that helped participants connect to the learning.

Deepened Sense of Compassion and Empathy

The interpersonal tone of Green Zone training, accentuated by stories of lived experiences as told by Charles, led several participants to declare an increased sense of compassion and empathy for the experiences of student veterans. Describing the training experience as one of “compassion building” for him, Sam shared his opinion that personalizing a situation or circumstance “increased the compassion and openness to it.” The manner in which Charles shared stories about his military service, the transition to civilian life, and challenges as a student veteran were perceived as “authentic” and “approachable.” This in turn allowed Sam to “put a name to what a student veteran could experience as they come back to our campus” and associate deeper feelings of care and support for other student veterans.

Charles’s storytelling and vulnerability evoked emotions of connection for other participants. Upon hearing that Charles “jumped up and enlisted when 9/11 happened,” Caroline recalled her frantic attempt to reach her own father who was serving on a military base that day. Vincent shared that hearing about personal challenges and successes from Charles helped him “empathize and feel linked with other veterans,”

including many of his advisees who had been in similar situations. An insightful perspective was provided by Marianne, who recalled that she had a palpable reaction when Charles recounted his feelings about a particular situation, saying,

He pointed out specifically in the room we were sitting in, something that had happened that related to his past experiences. He was very open, and he told us why and how that felt. And then you start to have this empathy. Like “Oh my gosh, what would I do? I couldn’t.” But he was standing in the room and he said, “This is how this felt.” and you’re like, “Wow, this is who we work with. This is someone right here.” So I think for me, that really changed me. I could physically feel and see what he was saying.

Facilitator interview data showed that these narratives of compassion shared by participants were reinforced by Charles’s own experience facilitating Green Zone training. Recalling a training session where he shared a particularly difficult story from his military deployment, Charles recounted that he could “literally see people’s eyes widen with pity” and “expressing concern on their faces.” The storytelling aspect of training provided by Charles played an integral role in the visceral connection participants felt with the Green Zone material.

Gave Depth and Credibility to the Material

Participants revealed that the inclusion of personal stories told by an individual with military experience provided depth and credibility to the Green Zone training material. The information presented by Jack, the non-veteran facilitator, was corroborated and “increased in credibility” by the personal accounts of Charles, who had lived the experience of the training. According to Leah,

The personalization allowed me to develop a better understanding of real-life scenarios veteran students could be facing. The personalization made the training feel very real because it allowed an otherwise textbook kind of presentation to have additional layers for learning and depth. That was particularly important for me to separate sanitized facts from understanding experiences and perspectives of how the military operates.

Noah echoed this sentiment. He indicated that factual information reported by Jack coupled with personal experiences from Charles enhanced the learning process of Green Zone training. Noah asserted that this unique coupling allowed information presented in the session to “get beyond being simply trustworthy by adding elements of legitimacy and realism” through storytelling.

Interview participant experiences of relating storytelling with adding depth and credibility to Green Zone training material were supplemented by anonymous training evaluations submitted to Human Resources as well as supplemental interview responses from Jack as the primary training facilitator. Evaluation comments indicated that the stories shared by Charles “were enlightening,” “enhanced the experience,” and “added validity to the presentation.” Additionally, Jack shared that he was intentional in structuring the training presentation to be “team-taught” with a veteran because “it brings authenticity” to the Green Zone material.

Personalization of the Green Zone training material through storytelling by an individual with lived experience created a type of connection for participants uncommon in typical professional development workshops. The collective narratives reflected feelings of being entrusted with significant pieces of Charles’s personal history that

created a sense of depth, authenticity, and communion with the learning. Charles intentionally cultivated this intimacy in an effort to deepen participants' understanding of and human connection to student veteran experiences through the unique lens of his personal life.

A Call to Mindfulness

As participants recalled their Green Zone training session, they portrayed the experience as an opportunity to be contemplative and expand their awareness about student veterans. These reflections seemed to create an internal call to be mindful and more vigilant in recognizing the distinct needs and transitions of the student veteran population.

Active Self Reflection

Green Zone training appeared to be a time of deliberate thinking for some of the interviewees. Having a dedicated time to focus on student veterans, and internalizing personalized stories told by Charles, led participants to actively reflect on their approaches and viewpoints related to student veterans. Rachael experienced a major point of insight when she realized that building an intentional relationship between her department and the VSO had not been on her "priority list." This realization caused her to purposefully think about the idea of collaborating with the office to engage student veteran leaders in her departmental training. She also began to wonder how to expand knowledge about student veterans to other students on campus. Rachael disclosed that a barrage of questions flooded her mind during Green Zone training. She shared,

It made me wonder how you partner with them and how they can be seen as leaders, and how do you hold that knowledge of who they are in that training and

recognize that's going to play out in the classroom? And how do you set them up for success, but also don't have to make them an example always and balance some of those pieces? How are we not meeting their needs? Is there an opportunity to do training specifically for other student communities, so they can recognize this is part of our population? How do we best understand as they work in groups with them [student veterans]? And recognizing that they're going to function maybe differently.

The information that Rachael was exposed to in the Green Zone training program caused her to actively stop and consider her lack of engagement with and about veteran students and consider new approaches that she could apply in the future.

Two participants had slightly different active self-reflection experiences.

According to Sarah, training provided her an opportunity to reflect and confirm that her current viewpoints and approaches were on target. Speaking about how she characterized her Green Zone experience, Sarah shared that the training reminded her to “be in the here and now” when working with veteran students. She further explained that “it helped confirm that I need to continue to look at each student as an individual,” and that information shared in the training served as a good reminder for her of this approach.

Sam's reflection moved beyond his own practice towards a critical examination of relevant practices within his college. As the leader of academic coaches, Sam expressed that Green Zone caused him to be reflective about the ways that some coaches tended to “lump” student veterans into the general non-traditional student population, considering them an “afterthought.” While Rachael, Sarah, and Sam had different kinds of reflective

outcomes, the content and space of Green Zone training provided them the opportunity to be actively engaged in thinking about student veterans.

Heightened Cognitive Awareness

Most participants expressed that the training environment created an increased level of personal awareness for them in ways they had not previously considered. This sense of heightened consciousness presented itself in various ways. Caroline shared that as she became more informed of factual knowledge, such the fact that the G.I. Bill does not cover the full cost of college attendance, it made her more understanding that some student veterans faced unanticipated financial struggles, like paying for groceries and other bills, when they left the military. The information presented in Green Zone training gave Caroline “a lot more appreciation for the stress they are under and the challenges they face” when transitioning to college.

Thinking about his interactions with faculty members and as an adjunct faculty member himself, Boyd discussed that his experience in the Green Zone workshop caused him to consider the ways in which traditional classroom instruction and management could present trigger points for student veterans. Hearing the information presented by Jack and Charles provided Boyd with new insight on “things like unclear direction being given and how that might result in rigorous pursuit of direction” in ways that faculty might perceive as aggressive or threatening. This point also resonated with Leah, in contemplating her own role as an instructor. Sharing her heightened awareness, Leah stated,

Something that really stuck with me was the fact that veteran students might ask a lot of direct questions and it could feel combative to someone who is not in the

service. That's just really resonated with me because I think it's so easy to feel encroached upon when you're being questioned a lot, but understanding that's not the intent. The intent is really for a deeper understanding of what the professor is talking about. Learning that our veteran students probably do better with very clear and concise communication and sending bulleted lists of information instead of long paragraphs, things like that. It really allowed me to think about different but more appropriate frameworks and approaches to our student veterans.

A specific instance of Green Zone learning impacted Marianne in a poignant way, which continued to affect her several months after her Green Zone training session. She described a YouTube video that was shown to training participants, depicting everyday sounds that might affect veterans in ways different from their civilian counterparts.

Marianne's recollection of the video and her reaction was vivid. She explained,

We're talking about everyday things. We always talk about fireworks, but this video showed everyday things. When the door slams, an alarm ringing, a car backfiring. I never even thought about how, when I yell or when I drop something, or when I do this or do that, it may affect somebody sitting next to me. Or this might be why they flinch, and I'm freaked out because they moved. But really, it's just, this is how they think. That hit me. Think about the student union. The noises, the sounds. That's every day for them. That video really stood out for me, because we can go day by day and not consciously have to think about any of those things, but they [student veterans] do.

Marianne went on to share that since the training, this sense of consciousness had stayed with her outside of her work life as well. She revealed that she had become more aware

of her surroundings in places like the grocery store, movie theater, and park where “everyday sounds” now meant something different to her as a result of Green Zone training.

The experiences of interview participants in gaining awareness about military and student veteran perspectives were corroborated by information gathered through review of training documents, interviews with the facilitators, and anonymous evaluation responses. Both Green Zone facilitators indicated that a primary intent of training was to increase the level of “education and awareness” for faculty and staff. Charles indicated that he hoped the Green Zone program would allow participants to “open up their perceptions of veterans to be more understanding of the long-term effects of military service,” and how they played out in a higher education setting. Examples of long-term effects were visually represented for training participants through slides in the Green Zone training PowerPoint presentation. Three slides specifically outlined potential causes and effects of student veteran behaviors in a campus environment that ranged from clarity of purpose to challenges working without a clear chain of command. One slide showed a video of everyday sounds that could be triggering to student veterans because of their military service. Finally, a notable amount of anonymous evaluation responses reflected that training had an impact on participant awareness. Thirty-one out of 71 respondents expressed comments that training provided a new awareness or deeper level of understanding related to military culture and impact on the transition to civilian life for student veterans.

The overall Green Zone training experience was characterized by participants as an affirmation and extension of institutional values. Participants expressed that Green

Zone training demonstrated that the university valued commitment to faculty and staff professional development and support of student veterans as a unique population worthy of spotlighting. The personalization of the training material through the storytelling of the veteran facilitator elicited a sense of emotional connection to and awareness of the information that was unlike any other training experience participants had encountered. Such personalization was able to expose participants to the real-world actualities of military service and transition while providing a unique opportunity for engagement that could be heard, seen, and felt. This training environment led participants to describe their Green Zone experience as a poignant interaction that deepened their knowledge of and appreciation for the student veteran experience.

**Research Question Three:
What kind of perspective changes did participants experience during the training?**

Understanding from scholarly literature that the intent of Green Zone training was to increase awareness about student veteran transition for faculty and staff, the third area of study was to explore how the training experience impacted the perspectives of participants. Awareness of changes or new realizations that participants encountered because of the training provided insight into how they made sense of their learning and laid foundations for the outgrowth of new knowledge. Throughout this exploration, participants divulged points that highlighted shifts in their personal perspectives about student veterans that caused them to assess larger systems of support for the veteran population. These points evolved into themes reflecting a recognition of the diversity of the student veteran population, a critical examination of societal and cultural assumptions about the military experience, and an analysis of on-campus support structures for student veterans.

Recognition of Student Veterans as a Diverse Subpopulation

Several participants revealed that they considered the military to be a type of cultural environment that reflected a diversity of individuals and experiences. Reflection about the transition from one culture to another, specifically coming from the military to campus, led some participants to correlate student veterans with other marginalized student populations.

A Distinctive Cultural Identity

The military was identified as a cultural identity and student veterans as a distinct identity group in many participant responses. Noah spoke specifically about his experiences growing up close to an Army Reserve base. He shared that information from the Green Zone training session “reinforced my awareness of the rigorous aspects of military culture, and how that culture is designed to emphasize a sense of duty” in a way that shaped life choices and worldviews reflective of cultural differences between student veterans and civilians. Likewise, Caroline recalled her childhood memories of living on military bases. She disclosed that she experienced “culture shock” when she finally transitioned to the civilian sector as a teenager. According to Caroline, military culture provided a “protective cocoon” of support and sharing a collective identity with others, which disappeared once that culture was left behind. Caroline expressed that Green Zone training made a connection for her that losing aspects of military identity and culture in the transition to college life and “its academic culture” presented similar challenges for student veterans that she experienced in her personal life.

The notion of student veterans as a unique identity group resonated with some participants, who indicated that veteran status should be considered with other aspects of

cultural diversity and identity. Recognizing the binding thread of military culture within varied soldier experiences, Charlene acknowledged,

I see veterans as a particular identity group. Although someone who is a Navy SEAL is going to have a very different lived experience than someone who did maintenance on airplanes with the Air Force. But still there's a common vernacular, a common structure, and that we need to honor that as a group, and all the other intersecting identities that go along with it.

In line with Charlene's perspective, Leah indicated that veteran status made student veterans a distinctive population that required faculty and staff to be "sensitive to individual experiences and their unique identity." Emilia echoed this sentiment and shared that she was excited about Green Zone training because it represented the fact that the university was "looking at serving the diversity that exists in our campus and building cultural competence" in an effort to increase understanding of and reduce barriers to the needs of student veterans.

Participant reflections identifying the military as a distinct culture were supported by Jack during his collateral interview process. Stating that Green Zone training intended to expose faculty and staff to "the military culture as a unique crucible that shapes these students," Jack emphasized that building a baseline of knowledge for participants around salient aspects of military identity and culture was an important factor in understanding the differences between student veterans and their civilian counterparts.

Military Service is a Spectrum of Realities

Receiving factual information and hearing personal anecdotes about the military as part of Green Zone training led participants to recognize that the experiences of

student veterans did not represent a homogeneous actuality, but rather a diverse amalgamation of realities. For instance, Rachael indicated that she realized that the different ways student veterans participated in their own military service had an effect on the ways they engaged with various campus entities, stating, “the different branches and even their mottos and creeds and how that plays out, that will impact how they are interacting.” Sarah agreed, sharing, “they each have their own experiences and each experience they’ve experienced in their own way,” which reflected her understanding that students who served in the military have multi-faceted backgrounds and ways in which they incorporate those backgrounds into their psyche. Marianne noted that serving in the military included a range of duties from domestic assignments to international deployments. However, she emphasized that “just because you go to Iraq doesn’t mean you all have the same experience,” which indicated her understanding of the diverse nature of military service.

Some participants deliberately spotlighted the diversity of student veterans they had previously encountered in their work. Integrating her background as an academic advisor with what she learned in Green Zone training led Leah to consider how student veterans represented themselves in a variety of ways on a civilian campus. In sharing her thoughts, Leah stated,

Student veterans are very diverse. I’ve had men and women of all different backgrounds come through my advising office. I’ve also worked with students who served in the military forces for other countries. I think it’s really important to remember that, like with many identities, being a veteran isn’t something that someone can see. A student might wear a general issue backpack or boots, but

there are students who have no outwardly visible indications of veteran status.

Veterans come from all different walks of life.

Charlene also considered her own professional experience and exposure to the diverse nature of military service. She shared that she had worked with student veterans whose backgrounds ranged from a combat veteran on the front lines, to a bugle player “who played ‘Taps’ at hundreds of funerals,” to a woman who was sexually harassed on a Naval ship. For Charlene, these varied experiences gave more context to the identities of student veterans and impacted how they navigated life on campus. On a similar note, Sam’s thoughts summed up this complexity quite simply when he stated, “There’s just no one way to be a student veteran, people come in and out at different points.” These narratives demonstrated participant understandings of the diverse nature of the student veteran population.

The reflections of interview participants that no singular narrative existed to explain the student veteran experience was affirmed through the Green Zone training documentation and the facilitator interview with Charles. A PowerPoint slide entitled “Your Mileage May Vary” outlined the proposition that military experience was dependent upon each individual service member. Supporting this point, Charles emphasized that among the “millions of people” who were active service members, only a certain percentage of them deployed, with a smaller percentage of deployed service members actually experiencing combat. This variation of experiences created differing perceptions and realities of how each student veteran related to their service.

Similarities with Other Marginalized Populations

An interesting insight related to diversity was shared by participants who compared student veterans to other discounted groups of students on campus. The words “marginalized,” “underrepresented,” and “underserved” were used by several participants to describe student veterans, while other participants likened student veterans to populations such as international students and members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Referring to the ways in which student veterans had distinct needs different from the traditional, mainstream population of college students; Patricia explained that she considered student veterans to be a “marginalized” group because “not everyone knows how to provide the specific resources they need.” Similarly, Rachael shared that she believed that student veterans were “underserved” on campuses because they were a population that did not generally come to the minds of administrators when thinking about college students. Emilia expressed her value to be competent in her professional knowledge about student veterans, just like other “underrepresented” student populations she served as a counselor.

The unique backgrounds and needs of veterans transitioning to a university environment prompted comparisons to other diverse students. Caroline drew a parallel between veterans coming to campus and international students coming to a new country, stating,

I see them similar to international students. There’s just a slew of things to get international students here, a lot of paperwork, and getting used to new traditions and language. Same thing with our military students. There’s just a slew of things to do to finally get them here, get them in our doors and transitioned and get them

to graduate. They have a lot of similar needs, coming into a different place from another way of life.

Four participants provided thoughts that associated student veterans with the LGBTQ+ population of students. Rachael indicated that student veterans were a set of students “just as important as our LGBTQ community.” Noah described student veterans as a “specialty population similar to LGBTQ.” Emilia spoke about the intersectionality of “LGBTQ folks, of military folks or veterans.” The most intriguing perspective came from Sam, who compared the transitional experiences of veterans to the coming out experience of the LGBTQ community. Sam reflected,

Charles talked about the reintegration cycle of veterans transitioning into civilian society, and I think sometimes, like queer students, the coming out experience is not the same for every student. Some students have a great coming out experience and some students don't. So some student veterans may have an easy time re-integrating and some don't. This means that there's a continuum there of our student veterans, just like for our LGBTQ students.

Participant responses revealed that they recognized similarities between student veterans, as an invisible and underserved population, and the experiences of other marginalized student populations on campus. Green Zone training helped to support already assumed similarities and uncover new reflections about student veterans having similar experiences to other invisible communities.

The recognition of the military as a distinct culture and comparison of student veterans to other marginalized populations represented shifts in participant perceptions as a result of Green Zone training. Comparisons to international and LGBTQ+ students

demonstrated that participants comprehended that unique circumstances and cultural mores within the military shaped each veteran individually. Acknowledging student veterans as a cultural community with diverse backgrounds and experiences led participants to perceive Green Zone training as an opportunity to increase their cultural competency.

Critical Examination of Societal and Cultural Assumptions

Participation in Green Zone training caused many interviewees to consider implied assumptions and myths held about student veterans and military service. Responses shed light on misperceptions developed through media and public portrayals of veterans and the ways in which participation in the training program helped to reframe perceptions of student veterans.

Media Portrayals and Personal Misperceptions

The role of media and social media took center stage in some narratives regarding how the public perception of veterans and the military was shaped. Images of wartime combat, overseas deployment, and violence depicted on television and in movies were cited by several participants as having shaped their views of military culture. Noah provided his insight, saying,

I suspect for many of us, television, film, and perhaps novels formed the basis of our understanding and image of military culture and experience. This is certainly true for me. While TV and movies get a lot correct, I suspect it gets a lot wrong also, or at least downplays aspects of military experience.

Marianne shared her opinion that the overabundance of combat images portrayed by the media led to her misperception that a majority of service members experienced war. She

disclosed that when students told her that they had been in the military, “images of Iraq and things getting blown up like on the news popped up” in her mind’s eye. She went on to explain that she perceived “so many misconceptions because of media and social media” and that the general public, including herself, tended to “fill in gaps of information about the military with images of what we see on TV and on our Twitter feeds.” Likewise, Sarah disclosed that popular media led to some incorrect assumptions, sharing,

What is shown creates the assumption that they’ve all been to combat. Been to boot camp and carried around these guns and then they went into combat.

They’ve gone off and seen people die in front of them. But the thing is they don’t all go to combat.

For some participants, Green Zone training provided information that helped to counteract ways in which military and student veterans were portrayed and perceived. Noah shared that for him, hearing stories and absorbing the facts shared in training counteracted “incorrect norms and misinformation” that he had been holding onto for years. Rachael shared that she was “quick to assume” that all soldiers were deployed and therefore struggled with the transition to civilian life due to “experiencing some kind of trauma,” but stated that training challenged this assumption by reminding her of the many different roles of service members and that deployment was not always a reality. Moreover, for Patricia, her assumption of student veterans before Green Zone training was stated as “pushy, direct, and demanding.” Describing how Green Zone reframed her judgments, Patricia shared that training helped her “understand the why” behind these behaviors and changed her perceptions that student veterans were intentionally brusque.

Green Zone training documentation showed support for participant narratives related to media and the military. A PowerPoint slide presented during training depicted “common portrayals” of service members by the media as “heroes,” “victims,” or “ticking time bombs.” Additionally, during his interview, Charles disclosed that he hoped Green Zone training provided faculty and staff the opportunity to hear his perspective as a veteran and “break through the assumptions” that participants had built up about student veterans.

Debunking Myths

Similar to unveiling personal assumptions and misperceptions about the military, Green Zone training served to help demystify societal lore that surrounded student veterans for several participants. While narratives related to the association of student veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) were a common response, one participant shared a particularly distinctive perspective.

Rachael and Marianne both indicated that in various interactions with colleagues about student veterans, colleagues had included the topic of PTSD as a potential explanation for “unstable behavior.” Similarly, Boyd recounted moments in his professional experience when faculty expressed concerns to him about student veteran behaviors. Boyd shared that the faculty members held the presumption “that the students were suffering from PTSD” and were therefore “more aggressive and lethal than other members of our student population.” Boyd went on to explain that his new understanding of the military experience as a result of Green Zone training could help “faculty unpack some of those behaviors” that could be synthesized in the context of the student’s transition from military to civilian life, rather than leaning into the conjecture of a PTSD

diagnosis. Speaking of the impact of training on his own perceived myths, Vincent shared,

As more Iraq and Afghanistan veterans began to enroll in college, it was easy for me to assume that they all had been a part of the horrors of war, and were going to have challenges with PTSD, adapting to college life, and functioning as a college student. This is not the case, as I now know. Professional experiences and training programs like Green Zone have debunked these myths.

As an “out gay man,” Sam provided a different perspective on myths surrounding student veterans. Admitting his own preconceived notions, Sam shared that his liberal political background and identity as a gay man, coupled with the “politicized nature of the military” as conservative leaning, contributed to the myth that all veterans were “gun slinging NRA members.” Reflecting on his Green Zone training experience, Sam revealed that hearing the facilitators talk about their experiences helped to “really debunk the myths” that veterans are “trigger-happy, gun-toting conservatives.” Training provided him the opportunity to engage with information that challenged his preconceived notions and deepened his appreciation for the military as a diverse organization reflective of conservative and liberal values.

The participant narratives of Green Zone serving to help debunk myths about student veterans were substantiated by responses from the training facilitators during their collateral interview process. Both Jack and Charles expressed that a desired result of raising awareness for faculty and staff through the training program was to break down stereotypes and myths associated with student veterans. Jack indicated that he hoped to move participants “beyond the often one-dimensional perception” of the military and

veterans portrayed in popular media towards a “more holistic” view of their assets and challenges. As a veteran, Charles indicated that he hoped to “dispel the notion that all of us are disgruntled, PTSD-riddled murder machines,” which he lamented was a difficult task in today’s society.

Analyzing Structures of Campus Support

As participants learned about the transition experiences of veterans to civilian and student life, an interrogation of support structures seemed to occur. Interview responses of many participants indicated that Green Zone training caused them to both recognize and examine the ways in which institutional systems of support served the student veteran population.

Positive Examples of Institutional Support

In reflecting upon campus structures of support for student veterans, a number of positive institutional efforts were acknowledged to exist on campus. Several participants referenced the VSO as a stand-alone unit with staffing to coordinate G.I. Bill certification and programming as a show of “top-tier support” from the university towards student veterans. The Veterans Memorial Park was mentioned by Marianne, Patricia, and Leah as a visible symbol of validation for university-affiliated service members, including student veterans. Similarly, the presence of the Veterans Lounge on campus was also seen as a commitment to creating dedicated support space. Speaking of her own father’s experience as a military college student, Caroline shared,

My dad went on a scholarship to college to have college paid for, and then he went to the military. And they didn’t have a VA lounge. They didn’t have a nice

supportive area for my dad to go to. So I think it's wonderful they have that at least here.

Other positive examples of institutional support were portrayed as being shown in more administrative ways. Vincent spoke about the efforts his college was making to create a new Bachelor of Arts degree that translated military cybersecurity training courses into academic credits. Leah viewed the university's Withdrawal for Extenuating Circumstances policy as valuing active military students, whom she understood were not veterans but articulated that the policy was "a signal that we are aware of and support any student's engagement with the military." Specifically referencing Green Zone training, both Sarah and Marianne cited an institutional commitment to professional development training coordinated through Human Resources and "expert staff" as a "real commitment to our veteran students." Marianne elaborated,

Having Green Zone training is a big part of that support. Not anybody can just do a training like this, so having staff from VSO train us on their knowledge is important. I think that helps people see that it opens up opportunities for people like me and others who may be in non-traditional professional roles of working around students or near students. We are not in direct student-facing roles like student activities or teaching, but we want to support our student veterans, and Green Zone allows us an opportunity to do that.

Learning about the transitional strengths and challenges of veterans coming into a college setting caused participants to consider how the institution was set up to provide support and assistance. For many participants, positive examples of support were represented in the form of visible symbols, such as dedicated offices and physical spaces,

while other forms of support were perceived as behind the scenes administrative processes. Review of Green Zone training documents and facilitator interview data provided evidence to these narratives. Specifically, one slide in the training PowerPoint was dedicated to educating participants on how the university was founded to support veterans, stating, “It is in our DNA!” The slide described specific institutional services and spaces focused on serving the student veteran population. In addition, Jack provided examples of financial support, including the allocation of institutional funding to renovate office and lounge spaces and the construction of a new park that was dedicated to recognizing the military service of student, faculty, and staff veterans.

Systemic Barriers and Breakdowns

While examples of positive support for student veterans were presented, an awareness of systemic breakdowns also seemed to materialize for several participants during the training session. From a larger societal context, Leah revealed that she did not believe that many people who served in the military “have the support services they need once returning to civilian life,” and that lack of support often infiltrated college systems. Caroline shared that she was “upset to hear” about the strict financial limitations and guidelines on federal monies supplied to student veterans by the G.I. Bill. She indicated that her assumption was “okay, you served your time and we will pay for your education as promised,” when in reality there are “time-limited and fund-limited” stipulations that student veterans must navigate in order to receive their educational benefits. Patricia echoed her experience related to funding timelines of G.I. Bill payouts not matching university billing deadlines. She explained that many student veterans were often frustrated with federal funding “not paying until a month after classes start,” despite the

university placing a protection hold on their classes to prevent dropping for non-payment. According to Patricia, many student veterans continued to be concerned about “needing the extra funds just to live,” emphasizing the lack of societal support structures for veterans exiting the military.

In a more localized context, other participants discussed how university systems and policies presented potential barriers to student veteran success. Rachael shared her experience of being in a room with other participants during training and hearing the ways in which student veterans were tasked with managing complex and unfamiliar practices when they arrived on campus. The information she heard led her and other participants to begin conversations amongst themselves about the perception that university systems were not fully set up to see student veterans be successful. Rachael recalled,

The real-life experience that was shared by Charles continued to reinforce things haven't changed. And so, good gracious, we were failing them that many years ago. We are still failing them today. Systems and policies and procedures, none of that has changed in all these years. The students are coming in higher numbers to our campus and yet we haven't met them where they best need us. In that room were various individuals from financial aid, lots of academic advisers, career services. And so it was remarkable that even as a room, we started having conversations amongst ourselves as a whole room, like we have not set the students up for success. In fact, we set them up for failure in many ways and still expect them to be successful.

Additional areas of university-related shortcomings were shared by Sam and Noah. A lack of faculty training about student veterans and faculty focus on “more high-achieving students,” such as honors students who produced research, was noted by Sam. Noah shared that “it became quite apparent how few supports are in place to guide veterans” who were used to a highly structured command hierarchy and expected to assimilate to a more loose bureaucratic environment when they transitioned to a college campus.

Identifying the Need for Improvement

Many responses from participants revealed that prior to Green Zone training, they had not had a first-hand understanding of the ways in which university policies and procedures could present barriers to student veteran success. The recognition of systemic deficiencies led some participants to consider the need for increased institutional efforts and how, according to Rachael, “we still have good work to do” in support of student veteran transition. Further contemplating this idea, Rachael followed up with some sobering questions about institutional empowerment to enact change, rhetorically asking,

If these are our own policies, and if we have the ability to edit our policies, why are we writing policies that don’t serve students? And recognizing that a policy might be great for the general all, but we have outliers, and how do we still serve outliers? Knowing that we’ve set up a system that is not successful, and yet does anyone feel empowered to change this? And what would it take to change this if we all acknowledge this isn’t successful, what happens from that point?

Reflections about how increased institutional support for student veterans could be achieved produced a variety of ideas from other participants. Two participants focused

on monetary issues. Caroline suggested that the university should “do something in our own world” to offer bookstore, parking, and meal plan discounts to student veterans, rather than expecting federal policies to change in order to provide more financial support for G.I. Bill benefits. Emilia also focused on the financial aspect of support. She indicated, “veterans are used to a certain kind of financial structure, and that doesn’t back up onto the university’s timetable” which in turn, causes a lot of tension and stress for student veterans. She wondered how open the university leadership was to supplementing the monetary needs of this student population who were coming from a very structured financial framework and “feeling like there was no safety net” for them.

In addition to monetary support, organizational ideas were shared to increase assistance for student veterans. Leah discussed the idea of a dedicated student veteran advising center, which could “lessen the volley” of student veterans from one part of campus to another and “increase student efficiency and efficacy in completing tasks.” Sam shared that he perceived a need to “close achievement gaps” that were present for non-traditional students, like student veterans, by making sure that “access to opportunities to improve academic success” was available to populations other than athletes and scholarship students. Finally, bringing the idea of integrative support for student veterans into the classroom environment was mentioned by two participants. Leah pointed out that “we have very few systems in place to assist a successful transition to the classroom,” while Marianne suggested if “Academic Affairs as a leadership entity was more supportive of Green Zone, I think you would see more faculty in the training.” While not full-time faculty members, these two participants recognized that changes in the academic environment could be beneficial to the success of student veterans.

Becoming aware of the needs and challenges experienced by some student veterans in transition to civilian and student life led these participants to analyze and rethink perspectives on how the institution might reduce barriers and better serve this population. These sentiments were also endorsed by collateral interview data provided by Jack. Recognizing that continued efforts were needed to make the university a “military-friendly institution,” Jack indicated that campus policies and procedures needed to be reviewed “in order to make it a friendly place and a better experience” for students in transition from the military. Jack shared that the deployment of Green Zone training to faculty and staff was part of ongoing efforts to educate and bring awareness to aspects of higher education bureaucracy that often served as barriers to student veteran success.

The coupling of factual information and personalized experiences presented in Green Zone training led to shifts in participant perspectives related to the diversity of student veterans, reframing personal and societal assumptions, and contemplating positive support for and barriers to student veteran success. Building an awareness around the military as a cultural identity provided participants with an opportunity to correlate veteran transitional experiences with those of other invisible and underrepresented student groups outside of the mainstream traditional college population. The training experience also served to counteract misconceptions about the military. These shifts in understanding and attitudes moved participants to reconsider their negative assumptions about student veterans and begin to contemplate the ways they perceived systemic support for or hindrance of successful transition of veterans into the college environment.

Research Question Four:

What are the post-training outcomes of participants' attendance in Green Zone training?

The final area of investigation for this study was to gain an understanding of how participants translated the multi-layered facets of their training experiences into outcomes of learning. Examining post-training outcomes provided insight into how participants applied their in-training experiences in the context of their ongoing professional work and support of student veterans. The narratives of participants reflected varied outcomes, including taking individual and departmental ownership for support, balancing personal and societal pressures of support, and expressing eagerness for future learning about student veterans.

Developing a Sense of Agency

Engagement in Green Zone training provided some participants with a recognition of their own power and instrumentality in providing support to the student veteran population. This sense of agency was highlighted in both individual and unified perspectives. Participants expressed thoughts that ranged from taking personal responsibility for knowledge and active support to feeling empowered to create collective change within their own departments.

Adding to the Professional Toolbox

Several participants spoke about the impact that training had on their awareness of campus resources and methods they could employ to support student veterans. Gaining information about services provided by the VSO, connecting the faces of Jack and Charles to the office, and learning “tips and tricks” to create more direct communication methods supplied participants with additional professional assets. Patricia shared that knowing factual information about G.I. Bill timelines increased her understanding of

issues that student veterans brought to her. She revealed that training made her feel “not as helpless” in assisting student veterans, stating, “Now I know the steps I can take to help them up until a point” before referring students to staff in the VSO for more complex needs. Sharing his perspective on the importance of being connected to the appropriate resources, Sam stated,

It’s helpful to have Jack’s name, someone I can reference to, for students and for myself. So, I always think about as an advisor, what are the things that I need in my toolbox in case anyone discloses anything to make sure I get them to the best resource in the appropriate amount of time possible?

Similarly, Charlene expressed that having an understanding of the functions of the VSO and the name of office staff members made her “feel more confident in the referral process” to assist students who were not familiar with the services of the office.

Boyd and Leah spoke about specific ways in which they planned to implement the tools of their new knowledge. Reflecting on how he would use his training experience in future interactions with faculty members who express concerns about the behavior of a student veteran, Boyd shared that he would apply the information he learned in Green Zone to keep faculty “from overreacting” and instead, “help them unpack whether behaviors can be understood” in a context related to the transition from military to civilian life. As both an academic advisor and course instructor, Leah disclosed that Green Zone training exposed her to a variety of ways to more intentionally approach and understand student veterans, sharing,

Better strategies for approaching student veterans, what to discuss, what to avoid.

The ways in which to talk to student veterans, being clear, concise, and direct.

And the experience of having a veteran student in the classroom, expect a lot of direct questioning which could sometimes even feel aggressive. It allowed me to better understand how to communicate with student veterans via email, keeping things on topic, using bullet points, including specific action items.

Leah revealed that she had already begun to utilize specific methods she “picked up in training” to be more intentional in her communication with student veterans. Leah explained that what she learned in Green Zone helped her develop and own strategies to build a “better framework” for her interactions.

Each of these interview participants expressed a better understanding of the role they could play and strategies to apply in supporting student veterans because of training. Adding support to the narratives of interview participants, 34 out of 71 respondents to the anonymous training survey commented about actions and resources they learned about during training that they planned to utilize in future interactions with student veterans. Being better equipped with an understanding of resources and concrete means to employ was an intended outcome of Green Zone training as expressed by Jack, the primary facilitator, and through documentation of training materials. During his interview, Jack indicated that a goal of Green Zone training was to provide participants with “takeaways” and concrete actions to apply so they could “begin to adapt their approach to dealing with student veterans.” Visual evidence of this goal was demonstrated through a training PowerPoint slide entitled “What You Can Do to Support Student Veterans in Your Role” that was presented during the Green Zone workshop. The slide outlined clear-cut suggestions such as “use bulleted formats,” “issue instructions orally and in writing,”

“include follow up steps,” and “be directive” for participants to consider as specific actions to enhance communication and interactions with student veterans.

Taking Action to be Visibly Supportive

In addition to adding resources to their collective professional toolbox, many participants discussed individual actions they planned to or had taken to outwardly express their support of the student veteran population. Ideas such as visiting the Veterans Lounge coffee hour, finding ways to volunteer for veterans’ events, co-sponsoring programs, and attending veteran-focused initiatives were expressed by Caroline, Marianne, Noah, and Sarah as ways they planned to show future support. However, the most prevalent act of showing visible support was expressed in the form of participants’ display of the Green Zone sticker in their individual work areas.

All of the participants spoke about placing the sticker in their office space as an important symbol of support. Many participants indicated that they placed the Green Zone sticker near the sticker they received during Safe Zone training, as a representation of the type of welcoming and inclusive environments they wished to create for anyone with whom they came in contact. Noah explained his intentions behind putting up his Green Zone sticker by sharing,

My hope is that when a student walks into my space, our space, and they're a student that identifies with whatever the badge refers to, that it creates for them a level of comfort. It communicates to them that I have a certain level of knowledge, awareness around the community or the identity or identities that they might belong. So if they want to open up about some things, in this case being a

veteran, or if they want to open up about being an LGBTQ-identified person, they will feel comfortable doing that.

Charlene and Caroline also endorsed the belief that visual symbols of support created a sense of comfort and safety for students. Charlene shared that the more often students saw a “visual marker” of support like the Green Zone sticker, the more likely they were to “perceive a safer environment” where they could be honest about their identity.

Caroline expressed that for her, the Green Zone sticker was “something to show saying this is a safe place,” and to visually make people aware of the inclusive nature of her office.

Beyond creating welcoming environments, other participants indicated that they hoped their display of the Green Zone sticker represented their effort to learn about and understand the student veteran population. According to Marianne, she wanted the sticker to create an air of curiosity among other administrative assistants so she could spread the word about her new knowledge and encourage others to join her in support. Boyd indicated that he wanted the sticker to show that he “at least made the effort to try to understand” the needs and issues of student veterans. Sam shared that he hoped the student veterans who saw the sticker on his door would perceive him as “knowing what they brought to the university.” Finally, Vincent stated that he wanted student veterans to translate the sticker as confirmation of learning and his ability to help, stating,

I really wanted to have the sticker displayed because I want students to be able to see that I have made an attempt to train, to learn more about them, their population, their issues they may have. So I’m hoping that by them seeing the

sticker posted outside my door, they know that I can try to accommodate them the best way possible.

These participants associated their display of the Green Zone sticker with taking action to show their support for student veterans. They valued the visual marker as a signal to others that they cared enough to learn about a specific population of students and were committed to creating inclusive and welcoming environments within their professional workspaces.

Change Starts Departmentally

A desire to expand veteran student support beyond individual action was expressed by several participants. For many, while they did not feel the ability to impact larger institutional systems of support, they felt empowered to create change within their own departments. This empowerment took many forms. Patricia indicated that she shared her Green Zone learning with the 30 employees on her team, in order to “get on the same page” regarding resources and tools to assist student veterans. Within his unit, Vincent planned to serve as a resource about student veterans for his direct reports and encourage attendance in Green Zone training for all new staff hires and faculty advisors in his department. Noah shared that he planned to use Green Zone “as an initial primer” for his entire staff leading into collaborative programming efforts between his area and the VSO. Leah stated that she planned to use aspects of the larger Green Zone training in the onboarding of new academic advisors in her role as a trainer for her academic college. In addition, Leah described the fact that her department had made an adjustment to the way veteran students had been “volleyed” within her area, sharing,

We have now designated point people for different populations. I definitely act as a point person for veteran students. So with questions or concerns, even if I have to then communicate with the Veteran Services Office, we try to narrow down the scope, so it's not students contacting one advisor, having to contact another advisor, having to contact the veterans office. But having it in a way, where on the backend, I do that communication and then send all the answers to the veteran student. It just creates a more streamlined process for them than we used to have.

Based upon her experience in one of the first Green Zone training sessions, Rachael proposed to her supervisor, a vice chancellor, the idea that their entire division should participate in training. According to Rachael, this idea was “welcomed wholeheartedly” by her supervisor and fellow colleagues in the division, which consisted of five different departments and 24 staff members. As a result, a dedicated training session was presented to Rachael's division with the “expectation from vice chancellor leadership” that everyone attended. Speaking about her decision to suggest the training to her supervisor, Rachael indicated that it was important for her to “be intentional within my sphere of influence at the university to support student veterans” in a way that could impact incremental changes and expand that influence beyond the department she led. In doing so, she aspired to spread awareness and support further than her direct circle and serve as an example to other areas of campus. Rachael expounded on her desired outcome, articulating her hope that “it's sending some messaging out to some other divisions of, look this is important work for our division, and as an entire campus. Let us help model what that expectation should be for other departments and other divisions.”

As an institutional decision maker, Rachael felt empowered to utilize her role as a department head and the relationship with her divisional leader to enact change within her spheres of influence and illustrate a model of support for other divisions across campus.

A desire for Green Zone training to impact support structures beyond individual faculty and staff was expressed through facilitator interview responses. Jack indicated that he not only wanted training participants to become “better advocates” as individuals, he also wanted Green Zone training to influence faculty and staff to “create better support systems and safer places” for student veterans. Charles expressed a similar sentiment, stating, “I don’t want anyone to change their standard operating procedures, but more understanding of our students can lead to some more flexibility within those other departments, and that is always a good thing.” Participants seemed to experience a desired outgrowth of Green Zone training, which was facilitating change within their own departments.

Engagement with Green Zone training allowed participants to gain a better understanding of the ways they could actively support student veterans through both individual practices and departmental changes. Although part of a larger institutional system, faculty and staff felt a sense of empowerment to take concrete action within their spheres of influence to address the transitional needs of student veterans. As expressed by the Green Zone facilitators, this type of operative agency was an intended outcome of the Green Zone training program.

Holding Tension in Support

Some participants expressed feelings of dissonance in balancing their desire to support student veterans with their recognition of some negative personal and societal perceptions of the military. This dissonance was reflected in participant responses about navigating their own political views while creating safe spaces for students of various identities, considering the current sociopolitical environment of the nation, and acknowledging the antagonistic historical nature of higher education towards the military.

Concurrent Support of Contrasting Identities

The idea of balancing support for student populations who may be perceived as having divergent identities was discussed by three participants. The struggle for balance was referenced most distinctly as occurring in the desire to offer simultaneous support for student veterans and members of the LGBTQ+ student community. Participants indicated that they did not want to choose support for one population over the other but were keenly aware of the perceived differences between the two identities.

Sam shared that he felt that “the two identities in many ways seem so political,” with student veterans being seen as “hard-core conservatives” and LGBTQ+ students as “having liberal values” whose worldviews did not intersect. As a gay man, Sam seemed to express a sense of protectiveness towards LGBTQ+ students. Discussing the placement of the Green Zone sticker next to his Safe Zone sticker on his office door, Sam admitted that he felt conflicted about whether to put the stickers next to each other. He questioned aloud whether he should move the stickers farther away from each other so as not to alienate LGBTQ+ students with his support of the “conflicting” student veteran group. Similarly, Noah reflected on his thought process around this internal conflict, sharing,

In the past, I spent a lot of time with LGBTQ+ identified students and heard a lot of stories about bullying and harassment particularly from hyper-masculine male-identified individuals. The tension I felt was due to the stereotypes and perceptions of hyper-masculine culture in the military. I didn't want any LGBTQ+ persons to feel threatened, or at least uncomfortable by the Green Zone sticker and any negative associations that would extend to me personally. While I don't ascribe to the stereotypes personally, I suspect others who enter my office might, and I felt tension about how "safe" my office might come across to others. Ultimately, I erred on standing by my beliefs and being inclusive. But this was the internal dialogue I had when I first saw those two laminated signs beside each other in my office door.

Proving a counter story narrative to this conflict, Leah expressed that she did not feel it was her place to be concerned about the tension others might feel around her display of the Green Zone and Safe Zone stickers in her workspace. She explained,

I did not feel tension displaying these two stickers right next to each other. I honestly feel as though it is not my business to pay any mind to differences among populations, even those which have deeply rooted tensions, because it is up to me to support all students. And I hope that when students see both those stickers proudly displayed next to each other, they interpret that as me being an ally on campus to all groups who need allyship and support.

All three participants actively engaged in post-training reflections about holding support for differing identities, although the outcomes were slightly different. Sam and Noah shared a similar experience of feeling conflicted about the potential of alienating

the LGBTQ+ population with their support for student veterans, while Leah felt that her duty to provide support to all students outweighed perceived conflicts between student identities.

In the Current Sociopolitical Environment

The realities of societal and political struggles were present for some participants as they considered their support for student veterans. A majority of interviews took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, violent clashes over racial injustices, and national turmoil within political parties. As a result, responses recognized potential conflict in showing support of the military in a volatile political climate. Sarah expressed her concern that negative stereotypes about police officers had extended “particularly around the National Guard” and other military-affiliated groups. She feared that student veterans’ association with the military might pigeonhole them into the current negative perceptions around police and result in decreased support of veteran initiatives by faculty and staff on campus.

Engaging in critical self-reflection, two participants revealed their internal conflicts over what student veterans were perceived to represent, and their own desire to advocate for the needs of this distinct population. Sam seemed deeply reflective as he shared his own internal conflict, disclosing,

I have been thinking about how to be the best advocate for my students given COVID-19 and Black Lives Matter. I’ve been reading anti-racist literature and participating in some white accountability groups. I read about how much visibility matters...whether that’s on social media, showing up in the streets, or even having a sticker on the door. I think I have the cognitive dissonance to

understand that not all veterans are Trump supporters and many support LGBTQ rights, but I don't know if my students have that dissonance yet. And with the militarization of the police...yeah, I don't know if my students even recognize the symbols enough to associate them or assign meaning to them, so this could be a non-issue and just in my head. I think there are some deep associations that I need to work on and that are a byproduct of the highly charged environment we all live and work in.

In considering how to provide support and advocacy for the students he served, Sam revealed that he found himself challenged by public biases about the military that were exacerbated by the precarious political environment. This led him to contemplate how to reconcile his support for student veterans with negative associations that some of his students may apply to the military. Likewise, Charlene revealed that she struggled with what she described as the two sides of the military, the “peacekeeper aspect” and the “darker side of military action,” which caused her to debate how to show support for the military that did not violate her “pacifist nature.” In addition to the Green Zone sticker, Charlene shared that the training facilitators handed out squeeze toys as giveaways depicting Army men with guns. She adamantly declared, “I just can't display that,” stating her belief that today's society over associated the military with violence and guns rather than as a peacekeeping force.

The nature of the current socio-political climate led these participants to reflect on the impact of support for student veterans and to also consider their own personal perceptions as they navigated conflicting feelings of support for positive aspects and opposition to negative facets of the military.

Academia's History of Not Welcoming Veterans

One participant shared an honest and illuminating perspective related to the history of higher education in relation to the military. Boyd, from his viewpoint as an institutional vice chancellor and adjunct faculty member, examined the cultural context of higher education as an unwelcoming environment for military-affiliated students. He declared that,

The academy is not historically the most welcoming place for student veterans. While it's not the 60s and 70s, there persists the stereotype of veterans as jarheads, politically and socially like-minded, not very intelligent, with a propensity towards lackeyism and violence. Additionally, like it or not, the military is an extension of the executive branch of our federal government, which is not held in high regard generally in institutions of higher education at the moment and has engaged in recent conflicts that many of our students, faculty, and staff have called out as unjustified or even criminal. It's not hard to see how students who feel as though they, or populations with whom they identify or emphasize, have been mistreated by the United States government, might project those feelings onto student veterans.

This reflection provided insight into the complex nature of supporting a student population that is perceived as complicit in the injustices of larger governmental and politicized organizations. Boyd's acknowledgment of the historical conflict between higher education and aspects of the military echoed what previous participants had shared about present-day tensions, seemingly bringing the history full circle.

The ability of participants to simultaneously hold various areas of tension while being supportive of student veterans seemed to show that multiple realities existed for them at the same time. They were able to cognitively process conflicting internal and external influences while maintaining their professional commitment to supporting a population of students they professed to value.

Sparked Desire for Continued Learning

An outcome of learning because of participation in the Green Zone program was an expressed desire for more learning. Many participants indicated that their experiences in the training stimulated additional curiosity about the topic of student veteran transition and cultivated an eagerness to gain another level of knowledge through future professional development offerings.

A Deeper Dive

The appetite for more in-depth learning about student veterans was expressed by multiple participants. A need for more information was a common thread woven among responses when sharing post-training reflections about the Green Zone program. Some participants felt that the initial training could have been more expansive and presented for a longer duration of time. Vincent shared that he wanted training to get into more detail, go longer, and “dig deeper” rather than be an introduction to topics. Rachael stated that she “wanted to go more in-depth” beyond the 90-minute session to “hit all the pieces of information” she felt she needed to learn. Patricia indicated that she wanted more information on G.I. Bill, stipends, housing allowances, and the “inner workings” of the VSO, sharing, “Now I’m just curious about it all.” Leah shared the sentiments of her fellow participants, craving more information and longer training, stating,

I think Green Zone training is an incredibly useful and resourceful training packed full of resources. But I definitely left feeling like I need more in order to be the best resource for students that I can be. I need more depth. I need more knowledge. I need more time.

Considering various perspectives in Green Zone training was also a focus among participants. From a training delivery standpoint, Vincent and Emilia shared that it would be beneficial to have “different levels of Green Zone training” or continued informational forums to address specific issues related to different campus partners such as academic advisors, faculty, and counselors. Within the content of the training program itself, Sarah and Noah wished to hear from more veterans about their different experiences. Both indicated that adding the perspectives of student veterans from a variety of military branches and experiences would be beneficial for expanding the knowledge base of participants. Noah made a suggestion for future training sessions, proposing,

Enhance Green Zone, if possible, if it works out, to actually have a panel of student veterans. It was great having Charles there, and I also acknowledge the challenges of being one veteran, representing one branch, one set of experiences. Having a more diverse range of experiences through a number of people I think could really help out. We could elevate the conversation to another level.

In comparing participant responses with interviews conducted with the Green Zone facilitators, a difference of opinion was uncovered regarding the willingness of faculty and staff to engage in extended learning of Green Zone material. As the primary Green Zone facilitator, Jack explained that the timeframe for Green Zone training had intentionally been reduced from four hours of content to 90 minutes because he assumed

that faculty and staff “didn’t have time to give, or didn’t want to give up that much time” for training. The aspirations expressed by these participants for more in-depth and extended learning about Green Zone material proved to be contrary narratives to Jack’s presumption that faculty and staff had limited capacity for learning on the topic.

Green Zone Part Two

A yearning for continued campus-based professional development related to student veterans was expressed by seven of the 12 participants. Described as “Green Zone part two” by Rachael, Leah, Noah, and Vincent, the concept of ongoing learning was one that resonated with a majority of those who engaged in the initial Green Zone training session. Noah shared that he was interested in “more advanced training beyond the primer” for people who wanted to work more closely with student veterans. Formats such as daylong training sessions, Green Zone retreats, and conference presentations were suggested by participants as continuing education frameworks they would like to see provided in the future. Offering part two of Green Zone training was stated as an important way to keep information “fresh” and “updated” for faculty and staff. Staying abreast of what is new, what has changed, and learning new facts to “close the gaps” that impact veteran transition to campus were expressed as priorities for participants’ professional development goals.

Going beyond thinking of the benefits of Green Zone part two, Rachael considered the potential impact of offering increased and continued Green Zone learning opportunities. She imagined the possibility of making Green Zone sessions a campus-wide professional development initiative as a step towards institutional policy change, stating,

Even if it's an online session, if you do it once in person and then every other year you do an online, so there could be opportunities. Also recognizing there's some people that just don't have the availability to get out to attend an in-person training. Is there something else that can be built in that way [online] for them?

There's so much to be learned, and if we don't get the right people in the trainings that have the power to make a policy change, then change will be more difficult to accomplish.

The narratives of these participants showed that they felt a benefit from their introductory Green Zone professional development training session in ways that led them to desire additional learning. Review of anonymous survey responses submitted to Human Resources corroborated this desire by other participants of Green Zone training. Of 71 total respondents to the survey, three comments suggested recommendations for "additional advanced training," "a follow up seminar or part two," and "longer more in-depth" training. Interviews with Jack and Charles indicated that post-training feedback from anonymous surveys and direct conversations with participants had resulted in conversations about the development of advanced Green Zone follow-up sessions.

Green Zone training created opportunities for participants to recognize and act on their own instrumentality to cultivate a supportive environment for student veterans within their own spheres of influence at the institution. The training experience also caused participants to engage in critical reflection and navigate the dissonance they felt in supporting student veterans alongside other student populations who might apply negative stereotypes to the military based upon past and current political environments. The Green Zone program contributed to the ability of participants to jointly hold

contradicting realities of support for and tension in supporting student veterans on campus. Overall, training produced a desire for deeper and more advanced learning about student veterans through the continuation of campus-based professional development offerings for faculty and staff.

Summary

This chapter outlined major thematic findings of the phenomenological research that investigated faculty and staff experiences in the Green Zone training program to support student veteran transition into higher education. Qualitative interviews with 12 participants revealed that motivations to participate in Green Zone training were influenced by family connections to and personal respect for military service, the desire to fill a void in professional development preparation, and sense of altruistic curiosity coupled with the desire to be of assistance to student veterans. Participants characterized their experiences in the training program as seeing the operationalization of institutional values and feeling a sense of personal connection to and awareness of learning that they had not experienced in any other type of previous professional training. The combination of factual information and personalized experiences shared through storytelling in the training made abstract material palpable and authentic in a way that expanded participants' compassion and understanding about student veteran experiences. Engagement in Green Zone training caused shifts in participant perspectives around the diverse cultural identities of student veterans, their own assumptions about the military, and the ways in which systemic support existed or needed to be improved to support transitional success for student veterans. The outcomes of participants' multi-layered experiences in Green Zone training were reflected in the recognition of their individual

and collective power to enact changes to support student veterans, their ability to hold multiple realities about simultaneous support for student veterans and other vulnerable groups in a volatile political climate, and their expressed desire for continued learning about the student veteran population. Document analysis and collateral interviews with Green Zone training facilitators provided support for the interpretive findings and co-constructed knowledge that was developed throughout the study.

The findings outlined in Chapter 4 provided thorough and rich descriptions of the major descriptive themes based on inductive analysis of 12 participant interviews and secondary data sources. This thematic presentation was guided by the phenomenological tradition of a “bridled attitude” (Vagle, 2018, p. 68), which recommends that the researcher maintain the ability to balance knowledge of existing theories and researcher subjectivity while remaining open to allow new insight to emerge from the phenomenon under study. The following chapter will discuss the application of theoretical frameworks and literature to major findings, which is essential to drawing deeper and richer interpretations of the outcomes of this study.

Chapter 5 provides a summary of findings, discusses the application of transformative learning theory and organizational culture theory to the interpretive analysis of major findings, outlines limitations of the current study, and suggests implications for professional practice and future research.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The representation of military-affiliated students as the fastest growing population of non-traditional learners in higher education (Osborne, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2016; U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, 2013; VA Campus Toolkit, 2019) urges deliberate attention and education for faculty and staff about the unique strengths, challenges, and transitional stressors of student veterans. Institutional commitment to engage faculty and staff in supporting roles for student veteran transition is a recommended best practice (Albright & Bryan, 2018; Cook & Kim, 2009; McBain et al., 2012). Despite the surge in military-affiliated student enrollment and a recognition of best practices related to institutional training initiatives (American Council on Education, 2010; Dillard & Yu, 2018; Kane, 2016; Nichols-Casebolt, 2012), many institutions are deficient in training faculty and staff on issues related to student veterans (Cook & Kim, 2009; DiRamio, 2017; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Lim et al., 2018; McBain et al., 2012; Osborne, 2014). As a result, a scarcity of empirical research exists to guide professional practice related to training programs focused on the transition of and institutional support for student veterans.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of faculty and staff in university-sponsored Green Zone professional development training intended to ease the transition of student veterans into the college setting. A phenomenological case study was conducted through qualitative interviews with 12 participants and a review of supplemental data sources. Findings were developed through inductive analysis and thematic interpretation of participant narratives. The research was guided by the following questions:

1. What are the initial motivations of participants to engage in Green Zone training?
2. How do faculty and staff characterize their overall experiences in the Green Zone training program?
3. What kind of perspective changes did participants experience during the training?
4. What are the post-training outcomes of participants' attendance in Green Zone training?

This chapter provides a summary of findings drawn from the data presented in the previous chapter. It offers a discussion of contextual theoretical frameworks and scholarly literature that have been applied to the interpretive analysis of select findings, outlines limitations of the current study, and suggests implications for professional practice. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

Major thematic findings of the study emerged through inductive analysis of participants' lived experiences in Green Zone training and post-training reflections. These narratives were positioned alongside the guiding research questions in an effort to ensure clear alignment and focused analysis while still capturing the rich essence of participant experiences. Document review and collateral interviews with Green Zone training facilitators provided support for the interpretive findings and co-constructed knowledge developed throughout the study.

Participant motivations to engage in Green Zone training were driven by elements that encompassed respect for community, desire to learn, compassion for others, and curiosity about the students whom they were committed to serving. While participants had a desire to learn about student veterans, a dearth of previous structured training about

the population required many participants to seek out other avenues of learning to expand their knowledge base. The development of an institutional Green Zone training program provided a rarely seen opportunity to fill a specific void in professional preparation. The training event also fulfilled participants' desires to interact with a network of campus professionals around shared knowledge that strengthened their sense of community connection.

Participants characterized their overall Green Zone training experience as an affirmation and extension of institutional values. They expressed that Green Zone training demonstrated that the university valued commitment to faculty and staff professional development, as well as the support of student veterans as a unique population worthy of spotlighting. The personalization of the training material through the storytelling of the veteran facilitator elicited a sense of emotional connection to and awareness of the information that was unlike any other training experience participants had encountered. Such personalization was able to expose participants to the real-world actualities of military service and transition while providing a unique opportunity for engagement that could be heard, seen, and felt. This training environment led participants to describe their Green Zone experience as a poignant interaction that deepened their knowledge of and appreciation for the student veteran experience.

The coupling of factual information and personalized experiences presented in Green Zone training led to shifts in participant perspectives related to the diversity of student veterans, reframing personal and societal assumptions, and contemplating positive support for and barriers to student veteran success. Building an awareness around the military as a cultural identity provided participants with an opportunity to

correlate veteran transitional experiences with those of other invisible and underrepresented student groups outside of the mainstream traditional college population. The training experience also served to counteract participant misconceptions about the military. These shifts in understanding and attitudes moved participants to reconsider negative assumptions about student veterans and contemplate the ways they perceived systemic support for or hindrance of the successful transition of veterans into the college environment.

Green Zone training created opportunities for participants to recognize and act on their own instrumentality to cultivate a supportive environment for student veterans within their spheres of influence at the institution. The training experience also caused participants to engage in critical reflection and navigation of the dissonance they felt in supporting student veterans alongside other student populations who might apply negative stereotypes to the military based upon past and current political environments. Engagement in critical reflection contributed to the ability of participants to jointly hold contradicting realities of support for and tension in supporting student veterans on campus. Overall, training produced a desire for deeper and more advanced learning about student veterans through the continuation of campus-based professional development offerings for faculty and staff.

Discussion of Highlighted Discoveries

While no conceptual framework or theory directed this research, contextual theories and scholarly literature informed the interpretation of participants' lived experiences in the Green Zone training program. From the descriptive findings presented in the previous chapter and other connections made by participants in the course of the

research, several salient points have been highlighted in this chapter for further discussion.

Organizational Culture Theory

Two points of examination and interpretation center on the contextual theory of organizational culture (Schein 1984, 1992, 1993; Schein & Schein, 2017) and application to featured conclusions. Institutional context was found to be a contributory element in participants' overall experience in the Green Zone training program. Participant responses gave insight into the organizational culture of their institution. First, a sense of top-down support was expressed by faculty and staff as they described their experience in Green Zone training. Participants were encouraged by supervisors to engage in time away from their professional roles to further their knowledge base about student veterans. This demonstration of support reflected an organizational culture of endorsement for professional development. Schein (1984, 1992, 1993) and Schein and Schein (2017) outlined the ways in which basic assumptions, hidden and espoused values, and unconscious behaviors of an organization impact group identity and define expectations, actions, and reactions within the organization. The institution under study had cultivated an environment where professional development opportunities were championed by both administrative leadership and collaborations between departments. This environment led participants to feel supported in their pursuit of learning on the topic of the student veteran population. Participants perceived Green Zone training as an outgrowth of institutional commitment to the professional development and preparation for faculty and staff. The interpretive theme of top-down support aligned with the framework of organizational culture theory in that the institution provided its members with "a basic

sense of identity” (Schein & Schein, 2017, p. 23) and demonstrated value around professional development, which contributed to the level of comfort faculty and staff felt in pursuing Green Zone training.

Second, support for the student veteran population and tension in support due to conflicting perspectives were able to coexist for participants in this institutional context. While several participants recognized the historical importance of being founded as a post-World War 2 veteran-serving institution, they still felt tension in the support of student veterans in the current political climate. According to Schein’s organizational culture theory (1993), various subcultures exist within organizations that require alignment and negotiation in order to achieve cultural growth and transformation of the organization. In addition, Schein and Schein (2017) asserted that organizational cultures are situated within broader societal macro cultures that influence the behavior of an organization. The concept of individualism versus collectivism as a basic dimension of macro culture was developed through national cultural studies conducted by Hofstede (1991) and Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov (2010), and deemed applicable by Schein and Schein (2017) to organizational culture analysis. Individualistic cultures define roles based on individual rights and duties, whereas collective cultures define roles in terms of group membership and allegiance to the whole, which serve as the principal elements of society (Schein & Schein, 2017). The ability of research participants to balance active, visual support for the student veteran community in the current sociopolitical environment along with navigating concurrent support of other student populations illustrated the ways that aspects of the societal macro culture were at play in the organizational culture of the institution. Participants engaged in cognitive negotiation

around institutional subcultures and how to make each group feel safe and comfortable. As a whole, the spirit of determining how to align support for the holistic community of students appeared to be stronger than the tension held by participants of supporting one student group over another. This collective attitude reflected a movement away from individualism towards a holistic climate of community building within the organizational culture.

These highlighted discoveries of the study interpreted through the contextual framework of organizational culture support that elements of climate, espoused values, shared meanings, and integrating symbols (Schein & Schein, 2017) impact how individuals navigate and make meaning of their lived experiences within an organization. The culture of the participants' institution allowed them to feel supported in pursuing the professional development opportunity of Green Zone training, and confident in negotiating alignment within subcultures of the institution that could lead to collective organizational growth and transformation.

Transformative Learning Theory

While the application of organizational culture theory to the above research findings focused on participants' experience in Green Zone training as members of the institutional community, transformative learning theory shed light into participants' experience the training as individuals. A notable discovery in the research emerged through the ways participants described being affected by the authentic voice and lived experiences of the military-affiliated facilitator in the Green Zone training program.

The paradigm of transformative learning considers the biographies, orientations, and unspoken assumptions brought into experiences by individuals. Such contextual

understanding influences meaning-making and subjective reframing of the world when individuals are introduced to new information. Transformative learning as a premise extends beyond traditional schemes of skill and knowledge obtainment, rather, the theory asserts that the process of learning also includes critical awareness, reflection, and reframing of individual assumptions and perceptions towards more open and inclusive viewpoints (Mezirow, 1978, 1991, 2000, 2002). The progression towards transformative learning involves “participation in constructive discourse to use the experience of others” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 8) as a way to assess personal assumptions and reconsider individual actions based upon new insight.

Green Zone training provided an opportunity for participants to engage in learning that exposed them to the real-life experience of a veteran. This served as a pivotal point of learning that shaped the way they reflected on and made meaning of the training material. Kegan (1994) posited that the greatest yearnings of the human experience are to be included in experiences and to have a sense of agency. Mezirow (2000) correlated inclusion and agency as outcomes of transformative learning dependent upon “active discourse with others to better understand the meaning of an experience” (p. 14). Participant narratives of engagement with Green Zone training and storytelling of the military-affiliated facilitator revealed that they felt entrusted with his personal history which created an emotional connection to the training. Such discourse with a person who lived the military and transition experiences brought the training information to life for participants in ways that elicited feelings of being included in connection to the experiences of student veterans while also creating a disorienting dilemma about preconceived notions of the military. This interaction prompted critical self-reflection and

the development of self-efficacy based on new knowledge and perspectives. The learning process for Green Zone trainees transcended the mere acquisition of new skills. It cultivated a journey of reflection and awareness representative of the stages and processes of transformative learning theorized by Mezirow (1978, 1991, 2000, 2002), unlike traditional forms of professional development training that participants had experienced in the past.

Aristotelian Elements and Transformative Learning

The transformative learning process that some participants experienced in the Green Zone training program seemed to result from pairing the presentation of factual information with an emotional connection to the material through personal storytelling. This combination of elements brought about points of critical reflection for participants that led to the integration of new perspectives into their decision-making to support student veterans. The manner by which material was presented in Green Zone training was reflective of the persuasive rhetoric elements of ethos, pathos, and logos espoused by Aristotle two millennia ago (Aristotle & Kennedy, 2007).

Aristotle's elements of persuasive appeal represent three areas to be considered when evaluating an argument. Brooks and Normore (2005) stated that ethos, pathos, and logos "translate roughly as character, emotion, and logic" (p. 3) and are elements that should be balanced for a persuasive argument. Each type of persuasive appeal serves to impact a person's mindset in different ways. As outlined by Leiringer and Cardellino (2008), a well-balanced argument should "awaken emotion (pathos) in the audience" (p. 1046) that leads them to the desired action or to agree with the desired judgment; illuminate the feasibility of "what is said by logical argument (logos)" (p. 1046); and

“present the character (ethos) of the speaker in a favorable light” (p. 1047). This framework allows the audience to evaluate an argument in three distinct ways, and eventually as a whole.

Green Zone training combined the appeals of ethos, logos, and pathos in a way that created a connection to the logic and emotion of the material for participants. The military-affiliated facilitator was perceived by participants as a trustworthy figure that gave credibility to training based upon his lived experiences that affirmed the factual information presented. Participants felt a deepened sense of compassion and empathy towards the experiences of student veterans as a result of the personal stories shared, which led them to want to take action to support the student veteran population. The balanced combination of ethos, logos, and pathos provided a foundation for transformative learning to take place for participants within the Green Zone training environment and fulfilled the intent of the program to increase the institutional support for the transitional needs of student veterans.

Alignment with Scholarly Literature

Due to the paucity of empirical research related to faculty and staff experiences in Green Zone training, areas of divergence from scholarly literature were not easily identifiable. However, several areas of similarity between the current study and previous research and literature were noted. The first alignment of the study with scholarly literature was related to participant perceptions of the strengths of student veterans. Similar to literature presented by Blaauw-Hara (2016); Boerner (2013); Kelley, Smith, and Fox (2013); Livingston, Havice, Cawthon, and Fleming (2011); and Rumann and Hamrick (2010), participants described student veterans as mature, focused, driven,

highly motivated, and leaders among their peers. Next, the societal and cultural assumptions about student veterans expressed by participants prior to their experiences in Green Zone training reflected comparable assumptions outlined in the empirical findings of Barnard-Brak, Bagby, and Sulak (2011) and DiRamio, Ackerman, and Mitchell (2008), who found that assumptions made by faculty disparately affected the support of, and resources for, student veterans in postsecondary education. Perceived assumptions and biases about student veterans expressed by some participants of this study led them to not be cognizant of the support or resources needed by student veterans to support a successful transition into the university environment. Lastly, the final alignment of this study with scholarly research was reflected in the expressed desire of participants to create a welcoming environment on campus for student veterans. This collective attitude echoed the outcomes of previous quantitative research. Results of faculty and staff surveyed in the five-year study conducted by Albright and Bryan (2018) reported that 95.62% of 14,673 of respondents affirmed the role of faculty, staff, and administrators in creating a supportive environment for student veterans. The unanimous attitude of the 12 study participants in the current research supported the nearly unified response received by Albright and Bryan (2018) regarding the important role faculty and staff play in supporting the transition of student veterans to campus.

Navigating Tension to Redefine Community Support

An unexpected discovery of the study was the sense of tension that was interpreted from competing ideological forces and contexts shared in participant narratives. From a contextual perspective, the participants' state is home to two major military installations and is ranked as eighth in the country for having the largest annual

population of veterans (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2020). Situated as an urban-serving institution, the university under study was founded with a mission to educate veterans returning from World War II, which several participants referenced as a point of historical pride. Participants described an institutional culture that espoused and supported faculty and staff advocacy for the diverse population of students enrolled at the university.

At the same time, some participants expressed being pulled by sociopolitical and ideological forces that felt contradictory. Tension appeared to exist in participants' desire to serve as advocates for the holistic community of students while balancing conflicting personal and societal perceptions of the military. A sense of connection, community, and support for student veterans appeared to give purpose and meaning to Green Zone training for participants. But for some, this was juxtaposed against ongoing negative perceptions of the military and academia's past of being an unwelcoming environment for military personnel. Historically, anti-war and anti-military activism of the 1960s, including protests against the Vietnam War, military draft, and recruiting stations on college campuses, polarized universities across the country (Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010) and some of those sentiments exist in higher education today. Elliott (2014) argued that "academic culture can be characterized as liberal, relative to the military...whereas those in the military are more likely to identify as moderate or conservative" (p. 107). Interpretive analysis of participant narratives revealed that several participants seemed to be actively navigating cognitive tension between supporting student veterans, whom they perceived to have conservative ideals and a contentious history in higher education, with support of student populations that held more liberal

values. In holding tension of these ideological dynamics, faculty and staff appeared to be redefining their concept of a supportive community and displaying equitable advocacy for all students on campus despite ideological differences among them.

Limitations of the Study

This study presents several limitations that are worth noting. First, research was performed within the first year that Green Zone training had been offered at the institution. As the training program was in its early stages of development, participants may have experienced fluctuation across the training sessions from which participants were recruited as facilitators were working out the nuances of format and delivery. This may have shaped how participants perceived and expressed the value of the program on their understanding of student veteran transition. Second, participation in Green Zone training was a voluntary professional development opportunity that may have engaged faculty and staff who hold a more positive view of military-affiliated students compared to individuals who did not engage in the training. Therefore, their favorable perception of the campus climate and Green Zone training could have been shaped by their personal dispositions. Third, my professional role as a senior administrator at the research site may have had an unintended negative or positive impact on faculty and staff participation in the study. As Warren (2012) pointed out, the qualitative interview is a co-constructed process between interviewer and interviewee. While I approached my study volunteers as research participants rather than as colleagues on campus, I acknowledge that my position as a senior-level administrator was a significant context in the interviews. Subsequently, some participants may have refrained from discussing more negative aspects of the campus culture with me due to this context. Fourth, from a racial perspective, a majority of the participant sample was homogenous with 11 of the 12

participants identifying as White or Caucasian. Fifth, all 12 participants in this study were staff members, with two of them identifying as adjunct faculty. I did not anticipate such a small number of participants who identified as faculty to engage in the study, nor did I anticipate the small number of faculty who participated in Green Zone training overall. Based upon training participation data shared by the Human Resources office, only nine of the 140 Green Zone trainees were identified as having a faculty role. Low faculty attendance in training could be an additional outgrowth of Green Zone being in its first year of development on campus.

Finally, it is important to recognize the challenges and limitations that the COVID-19 pandemic presented to the study. At the time COVID-19 impacted campus operations, only four participants were involved in the study. The cancellation of three Green Zone training sessions for the spring semester reduced the number of faculty and staff that could participate in training and required a shift in strategy to recruit the remainder of my participants from fall training sessions. This shift limited the opportunity to engage in more robust participant recruitment methods. Email outreach became the primary source of recruitment, rather than the multiple forms of participant recruitment that included script reading and flyer distribution at the end of training sessions. In addition, due to the COVID-19 North Carolina stay-at-home order, face-to-face interviews were not able to be conducted with 10 of the 12 participants. Changes to the interview protocol and consent form were made to include remote interview formats such as video conferencing and telephone interviews, which may have impacted the level of rapport with participants that I could build in a less personalized setting.

Implications for Professional Practice

This study intended to fill a void in scholarly literature related to faculty and staff training in support of student veterans on college campuses. To my knowledge, no other empirical research has been conducted to explore faculty and staff experiences in training programs such as Green Zone. Outcomes of this research have two primary implications for professional practice to be considered by institutional leaders and training coordinators.

Specifically related to support for the student veteran population, the current investigation serves as a catalyst to shift institutional conversations and assumptions about the ways in which support for student veterans can be considered. The implementation of Green Zone training for faculty and staff at institutions that enroll veterans and other military-affiliated student populations can move the onus of responsibility for transition success away from these students towards the holistic university community. Campus-based professional development training opportunities, such as Green Zone, have the ability to create a more robust institutional understanding, awareness, and organizational accountability of the unique characteristics and transitional needs of student veterans. Such training can provide faculty and staff members with contextual knowledge and actionable skills to apply to interactions with student veterans and transform the ways departments engage in agency to cultivate an environment of understanding and support for student veterans. This can have a positive impact for these students in areas such as academic instruction, advising, counseling, student activities, and wellness, which in turn could impact policy and procedure decisions in support of student veterans at higher levels of the institution.

On a broader scale, the discoveries of this study demonstrated the transformative influence of combining elements of logos, pathos, and ethos on participant learning in organizational professional development training. Traditional training has been geared towards delivering cognitive knowledge or skill development. This study shows the importance of integrating persuasive rhetoric to cultivate a deeper understanding and impact on the participant learning process. Incorporating elements of logos, pathos, and ethos into campus-based professional development training can elicit critical reflection, emotional connection, and development of new perspectives for faculty and staff. Intentional integration of these persuasive appeals can create training environments that move beyond knowledge delivery towards more transformational experiences that result in new roles and actions for faculty and staff. This approach can be beneficial in delivering professional development preparation around other marginalized or invisible campus populations in need of support and advocacy such as LGBTQ+, international, undocumented, and first-generation students.

Recommendations for Future Research

Although literature related to the increase of military-affiliated enrollment in higher education (Cook & Kim, 2009; McBain et al., 2012; Osborne, 2014) and student veteran transitional experiences (Campbell & Riggs, 2015; DiRamio et al., 2008; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Naphan & Elliott, 2015; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010; Schiavone & Gentry, 2014) have increased over the last several years, empirical literature related to faculty and staff experiences in training programs focused on support of student veteran transition is non-existent. Additional research would help to uncover the impact of

professional training and education for faculty and staff on institutional support for the student veteran population.

Implications of the current study could represent an opportunity for further exploration around the Green Zone training model as a method for educating faculty on the topic of student veterans. Mentioned as a limitation of this research, an unexpected outcome of the investigation was the low number of faculty that participated in the study. From a training model perspective, the limited faculty presence in Green Zone sessions provokes curiosity related to what motivating factors and organizational influences would cause them to engage in training efforts related to support of specific student populations. A second research possibility related to faculty could explore the impact of participation in Green Zone training on faculty perceptions of student veterans and classroom instruction strategies pre- and post-Green Zone training. These could prove to be interesting areas of investigation for other scholars.

While the current study utilized theories of transformative learning and organizational culture to frame interpretations of participant experiences, future scholars could conduct research that seeks to align other theoretical approaches to faculty and staff experiences in Green Zone training. Potential suggestions for consideration are the exploration of adult learning theory (Knowles, 1984), ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2009) in a collegiate context, and sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978).

Finally, a recommendation for future research includes applying Schein's (1984, 1992, 1993) and Schein and Schein's (2017) theory to a longitudinal study that investigates the impact of Green Zone training on the internal integration of

organizational culture over time to support student veterans. Such research could investigate how departmental, divisional, and overall institutional processes and policies shift to address solving the problem of holistic support of student veteran transition into higher education.

Summary

This phenomenological investigation sought to understand the lived experiences of 12 faculty and staff members in a campus-based Green Zone training to support the transition of student veterans into higher education. Theoretical frameworks of organizational culture and transformative learning provided lenses through which major thematic findings of the study are interpreted and theorized. Additional scholarly literature added insight to the discussion of research discoveries. Outcomes of the investigation provided implications for professional practice directed at institutional leaders and training practitioners. Directly related to support of student veterans, faculty and staff engagement with campus-based Green Zone training programs can serve to shift the onus of student veteran transition success away from students, and towards a more holistic institutional awareness and accountability model of transition success. From a broader professional development training perspective, the integration of logos, ethos, and pathos elements into training formats can have a transformative impact on faculty and staff learning processes and result in deeper understanding of and connection to material being presented.

Due to the paucity of research on this topic, the field would benefit from additional research on Green Zone training. Several areas of further study are possible to gain a more robust understanding of the training and its impact. Studies involving a larger

number of faculty could investigate motivating factors and organizational influences that engage faculty in professional development workshops about student veterans and other specialized student populations. Additional faculty-focused research could explore faculty perceptions of student veterans and classroom instruction strategies pre- and post-Green Zone training. Alignment of faculty and staff experiences in Green Zone with additional theories would provide deeper insight into aspects impacting professional development training. Lastly, a longitudinal approach to research could investigate the impact of Green Zone training on the overall organizational culture of an institution to support student veteran transition.

Concluding Remarks

Student veterans are entering higher education in large numbers due to access to educational benefits provided by the government and will continue to engage in higher education for years to come. This population of students presents strengths, challenges, and unique transitional stressors that are different than their peers. While colleges and universities have the ability to intentionally create environments that support the successful transition of student veterans from the military to the campus community, professional preparation for faculty and staff about student veterans is limited. Campus-based Green Zone training is an example of a recommended best practice to connect faculty and staff with professional development in an effort to develop institutional systems of support for the student veteran population. However, empirical studies that investigate the experiences of and outcomes for faculty and staff in this type of training are not available. The current study aimed to fill a gap in this area of scholarly knowledge.

Discoveries of this research provided insight into faculty and staff motivations to engage in Green Zone training, their overall training experience and perspective changes throughout the training, and the outcomes of their participation in the training. The lived experiences of participants produced multi-layered narratives about their engagement with and meaning-making of Green Zone training. Thematic interpretations of participant narratives shed light on the effect that Green Zone training had on faculty and staff awareness of and agency towards support of the student veteran population. Investigation of these experiences serves as a catalyst for future research focused on campus-based professional development efforts to cultivate holistic institutional support for this ever-growing population of students entering higher education.

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APPENDIX A: TRAINING RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

My name is (X), and I am a doctoral Research Assistant in the College of Education. I would like to take this opportunity to announce an opportunity for you to participate in research about your experiences in Green Zone training conducted by Christine Reed Davis, Dean of Students and doctoral student in the Educational Leadership program at UNC Charlotte.

In her role as a doctoral student, Christine is researching the experiences of faculty and staff who have participated in Green Zone training to support the transition of student veterans into the university. The current research is not connected to the role or function of the Dean of Students Office, or to her oversight of the Veterans Services Office as the Dean of Students. I am serving as a secondary investigator on this study, and Dr. Jae Hoon Lim, Associate Professor in the College of Education, serves as the faculty advisor for this study.

Nationally, a lack of research exists that investigates faculty and staff experiences in training to support student veterans. The research team is interested in exploring overall experiences of faculty and staff in Green Zone training, including motivations for participation and sense of new understanding after the training.

An eligible participant for this study will be any faculty or staff member who has completed a Green Zone training session and has interaction with student veterans. Volunteers for the study will be invited to participate in two individual semistructured interviews. The first interview will be a face-to-face interview lasting approximately 30–60 minutes. A follow-up interview will be scheduled after analysis of emergent themes has been conducted from the initial interview. The follow-up interview can be done either face-to-face or via email response. Face-to-face interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. Participation in the research is voluntary.

The research team will remove all identifiable information from interview transcripts so any information about participation, including identity, is completely confidential.

Within the next several days, you will receive an email that will provide you with a reminder about the scope and purpose of the research and invite you to participate in the research study. If you are interested in participating, simply follow instructions within the email to contact the research team, and we will contact you to schedule an interview at a future date and time of your convenience. I am passing out a flyer about this research study and your opportunity to be a part of the study. I am happy to stay after the conclusion of the training session to answer any individual questions you may have.

APPENDIX B: TRAINING RECRUITMENT FLYER

My name is Christine Reed Davis, Dean of Students and doctoral student in the Educational Leadership program at UNC Charlotte. In my role as a doctoral student, I am the Primary Investigator on a study researching faculty and staff experiences in Green Zone training to support student veteran transition to the university. The current research is not connected to the role or function of the Dean of Students Office, or to my oversight of the Veterans Services Office as the Dean of Students. Rachael Saunders, a doctoral Research Assistant in the College of Education, serves as the secondary investigator on this study, and Dr. Jae Hoon Lim, Associate Professor in the College of Education, serves as the faculty advisor on this research.

Nationally, a lack of research exists that investigates faculty and staff experiences in training to support student veterans. The research team is interested in exploring overall experiences of faculty and staff in Green Zone training, including motivations for participation and sense of new understanding after the training.

An eligible participant for this study will be any faculty or staff member who has completed a Green Zone training session and has interaction with student veterans. Volunteers for the study will be invited to participate in two individual semistructured interviews. The first interview will be a face-to-face interview lasting approximately 30–60 minutes. A follow-up interview will be scheduled after analysis of emergent themes has been conducted from the initial interview. The follow-up interview can be done either face-to-face or via email response. Face-to-face interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. Participation in the research is voluntary.

The research team will remove all identifiable information from interview transcripts so any information about participation, including identity, is completely confidential.

Within the next several days, you will receive an email from that will provide you with a reminder about the scope and purpose of the research and invite you to participate in the research study. If you are interested in participating, simply follow instructions within the email to contact the research team, and we will contact you to schedule an interview at a future date and time of your convenience. If you have further questions about the research, please feel free to contact any member of the research team:

Christine Reed Davis, Primary Investigator
crdavis@uncc.edu

Dr. Jae Hoon Lim, Faculty Advisor
jhl@uncc.edu

Rachael Saunders, Research Assistant
rsaund13@uncc.edu

APPENDIX C: POST-TRAINING RECRUITMENT EMAIL

This email is being sent by (Human Resources Learning and Organizational Development or departmental contact) on behalf of doctoral student, Christine Reed Davis.

Greetings,

My name is Christine Reed Davis, Dean of Students and doctoral student in the Educational Leadership program at UNC Charlotte. In my role as a doctoral student, I am researching faculty and staff experiences in Green Zone training to support student veteran transition to the university. The current research is not connected to the role or function of the Dean of Students Office, or to my oversight of the Veterans Services Office as the Dean of Students. Rachael Saunders, a doctoral Research Assistant in the College of Education, serves as the secondary investigator on this study, and Dr. Jae Hoon Lim, Associate Professor in the College of Education, serves as the faculty advisor on this research.

As a recent Green Zone training participant, I am writing to invite you to participate in the current research study.

Why is this study being conducted?

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of faculty and staff in university-sponsored professional development training intended to ease the transition of student veterans into the college environment. A scarcity of research exists that investigates faculty and staff experiences in training to support student veterans. This research intends to investigate the cultural and institutional context of Green Zone training implementation and faculty/staff voluntary participation; dimensions of participants' motivation to attend training; key aspects of learning experienced during the training; and how participants make sense of new understanding after the training.

What is the criteria to participate?

Participation in this study is open to any faculty or staff member who has participated in the Green Zone training program, and who interacts with student veterans in their professional capacity as a faculty or staff member at the university.

What happens if I choose to participate?

If you volunteer for the study, you will be asked to participate in two individual interviews on campus. You will meet with me, or Research Assistant Rachael Saunders, within the next few weeks to conduct the first interview, which will be a face-to-face interview. A follow-up interview will be scheduled after analysis of emergent themes has

been conducted from your first interview. The follow-up interview can be done either face-to-face or via email communication. Both interviews will last approximately 30–60 minutes and face-to-face interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. You will have the opportunity to review your transcribed responses in order to double-check accuracy and provide any clarification needed to your responses. All identifiable information from your interview transcripts will be removed, so any information about participation, including identity, is completely confidential.

How do I participate?

If you are interested in volunteering as a research participant, please contact me at crdavis@uncc.edu indicating your interest. I will follow up with an email and electronic scheduling poll to coordinate a date, time, and location for your initial interview with me, or Rachel Saunders. Face-to-face interviews will take place in a private location of your choice on campus in order to maintain the confidentiality of your participation.

Sincerely,

Christine Reed Davis, Primary Investigator
crdavis@uncc.edu

Rachael Saunders, Research Assistant
rsaund13@uncc.edu

Dr. Jae Hoon Lim, Faculty Advisor
jhlim@uncc.edu

APPENDIX D: FACULTY-STAFF ELECTRONIC CONSENT FORM

Information about the research

This study aims to examine the experiences of faculty and staff participants of Green Zone training. Participation in the research is voluntary, and any information about participation, including individual identity, is completely confidential. No known major risks or discomfort are anticipated to be associated with participation in the research. A potential benefit of participation is the opportunity to reflect upon personal experiences, which in turn may impact the ways in which participants understand and interact with the student veteran population at the university. Volunteers will be asked to participate in two individual interviews with a member of the research team that will last approximately 30–60 minutes. Verbal interview responses for both interview sessions will be transcribed and provided to participants in order to check for accuracy prior to the data analysis process. In addition, data analysis will be conducted of documents including Green Zone training materials, demographic surveys, and anonymous training evaluation feedback collected by the university's Human Resources Learning and Organizational Development department.

1. What is this form?

This is a Consent Form, which serves to provide you with information about the study and your invitation to participate in the research. In addition, this Consent Form describes risks and benefits of your voluntary participation in the study. You are encouraged to take time to review the information provided in the Consent Form and to ask any questions you may have now or in the future. If you decide to participate in this research, you will be asked to sign this form and be given a copy for your personal records.

2. What is the purpose of the research?

The purpose of this qualitative research is to examine the experiences of faculty and staff participants of Green Zone training, which is intended to educate university staff regarding support of veteran students at the university. Specifically, the research intends to investigate the cultural and institutional context of Green Zone training implementation and faculty/staff voluntary participation, personal and professional dimensions of participants' motivation to attend training, key aspects of learning experienced during the training, and how participants make sense of new understanding after the training.

3. Who is conducting the research study?

This study is being conducted by Christine Reed Davis, Dean of Students and doctoral student in the Department of Educational Leadership, as part of dissertation research. The current research is not connected to the role or function of the Dean of Students Office, or

to Christine Reed Davis' oversight of the Veterans Services Office as the Dean of Students. Rachael Saunders and Madison Levan, graduate Research Assistants in the College of Education, will serve as secondary investigators on the study. Dr. Jae Hoon Lim, Associate Professor of Educational Research in the College of Education, is serving as the Faculty Advisor.

4. Am I eligible to participate?

You may participate in this project if you are a faculty/staff member who has completed a Green Zone training session at the university. Faculty/staff members who have not completed a Green Zone training may not participate in this project.

5. What will my participation entail?

If you agree to volunteer for the study, you will be asked to complete a demographic form and participate in two individual semistructured interviews. The first interview will be a face-to-face interview, either in-person if COVID-19 social distancing allows or in a remote format, based on a loosely structured interview protocol lasting approximately 30–60 minutes. A follow-up interview will be scheduled after analysis of emergent themes has been conducted from the initial interview.

The follow-up interview can be done either face-to-face if social distancing allows, in a remote format, or via email response. Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. Pseudonyms will be used to protect your confidentiality. You will be provided with a copy of your transcripts in order to check the accuracy of the transcription and provide any corrections or feedback about the accuracy of the transcription to the researcher(s) as needed. Primary Investigator Davis or her Research Assistant(s) will schedule and conduct the interviews in a location or format that is most convenient and comfortable for you.

6. What are the risks and benefits of participation?

There are no major known risks for your participation in this study. However, the project may involve risks that are not currently known. There may be some uncomfortable feelings on the part of the interview participants because some questions will be about your experiences in the Green Zone training, previous and subsequent knowledge about student veterans, and your interactions with veteran students. The interviewers will try to make the questions as open and tactful as possible to reduce or eliminate these feelings. Other than the possibility of minimal discomfort related to interview questions, there are no other psychological, academic, economic, or legal risks associated with participating in this study.

You may benefit from your participation in this study because you will have the opportunity to reflect upon the content of the Green Zone training, your experiences in the training, and subsequent learning as a result of the training, which may impact the ways in which you understand and interact with the student veteran population at the institution.

7. Can I stop my participation in the study?

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. You will not be treated any differently if you decide not to participate in the study, or if you stop once you have started.

8. How will my information be protected?

Any information about your participation, including your identity, is completely confidential. The following steps will be taken to ensure this confidentiality. All interview data will be managed by the research team. All identifiable information from each interview transcript will be removed during the transcription process and replaced with pseudonyms. Therefore, no one besides the research team will know the final list of interviewees who have actually participated in the study. The final evaluation report will present aggregated data without any identifiable information attached. You are one of 10 faculty/staff members expected to participate in this study.

9. Will I receive an incentive to participate in the study?

There is no incentive or payment for participating in this research study.

10. Who can answer questions about this research and my rights as a participant?

The university wants to make sure that you are treated in a fair and respectful manner. Contact the university's Research Compliance Office (704) 687-1871 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 Primary Investigator, Christine Reed Davis (704-687-0342, crdavis@uncc.edu) or Faculty Advisor, Dr. Jae Hoon Lim (704-687-8864, jhlim@uncc.edu).

11. Will data collected from this study be used for future research?

The data collected will not be used or distributed for future research studies even if identifiers are removed.

You may print a copy of this form for your records.

If you are at least 18 years of age, read and understand the information above, and agree to participate in this research study, enter your email address below and click on “Continue Survey” to indicate your agreement and begin your participation in the study. If you do not consent/agree to participate, please exit the survey.

Email: (open form text box)

APPENDIX E: FACULTY-STAFF ELECTRONIC DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

- 1) Preferred Name (first and last): (open form text box)
- 2) To which gender identity do you most identify? Select one (drop down)
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Transgender female
 - d. Transgender male
 - e. Non-binary
 - f. Prefer not to answer
 - g. Not listed. Please specify (text box)
- 3) Please list the ethnicity/ethnicities with which you identify. (open form text box)
- 4) Email address.
- 5) What is your role at the institution? Check all that apply. (check boxes)
 - a. Staff
 - b. Faculty
 - c. Other (please specify): (open form text box)
- 6) What is your position title?
- 7) In which university department are you employed? If employed by more than one, please specify. (open form text box)
- 8) Do you serve as a class instructor? (check box)
 - a. Yes
 - b. NoIf yes, what classes do you teach? (open form text box)
- 9) To your knowledge, do you interact with student veterans in your professional role? (check box)
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Not sure
- 10) Do you have a personal affiliation with the military? (check box)
 - a. Yes

- b. No

If yes, please specify affiliation: (open form text box)

11) If COVID-19 social distancing restrictions do not allow for face-to-face interviews, what is your preference for a remote interview format? (check box)

- a. Telephone call
- b. Online video conferencing
- c. Either

APPENDIX F: GREEN ZONE FACILITATOR CONSENT FORM

Project Title and Purpose

A Phenomenological Case Study of Faculty and Staff Experiences in Green Zone Training to Support Student Veteran Transition into Higher Education

Research Summary

The purpose of this research study is to examine the experiences of faculty and staff participants of Green Zone training. Participation in the research is voluntary, and any information about participation, including individual identity, is completely confidential. No known major risks or discomfort are anticipated to be associated with participation in the research. A potential benefit of participation is the opportunity to reflect upon personal experiences, which in turn may impact the ways in which participants understand and interact with the student veteran population at the university. Participant volunteers will be asked to participate in two individual interviews with a member of the Research Team. Verbal interview responses will be transcribed and provided to participants in order to check for accuracy prior to the data analysis process. In addition, data analysis will be conducted of documents including Green Zone training materials, demographic surveys, and anonymous training evaluation feedback collected by the university's Human Resources Charlotte Learning and Organizational Development department.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this exploratory qualitative research is to examine the experiences of faculty and staff participants of Green Zone training, which is intended to educate university staff regarding support of veteran students at the university. Specifically, the research intends to investigate the cultural and institutional context of Green Zone training implementation and faculty/staff voluntary participation, personal and professional dimensions of participants' motivation to attend training, key aspects of learning experienced during the training, and how participants make sense of new understanding after the training.

Research Team

This study is being conducted by Christine Reed Davis, Dean of Students and doctoral student in the Department of Educational Leadership, as part of dissertation research. The current research is not connected to the role or function of the Dean of Students Office, or to Christine Reed Davis' oversight of the Veterans Services Office as the Dean of Students. Rachael Saunders and Madison Levan, graduate Research Assistants in the College of Education, will serve as secondary investigators on the study. Dr. Jae Hoon Lim, Associate Professor of Educational Research in the College of Education, is serving as the Faculty Advisor.

Eligibility

You may participate in this project if you are a facilitator of a Green Zone training session at the university.

Overall Description of Participation

You will be asked to participate in **two individual semistructured interviews**. The first interview will be a face-to-face interview based on a loosely structured interview protocol lasting approximately 30–60 minutes. A follow-up interview will be scheduled after analysis of emergent themes has been conducted from the initial interview. The follow-up interview can be done either face-to-face or via email response. Face-to-face interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. You will be provided with a copy of your transcripts in order to check the accuracy of the transcription and provide any corrections or feedback about the accuracy of the transcription to the researcher(s) as needed. Primary Investigator Davis or her Research Assistant will schedule and conduct the interviews on-campus in a private location that is most convenient and comfortable to you.

Length of Participation

Both initial and follow-up interviews will last approximately 30–60 minutes each.

Risks and Benefits of Participation

There are no major known risks for your participation in this study. However, the project may involve risks that are not currently known. There may be some uncomfortable feelings on the part of the interview participants because some questions will be about your experiences in the Green Zone training, previous and subsequent knowledge about student veterans, and your interactions with veteran students. The interviewers will try to make the questions as open and tactful as possible to reduce or eliminate these feelings. Other than the possibility of minimal discomfort related to interview questions, there are no other psychological, academic, economic, or legal risks associated with participating in this study. You may benefit from your participation in this study because you will have the opportunity to reflect upon the content of the Green Zone training, your experiences in the training, and intended outcomes of the training.

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. You will not be treated any differently if you decide not to participate in the study, or if you stop once you have started.

Confidentiality Statement

Any information about your participation, including your identity, is completely confidential. The following steps will be taken to ensure this confidentiality. All interview data will be managed by the Research Team. All identifiable information from each interview transcript will be removed during the transcription process and replaced with pseudonyms. Therefore, no one outside the Research Team will know the final list of interviewees who have actually participated in the study. The final evaluation report will present aggregated data without any identifiable information attached. You are one of three Green Zone training facilitators expected to participate in this study.

Statement of Fair Treatment and Respect

The university wants to make sure that you are treated in a fair and respectful manner. Contact the university's Research Compliance Office (704) 687-1871 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 Principal Investigator, Christine Reed Davis (704-687-0342, crdavis@uncc.edu) or Faculty Advisor, Dr. Jae Hoon Lim (704-687-8864, jhlim@uncc.edu).

Participant Consent

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, email address (PRINT)

DATE

Participant Signature

Investigator Signature

DATE

APPENDIX G: FACULTY-STAFF INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Warm up

Before I ask about your experiences in the Green Zone training, I am very interested in getting to know a little bit about you:

- What is your current position at the university?
 - What are the general duties of your position?
 - How long have you been at UNC Charlotte?
- What is your professional background?
 - Tell me about any other positions you have had at UNC Charlotte.
 - Tell me about any other positions you have had outside of UNC Charlotte.
- What drew you to your current role at UNC Charlotte?
- How would you describe your affiliation with or connection to the military?
 - Any specific branch?
 - If served, for how long?

Interactions with student veterans

I am interested in hearing about your interactions with student veterans:

- Tell me about any regular interaction(s) that you have with student veterans.
 - How are the interaction(s) related to your current position?
 - Tell me about a few student veterans you have interacted with in the past.
 - What has been your overall experience with student veterans?
- Share any training about student veterans you have had before participating in Green Zone training at UNC Charlotte.
 - Where was the training?
 - Describe who conducted the training.
 - What was the general content of the training?

In-session training experience

I'd like to learn about your experience in the UNC Charlotte Green Zone training program:

- How did you hear about Green Zone training?
- What motivated you to participate in the training?
 - Personal motivations
 - Professional motivations
- Describe any supervisory or departmental approval or support you received in order to attend the training.
- What knowledge or information about student veterans did you bring into the training?
- What were your expectations of the training?
 - How were those expectations met?
 - How were those expectations not met?
- Describe what you learned during the training

- Tell me about what part(s) of training stand out as the most significant or memorable.

Post-training experience

I am interested in hearing about your experience since the Green Zone training:

- In the time since the training, what is your reflection of the information you received through training?
 - How would you describe your knowledge about student veterans before the training?
 - How would you describe your knowledge after the training?
- How has the training impacted your understanding of student veterans?
 - Describe any assumptions you had about student veterans before the training.
 - How did the training impact those assumptions?
- Tell me about any interaction(s) you have had with student veterans since the Green Zone training.
 - How has your interaction(s) changed?
 - What are the specific changes you have noticed in the interaction(s)?
 - What are the points of learning from Green Zone that have impacted the change in interaction?
- Describe how you plan to apply the information you learned through Green Zone training in the future.
- Is there anything you would like to add?

APPENDIX H: GREEN ZONE FACILITATOR INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Warm up

Before I ask about your experiences in facilitating Green Zone training, I am very interested in getting to know a little bit about you:

- What is your current position at the university?
 - What are the general duties of your position?
 - How long have you been at UNC Charlotte?
- What is your professional background?
 - Tell me about any other positions you have had at UNC Charlotte.
 - Tell me about any other positions you have had outside of UNC Charlotte.
- What drew you to your current role at UNC Charlotte?
- How would you describe your affiliation with or connection to the military?
 - Any specific branch?
 - If served, for how long?

Interactions with student veterans

I am interested in hearing about your interactions with student veterans:

- Tell me about regular interaction(s) that you have with student veterans.
 - How are the interaction(s) related to your current position?
 - Tell me about a few student veterans you have interacted with in the past.
 - What has been your overall experience with student veterans?
- Share any training about student veterans you have had before facilitating the Green Zone training at UNC Charlotte.
 - Where was the training?
 - Describe who conducted the training.
 - What was the general content of the training?

Green Zone facilitation

I would like to learn about your facilitation of Green Zone training at UNC Charlotte:

- Tell me why Green Zone training is offered to faculty and staff.
 - How does the training support student veterans?
- Describe who created the training program for UNC Charlotte.
- What was your motivation to facilitate Green Zone training?
- Tell me about how the training is structured and presented to participants.
 - What is the teaching format of the training?
 - How do participants interact with you as the facilitator?
 - How do participants interact with each other during the training?
- What are the intended learning outcomes for participants of the training?
 - How do you expect Green Zone training to impact faculty and staff understanding of student veterans and their transition to the university?

Post-facilitation experience

I am interested in hearing about your experience since the Green Zone training:

- Describe any feedback you have heard from participants since the training.
- How has the training impacted your own understanding of student veteran transition to the university?
 - Describe any assumptions you had about student veteran transition before the training.
 - How did the training impact those assumptions?
- Tell me about interaction(s) you have had with student veterans since facilitating the UNC Charlotte Green Zone training.
 - How has your interaction(s) changed?
 - What are the specific changes you have noticed in the interaction(s)?
 - What are the points of learning from Green Zone that have impacted the change in interaction?
- In the time since the training, what is your reflection of the facilitation experience?
 - What were things you expected?
 - What were things you did not expect?
- Tell me about any change(s) planned for future training sessions.
 - What has brought about the change(s)?
 - How will change(s) be implemented?
- Is there anything you would like to add?