

Connecting the Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC) Program and the Campus
Environment at a SOC Program Institution: A Mixed Methods Study with a Transformative
Design

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Dedicated to Charleen, Jessica, and Brian –
best friends a husband and father could ever have.

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Abstract

A theoretical perspective was used to suggest the Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC) program and a welcoming campus environment for student veterans are connected. The *process, person, context, time/timing (PPCT)* model of human ecology theory was used to explore the theoretical perspective through a student veteran lens. The researcher developed a questionnaire and incorporated survey research in a concurrent transformative mixed methods design to collect both quantitative and qualitative data from student veterans at a typical SOC program institution. The site selected for this study was a public land grant research institution where there was a sizable population of student veterans and where SOC program provisions were predetermined to meet or exceed SOC program standards of service to student veterans. Evidence drawn from the separate analysis of quantitative data and qualitative data was integrated, analyzed for convergence, and then compared for consistency with a theoretical perspective. This study offered a convergence of evidence to suggest there is a lack of SOC program awareness among student veterans. However, the study also offered evidence to suggest student veterans relate SOC program provisions to a welcoming campus environment even if they don't recognize the provisions to be part of institutional efforts to operationalize SOC program principles and criteria. Finally, findings suggest student veterans relate three institutional conditions to a welcoming campus environment: having staff members who are both supportive of veterans and conscious of veterans' issues in higher education; having SOC program related information available for student veterans; and, having counselors, advisors, faculty, and administrators who are sensitive to veteran perspectives of veterans' issues in higher education.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction	1
Background/Context	1
Statement of the Problem.....	4
Purpose of the Study	4
Research Questions	4
Theoretical Framework.....	5
Significance of the Study	9
Terminology.....	9
Student veteran.....	9
Mattering.....	10
Veteran identity centrality.....	10
Positive regard for veteran identity.....	10
Summary of Chapter One	11
Organization of This Dissertation.....	11
Chapter 2 Literature Review.....	12
Introduction.....	12
Reciprocal Interactions in the Process of Acculturation to Campus.....	14
Integration and acculturative stress.....	15
Indicators related to integration and acculturative stress.....	16
Reciprocal Interactions in the Context of a SOC Program Institution.....	19
A supportive ecology for student veterans.....	19
The need for SOC program principles and criteria.....	21
The Time and Timing of Reciprocal Interactions in the Post-9/11 Era.....	22
Student veterans and the Post-9/11 era.....	24
Timing in the life cycle of a military career.....	29
Summary of Chapter Two.....	31
Chapter 3 Methods and Procedures	33
Introduction.....	33
Research Design.....	34
Research Method	36
Site and Population	37
Sources of Data	41
Variables	43
Opinions and experiences associated with SOC program provisions.....	43
Ratings and descriptions of a welcoming campus environment.....	44
Student veteran mattering to others on campus.....	45
Attitudes and behaviors on campus related to student veteran status.....	46
Demographics.....	47
Other information.....	48
Procedures.....	48
Data collection.....	48
Data analysis.....	49

Validity and Trustworthiness.....	52
Limitations and Delimitations of the Study.....	53
Summary of Chapter Three.....	54
Chapter 4 Findings.....	55
Introduction.....	55
Demographic Data	57
Findings.....	62
RQ1.....	62
RQ2.....	66
RQ3.....	72
RQ4.....	92
Summary of Chapter Four	95
Chapter 5 Summary, Discussion and Conclusions	97
Introduction.....	97
Summary of the Findings.....	98
Discussion.....	101
The SOC program and campus environment connection.	101
The SOC program and acculturation to campus connection.	102
Cultural complexities and a transformative paradigm.	103
The strength of mixed methods.....	105
Limitations and Delimitations.....	108
Recommendations.....	110
Future Research	114
Conclusions.....	116
References.....	117
Appendices.....	131
Appendix A – SOC Student Veteran Survey at UTK Questionnaire	132
Appendix B – SOC Survey Invitation Email.....	143
Appendix C – SOC Survey Reminder Invitation Email	144
Appendix D – SOC Survey Closing Invitation Email	145
Appendix E – SOC Campus Consent Statement	146
Appendix F – Codebook: SOC Student Veteran Survey Item Numbers and Data Labels	149
Vita.....	153

List of Tables

Table 1.1. The <i>PPCT</i> model elements and interests related to a theoretical connection between the SOC program and a welcoming campus environment for student veterans	8
Table 3.1. Enrollment data for military affiliated students at UTK.....	39
Table 3.2. Ethnicity for student veterans at UTK, spring 2017	41
Table 4.1. Self-identified race/ethnicity of study participants.....	61
Table 4.2. Data labels and descriptive data for responses to SOC program items and the campus environment item ($N = 45$).....	63
Table 4.3. Data analysis for Spearman's rho (ρ) related to opinions of SOC program provisions and welcoming campus environment ratings.....	64
Table 4.4. Data analysis for Spearman's rho (ρ) related to aggregated measures of SOC program opinions and welcoming campus environment ratings.....	65
Table 4.5. Joint display of SOC program related evidence	73
Table 4.6. Recalculated descriptive data ($n = 32$).....	76
Table 4.7. Recalculated data analysis for Spearman's rho (ρ) related to SOC program opinions and welcoming campus environment ratings ($n = 32$).....	78
Table 4.8. Recalculated data analysis for Spearman's rho (ρ) related to aggregated measures of SOC program related opinions and welcoming campus environment ratings ($n = 32$).....	78
Table 4.9. Theme-by-statistic data analysis for Spearman's rho (ρ) related to SOCAgg, WelcRate, MattAgg, VICSAgg, and PRVISAgg ($n = 32$)	80
Table 4.10. Joint display of data for EUA1 and EUA2 with comparable UA data	82
Table 4.11. Data analysis of Mann-Whitney U Test Statistics ^a for differences	84
Table 4.12. Data analysis of crosstabulation with EUA1 and EUA2 coded for high and low SOCAgg values, controlling for mattering to others on campus	85
Table 4.13. Qualitative data for conditions related to welcoming SOC program experiences.....	87
Table 4.14. Qualitative data related to mattering to others on campus from responses to SOC program items	89
Table 4.15. Qualitative data related to mattering to others on campus from responses to welcoming campus environment item	90
Table 5.1. Conditions for welcoming SOC program experiences related to a welcoming campus environment for student veterans.....	107

List of Figures

Figure 1.1. Ecology for Reciprocal Interactions Between a Student Veteran and a SOC Program Institution	6
Figure 3.1. Procedural Diagram for the Convergent Mixed Methods with a Transformative Design Study of the Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges Program.....	35
Figure 3.2. Age Frequency for Student Veterans at UTK, Spring 2017.....	40
Figure 4.1. Numbers of Semesters Study Participants Attended Classes at UTK.....	59
Figure 4.2. Number of Study Participants by Age in Years	60

The pursuit of what is right – intellectually and ethically – may pit us against the power of popularity and the inertia of the status quo.

E. Grady Bogue and Kimberly Bingham Hall

Chapter 1

Introduction

Background/Context

The Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC) program was formally established in 1972 as a joint effort between the United States Department of Defense (DOD) and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) (DOD, 2014; *SOC Guide, Vol. 1*, 2013 – 2015). The SOC program has helped student veterans achieve their goals for post-secondary education; helped higher education administrators provide support for student veteran success; and, helped the DOD recruit, train, and retain the human capital needed to protect our social, political, and economic interests around the world. Roughly 1,900 colleges and universities (almost half of the institutions of higher learning in our nation) have formally committed support for the guiding principles and criteria of the SOC program.

The SOC program has three principles and four criteria operationalized at participating institutions. The three operating principles reflect DOD and AASCU agreement that (a) service members and veterans should have access to postsecondary education opportunities that are generally available to other citizens; (b) education opportunities available to student veterans should be of high quality; and, (c) policies and procedures should be administered with a measure of flexibility to accommodate the unique needs and circumstances of students who have

served or are currently serving in the military. The four SOC program criteria stem from the principle of flexibility and reflect DOD and AASCU agreement that, in order to help student veterans achieve their goals for post-secondary education, flexibility is needed in administering institutional policies and procedures related to (a) the transfer of previously earned college credits; (b) delays and interruptions in the educational process caused by military service; (c) credit for learning acquired through specialized military training and occupational experience; and (d) credit for learning in extra-institutional and non-instructional settings. As recently as 2014, only SOC program institutions were included in the list of “Best Colleges for Veterans” by *U. S. News & World Report* (Best Colleges for Veterans, 2014; Best Colleges for Veterans Methodology, 2014).

An official statement of support for SOC program principles and criteria indicates the intent to be a “veteran-friendly” institution. The term “veteran-friendly” evolved in the higher education community as a way to describe institutional “efforts intended to provide a welcoming, or accommodating, environment on campus” (Vacchi & Berger, 2014, p. 125). By inference, we could assume that student veterans attending a SOC program institution might endorse the campus environment as welcoming and that they might also be able to describe welcoming experiences that could help administrators understand how the SOC program is connected to a welcoming campus environment for student veterans.

Given the emphasis on institutional efforts to provide welcoming campus environments for student veterans (Ackerman & DiRamio, 2009; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Hamrick, Rumann, & Associates, 2013; McBain, 2008; McBain, Kim, Cook, & Snead, 2012; Moon & Schma, 2011; Osborne, 2014b; O’Herrin, 2011; Vacchi, 2014; Zinger & Cohen, 2010), I recalled a personal

experience that I had with an administrator at a SOC program institution many years ago. The institution was a large public research institution and had an ongoing effort to enroll service members stationed at nearby military installations. I enrolled and completed course credits equal to almost two years of full time studies while I completed my initial military service obligation. I did not intend to reenlist. Instead, I wanted to complete an undergraduate degree and pursue my civilian career aspirations as soon as possible. Having earned a competitive grade point average, I decided to apply for a scholarship that, if awarded, could help me continue my studies in a full time status at the institution. I was very surprised when the administrator of the scholarship program refused to accept my application. The administrator explained to me that veterans “did not need a scholarship” because we were eligible for military education benefits. It seemed odd that serving in the military assured service members and veterans the privilege of enrolling as students at the institution, yet their veteran status was used to exclude them from the opportunity to apply for a scholarship.

In hindsight, there may have been a fair and logical reason for the administrator to refuse to accept applications submitted by student veterans. However, at that point in time, I recall how the experience led me to believe the streamlined enrollment process for service members and veterans might have been disingenuous. It seemed as though student veterans were not valued the same as other students at the institution. Perhaps my experience was not a typical student veteran experience at SOC program institutions; however, my reflection on the experience caused me to ponder the question at the center of this study. Is there a connection between the SOC program and a welcoming campus environment for student veterans at a SOC program institution?

Statement of the Problem

Although an official statement of support for SOC program principles and criteria is a hallmark of institutional efforts to welcome student veterans, without evidence from a student veteran perspective, policy makers and administrators may only assume there is a connection between a SOC program and a welcoming campus environment for student veterans. The assumption represents an institutional problem that Bazerman and Tenbrunsel (2011) called bounded awareness, the gap between reality of an institution as seen from an administrator's point of view and reality of the institution as seen from an alternate point of view.

Purpose of the Study

This study explored a theoretical connection between the SOC program and the campus environment through a student veteran lens. A concurrent transformative approach in a mixed methods research design (Creswell, 2009, 2015; Mertens, 2007) facilitated the collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data and also the integration of findings to offer a better understanding of the student veteran campus experience at a typical SOC program institution.

Research Questions

Four research questions (RQ) were addressed in this study.

RQ1 – Does the analysis of quantitative evidence indicate student veterans relate SOC program provisions to a welcoming campus environment?

RQ2 – Does the analysis of qualitative evidence suggest student veterans associate SOC program provisions with a welcoming campus environment?

RQ3 – To what extent does evidence from two different types of data support a theoretical perspective that suggests there is a connection between SOC program provisions and a welcoming campus environment for student veterans?

RQ4 – Does the evidence of this study suggest inequalities for any identifiable subgroup(s) of the student veteran population?

Theoretical Framework

Human ecology theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Bronfenbrenner, 1995; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) was used as a framework for this study. Researchers have applied human ecology theory to the student experience in a higher education environment (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010; Renn & Arnold, 2003). Vacchi and Berger (2014) applied human ecology theory specifically to the student veteran experience. The logic of human ecology theory suggests the SOC program transcends layers, or concentric rings, of environmental conditions that envelope the reciprocal interactions between student veterans and various elements of the institutional environment. Furthermore, the logic of human ecology theory suggests the nature of reciprocal interactions involving SOC program principles and criteria should be reflected somehow in student veteran campus experiences at a SOC program institution. If so, student veteran opinions and experiences related to SOC program provisions at a SOC program institution should help understand the connection between the SOC program and a welcoming campus environment for student veterans.

Figure 1.1 illustrates the general concept of reciprocal interactions involving SOC program provisions wrapped in concentric rings of human ecology. For this study, the concept of

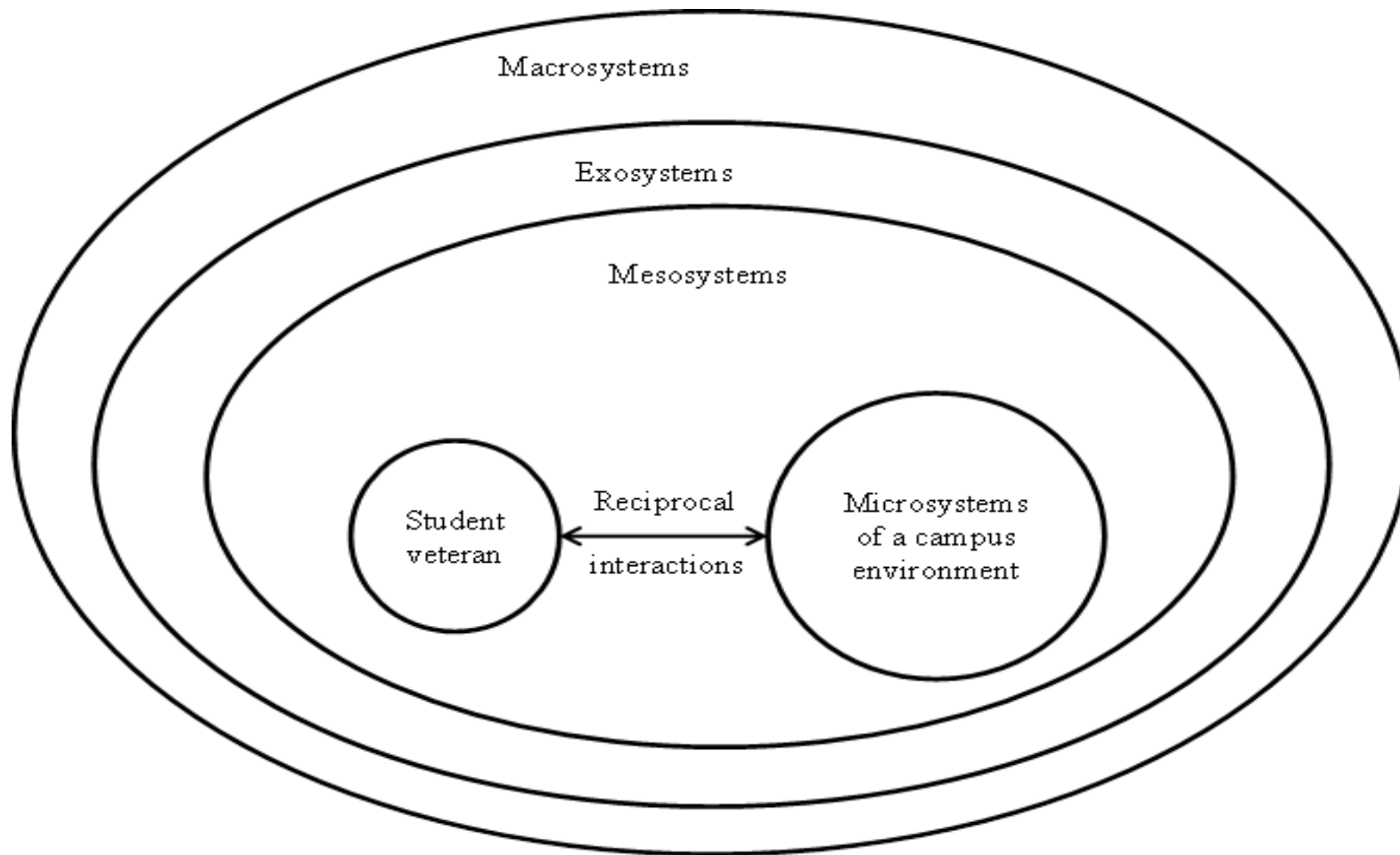


Figure 1.1. Ecology for Reciprocal Interactions Between a Student Veteran and a SOC Program Institution

human ecology for the student veteran campus experience focused on the DOD and AASCU agreement regarding SOC program principals and criteria at the macrosystems level. Moving inward in the illustration, the exosystems level includes a variety of standards and best practices for serving student veterans (American Council on Education, n.d.; Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, n.d.; O'Herrin, 2011). Reciprocal interactions associated with the SOC program occur at the mesosystems level and involve institutional characteristics of the campus environment and individual characteristics of student veterans at the institution.

SOC program principles and criteria are operationalized through “persons, objects, and symbols” (Bronfenbrenner, 1995, p. 634) at the microsystems level. Persons involved in administering SOC program provisions include administrators, advisors, counselors, faculty members, and support staff at the institution. An important object for a SOC program institution is dedicated space on campus where student veterans can find information about sources of support tailored to their needs, study, meet and relax with other student veterans (Arminio, Grabosky, & Lang, 2015; Hamrick, Rumann, & Associates, 2013; Kelley, Smith, & Fox, 2013). The formal commitment to support SOC program principles and criteria is a symbol of institutional intent to provide a supportive environment for student veterans.

Reciprocal interactions involving student veterans and SOC program provisions were the focal point for this study. The *PPCT* model of human ecology theory provides a structured framework for the study of reciprocal interactions. The *PPCT* model of human ecology theory includes characteristics of a human growth and development *process*, characteristics of the *person(s)* involved in the process, the *context* in which the process occurs, the *time* of the process within the complex fabric of society at large, and also the *timing* of the process within the

lifespan of the person at the center of the process. The *PPCT* model was used to guide the review of literature associated with the student veteran campus experience. Table 1.1 shows how specific interests of this study were associated with each element of the *PPCT* model.

Acculturation is a human growth and development process that occurs “when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture pattern of either or both groups” (Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits as cited in Berry, 1997, p. 7). As military culture is fundamentally different from the culture of higher education, the student veteran campus experience involves the process of acculturation (Arminio, Grabosky, & Lang, 2015; Bichrest, 2013; Hamrick, Rumann, & Associates, 2013; Petree, 2015).

For this study, the nature of reciprocal interactions involving SOC program provisions were regarded as an important starting point for the process of acculturation. Essentially, the student veteran perception of a welcoming campus environment at a SOC program institution was expected to reflect the nature of reciprocal interactions involving SOC program principles

Table 1.1. The *PPCT* model elements and interests related to a theoretical connection between the SOC program and a welcoming campus environment for student veterans

Element	Interest
Process	Acculturation to campus
Person(s)	Student veterans
Context	A SOC program institution
Time/timing	Post-9/11 era and timing within the lifecycle of an individual's military career

and criteria. In theory, the student veteran perception of a welcoming campus environment is more likely if student veterans experience the support of SOC program provisions as a starting point for the process of acculturation at an institution.

Significance of the Study

A connection between the SOC program and the campus environment at a SOC program institution has not been explored from a student veteran perspective. Thus, for more than four decades, policy makers and administrators have assumed the SOC program is an environmental condition related to a favorable experience for student veterans. A student veteran perspective of the connection between SOC program provisions and the campus environment confirms some longstanding assumptions and also illuminates opportunities for program improvements. It may also encourage new commitments of support for the SOC program at institutions where administrators have not yet focused institutional resources on providing a welcoming environment for student veterans.

Terminology

Student veteran. Vacchi (2014) defined a student veteran as “a student who is a current or former member of the Active Duty Military, the National Guard, or Reserves regardless of deployment status, combat experience or legal status as a veteran” (p. 17). For the purpose of this study, maximum inclusion was intended. To be clear, for this study, the definition of student included any person who was enrolled on a full time or part time basis, and the definition of veteran included any person who was currently serving or had ever served, for any length of time, as a member of any Active Duty, National Guard, or Reserve unit of the U. S. Military.

Mattering. Mattering is a psychosocial construct recognized as a basic human need and, therefore, a fundamental motivation for human attitudes and behaviors (Elliott, 2009; Rosenberg & McCullough, 1979; Schlossberg, 1989; Strayhorn, 2012). Schlossberg (1989) described mattering as “the feeling that others depend on us, are interested in us, are concerned with our fate, or experience us as an ego-extension” (p. 6) and emphasized the personal aspect of mattering as a “belief, right or wrong, that [one] matters to someone else” (p. 9). In this study, the construct of mattering was predicted to be a universal human characteristic that would be related to reciprocal interactions involving SOC program provisions at an institution. Importance and significance are commonly accepted synonyms for mattering, and marginality is a commonly accepted antonym. Marginality was cited in literature as the antithesis of acculturation and, in most cases, the least favorable outcome of the acculturation process (Berry, 1997, 1998, 2005, 2006; Rudmin, 2003, 2009).

Veteran identity centrality. Di Leone et al. (2015) described veteran identity centrality as the importance that veterans place on their veteran identity. In their research, they found veteran identity centrality to be related to attitudes and behaviors of veterans in the context of their experiences with the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). In this study, veteran identity centrality was predicted to be a cultural characteristic of student veterans that would be related to reciprocal interactions at SOC program institutions.

Positive regard for veteran identity. Di Leone et al. (2015) described positive regard for veteran identity as the self-esteem derived from veteran identity. In their research, they found positive regard for veteran identity to also be related to veteran attitudes and behaviors toward the VHA, yet independent of veteran identity centrality. To explain, they cited studies that

suggested “one may feel that a stigmatized identity is particularly central to one’s identity and simultaneously hold that identity in poor regard” (p. 2). They also cited studies that suggested “experiences such as discrimination increase the centrality of an identity, but decrease esteem related to that identity under certain circumstances” (p. 2). Positive regard for veteran identity was predicted to be a cultural characteristic of student veterans that would be related to reciprocal interactions associated with SOC program provisions at the institution.

Summary of Chapter One

This chapter described the problem of bounded awareness associated with the SOC program. Human ecology theory was used to frame a theoretical perspective of the student veteran campus experience at a SOC program institution, and the *PPCT* model of human ecology theory was discussed as a framework for interests associated with this study. The terminology of reciprocal interactions, acculturation, student veteran, mattering, veteran identity centrality, and positive regard for veteran identity was introduced.

Organization of This Dissertation

A review of literature related to the interests of this study is presented in Chapter 2. The methodology used in the study is described in Chapter 3. Findings from the research are presented in Chapter 4 and then discussed in Chapter 5.

A soldier is a soldier is a soldier!?

Gerhard Kümme

Chapter 2**Literature Review****Introduction**

Since 1972, the Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC) program has been a hallmark of institutions where efforts are made to provide a supportive environment for student veterans; however, with no empirical evidence to connect the SOC program to the student veteran campus experience, administrators and policy makers have only been able to assume SOC program provisions help provide a welcoming campus environment for student veterans. Human ecology theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Bronfenbrenner, 1995; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) offers a theoretical perspective that can be used to examine the reality of this assumption. The theory has been adapted as a framework for understanding the student experience in higher education (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010; Renn & Arnold, 2003), and Vacchi and Berger (2014) adapted the theory to the student veteran experience.

Human ecology theory posits that human growth and development is an outcome of proximal processes involving reciprocal interactions between a developing human organism and environmental elements over time. Proximal processes were noted “to be the most potent force influencing the developmental outcome” of a person’s experience within the context of a specific environment, and the power of the process is believed to “vary systematically as a function of the

environmental context . . . and characteristics of the person” at the center of the developmental process (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 800).

The reciprocal interactions of a proximal process rarely take place in either an ideal environment or a static environment. Likewise, human organisms rarely display ideal characteristics consistently across time and across all situations. Human ecology theory accounts for this confluence of ever-changing complexities and generally infers that a human growth and development process occurring within a supportive environment is more likely to have a favorable outcome than one occurring within an unsupportive environment (Evans et al., 2010, pp. 160-172).

The *process, person, context, and time/timing (PPCT)* model of human ecology theory was used as a guide to review literature that seemed to be related to reciprocal interactions involving student veterans and SOC program provisions at a SOC program institution. Acculturation to campus was the proximal *process* of interest; student veterans were the *persons* of interest; and a SOC program institution was the *context* of interest. The Post-9/11 era and the chronology of the campus experience within the lifecycle of a student veteran’s military career were the *time* and *timing* of interest. Again, reciprocal interactions involving SOC program provisions were the focal point for the study. This chapter provides a discussion of literature related to reciprocal interactions in the process of acculturation to campus, reciprocal interactions in the context of a SOC program institution, and the time and timing of reciprocal interactions in the Post-9/11 era.

Reciprocal Interactions in the Process of Acculturation to Campus

Acculturation is a proximal process that occurs “when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture pattern of either or both groups” (Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits as cited in Berry, 1997, p. 7). Researchers in the field of cross cultural psychology have explained the dynamics involved in the process of acculturation (Berry, 1997, 1998, 2005; Rudmin, 2003, 2009). In general, a dominant group is identified as the culture group with a balance of power in a given environment, and a non-dominant culture group is typically referred to as the acculturating group because they are more likely to change their cultural patterns out of motivation to gain acceptance from others in the environment.

The image of a student veteran in a college or university campus environment reflects the concept of “continuous first-hand contact” between members of two different culture groups, one dominant and the other acculturating (Arminio, Grabosky, & Lang, 2015; Bichrest, 2013; Hamrick, Rumann, & Associates, 2013; Petree, 2015). Military culture is fundamentally different from the culture of academia (Corley, 2006; Downs & Murtazashvili, 2012; Neiberg, 2000; Osborne, 2013; Owens, 1992). In military culture, service members are conditioned to subordinate their personal opinions, interests, emotions, comfort and safety in order to defend personal freedom for others. In academic culture, students are encouraged to practice self-reflection, self-expression, and self-awareness toward a purpose of promoting the discovery and development of their personal interests, talents, and aspirations (Evans et al., 2010; Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Pascarella & Terinzini, 2005). This very basic comparison of the two cultures highlights how adapting to the norms of academic culture can be an unusual and perhaps disconcerting

experience for a veteran. Military cultural identity has been found to “take precedence over other common identities such as race, gender, sexual orientation, political party, or socioeconomic status” (Meyer, Writer, & Brim, 2016, p. 5).

In the context of a given environment, members of different culture groups consciously or subconsciously choose one of four strategies for their attitudes and behaviors in the process of acculturation – integration, assimilation, separation, or marginalization (Berry, 1997, pp. 9-12). According to Berry (1997), two underlying factors influence a person’s choice from among the four acculturation strategies. The factors are (a) a person’s motivation to either maintain or shed their cultural identity and (b) a person’s motivation to either “become involved in other cultural groups, or remain primarily among themselves” (p. 9). Ideally, members of each culture group would find a way to adjust their cultural patterns so that others would not feel like they had to shed their cultural identity in order to have their needs met.

Integration and acculturative stress. Berry (1997) emphasized that the dominant culture group has a responsibility to initiate accommodating attitudes and behaviors toward the acculturating group because any strategy other than integration can negatively affect the viability of integration as an option for members of an acculturating group (pp. 17 – 21). Members of an acculturating group may experience “acculturative stress” if they are unwilling to shed their cultural identity in order to assimilate and gain acceptance from members of the dominant culture group (Berry, 1997, p. 13).

While separation strategy may seem like an opportunity to avoid shedding their cultural identity, this strategy often relegates members of the acculturating group to an inferior status within the environment. Consider the situation faced by someone who is a member of a small

acculturating group with its members widely dispersed within the environment of a different culture group. If they are physically isolated from members of their own culture group and not accepted by members of the dominant culture group, they may experience a level of “acculturative stress” that reflects a state of marginalization. Berry (1998) defined marginalization as the experience of having “little possibility or interest in cultural maintenance (often for reasons of enforced cultural loss through attempts at assimilation), and little interest in having relations with others (often for reasons of exclusion or discrimination)” (p. 14).

A relatively small population of acculturating group members is susceptible to acculturative stress in a college campus environment. In one study of the acculturation to campus experience of a non-dominant culture group in a college environment, researchers found that “the more tenaciously [members of the acculturating group] held on to their ethnic identity, the greater the stress they reported” (Mena, Padilla, & Maldonado, 1987, p. 221). The researchers also found their acculturative stress was related to “their feelings of not belonging” (p. 221).

Indicators related to integration and acculturative stress. A sense of belonging is recognized in theory and research as “a powerful, fundamental, and extremely pervasive motivation” for behavior in human interactions that are relatively free from conflict and negativity (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 497 – 500). A sense of belonging enables a person to live a life of self-acceptance while being one’s self around others. Feelings of not belonging can lead to loneliness, sadness, stress, anxiety, physical as well as mental illness, and continual efforts to gain acceptance through relationships with others.

Strayhorn (2012) described sense of belonging as a person’s “subjective evaluation of the level of integration in a particular context” (p. 8), and in his review of research related to

students in the context of a college campus environment, he described sense of belonging as “students’ perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group (e.g., campus community) or others on campus (e.g., faculty, peers)” (p. 17). Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, and Salomone (2002–2003) drew from the fields of physical and mental health to describe college students’ sense of belonging as a representation of “perceptions on the part of the student of shared values and support in the college environment” and a reflection of “integration into the college system” (p. 228).

Student veterans have often been described as an isolated, alienated, and marginalized subpopulation in higher education (Barry et al., 2014; Bonar & Domenici, 2011; Durdella & Kim, 2012; Elliott, Gonzalez, & Larsen, 2011; Hassan et al, 2010; Lighthall, 2012; Osborne, 2014a, 2014b). In some cases, student veterans have told in their own words how they have experienced alienation and marginalization in higher education campus environments (Barry et al., 2014; DiRamio et al., 2008; Elliott et al., 2011; Gonzalez & Elliott, 2013; Grimes et al., 2012; Hamrick et al., 2013; Hassan, Jackson, Lindsay, McCabe, & Sanders, 2010; Moon & Schma, 2011). This image of student veterans as a marginalized group suggests the need for military cultural competency to promote the successful integration of student veterans on college campuses (Meyer, Writer, & Brim, 2016).

Clearly, for some reason(s), some student veterans have experienced acculturative stress in acculturating to campus, and it presents a dilemma in assessing the relationship between their experience and the campus environment. Although a sense of belonging is often used as an indicator of integration (Hoffman et al., 2002-2003; Strayhorn, 2012), it would be an

unreasonably high expectation in some cases. Some student veterans may exhibit attitudes and behaviors consistent with separation strategy in the process of acculturation to campus, and separation strategy is incongruent with institutional strategies aimed at integrating student veterans to the campus environment.

A valid measure is needed to help gauge the success of institutional efforts aimed at the integration of student veterans, and a review of literature seemed to indicate mattering could serve that purpose. Mattering is a measureable construct, and researchers have found it responds to changes in environmental conditions and also responds to changes in a person's characteristics over time (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1979; Schlossberg, 1989). Strayhorn (2012) concluded mattering is an essential element of a sense of belonging. He wrote that "sense of belonging is related to, and seemingly a consequence of, mattering" (pp. 122-123). Essentially, Strayhorn suggested that mattering is a closely related, yet separate construct from belonging.

Researchers have shown that mattering has meaning and value to students in higher education (Dixon & Robinson Kurpius, 2008; Gibson & Myers, 2006; Myers & Bechtel, 2004; Strayhorn, 2012; Tovar, Simon, & Lee, 2009). In research that involved college students between the ages of 18 and 23, Dixon and Robinson Kurpius (2008) found mattering to be negatively correlated with depression. Myers and Bechtel (2004) found mattering to have a statistically significant positive correlation with wellness and a statistically significant negative correlation with stress among cadets at West Point. Gibson and Myers (2006) found mattering to have a statistically significant positive correlation with wellness among cadets at The Citadel. In research that involved an ethnically diverse sample of college students ($n = 1,561$), Tovar, Simon, and Lee (2009) found mattering to be correlated with "positive student experiences on

campus with the learning environment, with institutional agents such as instructors and counselors, and with student-centered programs, policies, and procedures” (p. 174).

The review of literature related to reciprocal interactions in the process of acculturation to campus showed that student veterans are an acculturating group in higher education and that acculturative stress is related to sense of belonging and strength of cultural identity. The review of literature also showed that cultural identity and mattering may be useful in understanding the acculturation to campus process from a student veteran perspective. The next section will address literature related to reciprocal interactions in the context of a SOC program institution.

Reciprocal Interactions in the Context of a SOC Program Institution

Human ecology theory suggests the student-institution relationship is inextricably and complexly related to the macro-, exo-, and mesosystems of the environment (Evans et al., 2010, p. 165). Kümmel (2006) studied the civil-military gap in free societies and found attitudes and behaviors toward the military to fit three general characterizations – indifference, ambivalence, and supportiveness. The civil-military gap in American society seems to have narrowed at times but never closed (Bacevich, 2013; Laich, 2013). At present, public opinion is generally supportive of the military and military veterans. The history of higher education in the United States reflects similar trends (Alexander & Thelin, 2013; Downs & Murtazashvili, 2012; Neiberg, 2000).

A supportive ecology for student veterans. At the macrosystems level, a supportive public opinion was reflected in Executive Order (13607) issued by President Obama in 2012. The order called for “a culture of trust and connectedness to promote wellbeing and success for veterans” in higher education. The emphasis on a supportive environment was shared by the

Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) in Higher Education (n.d.) at the exosystems level. CAS issued Guidelines for Veterans and Military Programs and Services (VMPS) to “promote campus environments that provide meaningful opportunities for student learning, development, and integration” of student veterans (p. 6). Pronouncements similar to these reflect a belief that policies and practices can help provide a supportive environment for student veterans at the campus level.

An institutional commitment to support SOC program principles and criteria is tangible evidence of intent to provide a supportive environment for student veterans through policies and practices at the meso- and microsystems levels. As of 2014, more than 1,900 institutions of higher learning maintained a formal commitment to provide clear, truthful and comprehensive communications to student veterans during the recruitment and admissions process; maintain high-quality standards for accreditation of courses, programs, and services; and, provide flexibility for student veterans, especially when administering policies and programs related to transfer credits, residency status, credit for military training and experience, and credit for extra-institutional learning (Servicemembers Opportunity College, 2013).

Although an institutional commitment to support SOC program principles and criteria suggests a supportive environment for student veterans, Kuh and Whitt (1988) noted that “institutional policies and practices are culture driven and culture bound” and “culture driven institutional policies and practices may denigrate the integrity and worth of certain groups” (p. 114). In other words, the reciprocal interactions between student veterans and institutional agents are likely to involve SOC program provisions at a SOC program institution; however, the reciprocal interactions are also likely involve a confluence of cultural differences.

Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) defined a human ecology experience as “the realm of feelings – anticipations, forebodings, hopes, doubts or personal beliefs” about oneself, others, and the activities in which they are engaged and noted that “the behavior of others toward the developing person” is an important part of the environmental influence on reciprocal interactions (p. 797). It is reasonable to assume that an institutional commitment to support SOC principals and criteria creates certain expectations among student veterans. Ultimately, how student veterans feel about the environment at a SOC program institution may hinge on the ability of institutional agents to operationalize meaningful standards and consistently adhere to those standards in reciprocal interactions with student veterans over time.

The need for SOC program principles and criteria. The student veteran population is essentially a subset of the nontraditional student population (Molina & Morse, 2015). Most student veterans must cope with one or any combination of multiple risk factors that threaten their success in higher education (e.g., delayed enrollment in college; part-time enrollment; financial independence; marriage; parenthood, especially as a single parent; and working full-time while attending college) (p. 15). However, the student veteran experience involves a unique set of complexities that stem from the nature of military service.

A collection of works by Hamrick et al. (2013) provided an excellent overview of a wide variety of issues associated with the student veteran experience. For example, on a recurring basis, a student veteran may have had to adjust or delay participating in higher education to accommodate alerts, deployments, new duty assignments, or career training and development requirements. Some of these events may have required them to transfer to a new institution of higher learning to accommodate a change of duty station. Consequently, the student veteran

experience can entail multiple transitions into and out of one or multiple postsecondary institutions, and each transition can either cause or exacerbate issues related to policies and practices that vary from one higher education institution to another and may even vary at one institution from one point in time to another. Resolving the issues typically involves primarily administrative decisions related to admission and readmission, course withdrawal, extensions to complete course work, residency status, transfer of credits, award of credits, payments and refunds, setbacks in academic progress due to differences in curricula and sequencing of courses, and differences in guidelines for matriculation and graduation. SOC program principles and criteria enable administrators to tailor a unique solution for student veterans facing these kinds of issues.

The review of literature related to reciprocal interactions in the context of a SOC program institution showed how the process of acculturation is involved in administering SOC program provisions. Human ecology theory, research in civil-military relations, and the history of higher education suggest the policies and practices at an institution can reflect an attitude of indifference, ambivalence, or supportiveness toward student veterans and the institutional commitment to support SOC program principles and criteria. The next section will address literature related to the Post-9/11 era and the chronology of the campus experience within the lifecycle of a student veteran's military career.

The Time and Timing of Reciprocal Interactions in the Post-9/11 Era

Congress established the Post-9/11 GI Bill by enacting the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 (Title 38 U.S.C., Chapter 33). Like the Post-WWII GI Bill did for veterans of that era, the Post-9/11 GI Bill provides education benefits on a level that

makes postsecondary education a viable pathway for veterans to transition from military service into civilian life (Ackerman & DiRamio, 2009; Department of Veteran Affairs, 2010; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Hamrick, Rumann & Associates, 2013; McBain, Kim, Cook & Snead, 2012; Molina & Morse, 2015; Rumann, Rivera, & Hernandez, 2011; O'Herrin, 2011; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010; Vacchi, 2012; Vacchi & Berger, 2014). The number of student veterans enrolled in higher education immediately increased after the Post-9/11 GI Bill legislation was enacted.

Researchers at The Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research anticipated the influx of student veterans and modified the National Survey of Student Engagement to enable respondents to self-identify their veteran status (NSSE, 2010a, 2010b). The modifications allowed researchers to disaggregate student veteran group responses from other student group responses. In a nationwide random sample, approximately 11,000 (3.4%) respondents self-identified their student veteran status (2010a, p. 17). The survey instrument included items for a composite index intended to measure students' perception of a supportive campus environment. The index included measures of the "extent to which students perceived the campus helped them succeed academically and socially, assisted them in coping with non-academic responsibilities, and promoted supportive relations among students and their peers, faculty members, and administrative personnel and offices" (2010b, p. 20). Results indicated student veterans, especially those in the senior year group, "perceived less support from their campus environment" and expressed less satisfaction with the educational experience at their institution than nonveteran students (2010a, p. 18). These findings led researchers to consider how little they knew about student veteran perspectives (2010a, p. 17).

At that time, much of what was known about student veterans was based on student veteran experiences of the WWII and Vietnam eras (Alexander & Thelin, 2013; Elder, 1986; Kelty et al, 2010; Kleykamp, 2006; Madaus, Miller, & Vance, 2009; Olson, 1973; Vacchi & Berger, 2014). By all accounts, whether they were on campus or off campus, student veterans in the WWII era experienced universal and comprehensive support after their military service. Numerically and culturally, they were the dominant group on many higher education campuses. By comparison, whether on campus or off campus, student veterans in the Vietnam era faced public opinions that were sharply divided over the meaning, purpose, and methods of the conflict. Animosities motivated many to conceal their veteran identity in order to avoid unwelcome attention on campus. Unfortunately, the Vietnam era is noted for negative stereotypes and social stigmas related to veteran identity and also an unfavorable higher education environment for veterans (Kelty et al., 2010, p. 194; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010, p. 433).

Student veterans and the Post-9/11 era. The student veteran experience was essentially ignored in higher education research between the Vietnam era and the Post-9/11 era (Bichrest, 2013). Efforts to understand the student veteran experience were renewed when Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits were introduced and stimulated an increase in student veteran enrollment numbers (Ackerman & DiRamio, 2009; Department of Veteran Affairs, 2010; Hamrick, Rumann & Associates, 2013; McBain et al, 2012; Moon & Schma, 2011; Rumann, Rivera, & Hernandez, 2011; O'Herrin, 2011; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010; Vacchi, 2012; Vacchi & Berger, 2014). Some college and university campuses experienced as much as a 50% increase in their student veteran population (Moon & Schma, 2011, p. 53). National survey results indicated the average campus

enrollment for student veterans rose from 357 to 823 between 2009 and 2012 (McBain et al, 2012, pp. 7-8).

Despite the increased enrollment of student veterans during the past decade, an enrollment number of roughly 1.1 million means that student veterans are slightly less than five percent of the general student population (Molina & Morse, 2015, p. 5), a percentage that is less than the African American student percentage of 13.8% and also less than the Hispanic or Latino student percentage of 13.1% (Knapp, Kelly-Reid, & Ginder, 2012, pp. 4-5). The percentage of student veterans is more comparable to the Asian student percentage of 5.4%, the nonresident alien percentage of 3.4%, and, as indicated by information available on the official Web site of the National Collegiate Athletic Association, the student athlete percentage of 2.5%.

McBain, Kim, Cook, and Snead (2012) conducted a national survey to determine what campus administrators considered to be the barriers to student veteran success in higher education. Responses were categorized under three general concerns: whether student veterans were prepared for the financial costs associated with higher education, whether student veterans were prepared for the academic rigors necessary to persist to graduation, and whether student veterans, as well as college campuses, were prepared for the acculturation of student veterans to campus (McBain et al., 2012).

Institutional support for student veterans became a focal point in the higher education community (Ackerman & DiRamio, 2009; Bonar & Domenici, 2011; DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008; Francis & Kraus, 2012; Gonzalez & Elliott, 2013; Green & Van Dusen, 2012; Hamrick, et al., 2013; Madaus, Miller, & Vance, 2009; McBain, 2008; McBain et al, 2012; Moon & Schma, 2011; Morse & Molina, 2016; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010; Vacchi, 2012;

Vacchi & Berger, 2014; Zinger & Cohen, 2010). Fortunately, the Post-9/11 GI Bill has proved to have a mitigating effect on financial barriers. Morse and Molina (2016) reported that, since 2009, \$53 billion were provided through the Post-9/11 GI Bill. The concern over student veteran readiness for the academic rigors of higher education have been addressed by several different initiatives designed to assess proficiencies, offer refresher courses and college orientation courses tailored to student veterans' needs, and provide tutoring and counseling services when needed (Morse & Molina, 2016). The results of a research project sponsored by the Student Veterans of America indicated the academic performance of student veterans was generally on par with their civilian counterparts (Cate, 2013, 2014). Despite favorable indicators regarding financial and academic barriers to success, concerns for student veteran acculturation to campus have continued (Bichrest, 2013; Bonar & Domenici, 2011; Kim & Cole, 2013; McBain et al, 2012; NSSE, 2010; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010; Rumann et al., 2011; Vacchi, 2012; Vacchi & Berger, 2014; Zinger & Cohen, 2010).

Some notable contradictions have emerged from research associated with the student veteran campus experience. Three studies help describe the contradictions and illuminate the need for further research. In one study, researchers suggested student veterans may share a common deficit characteristic described as an “inability to connect with peers and faculty on campus” (Barry, Whiteman, & Wadsworth, 2014, p. 30), a theme that reflects Schlossberg's discussion of marginality as “a personality type, or a way of life” (1989, pp. 7-8). In another study, researchers found student veterans intentionally opted out of the social environment on campus for pragmatic reasons (Kim & Cole, 2013), a theme that generally reflects the experience of non-traditional students in higher education (Graham & Donaldson, 1999). In a third study,

researchers found student veterans at the University of Indiana “often referenced accommodating interactions with faculty, positive classroom environments and pursuing clear academic goals as significant features of their experiences at the institution” (Grimes et al., 2011, p. 70). While researchers in the latter study offered no analysis to relate veteran-friendly campus initiatives at Indiana University to the student veterans’ campus experiences, the study may be re-considered in light of the fact that *U.S. News & World Report* ranked Indiana University seventh in a “Best Colleges for Veterans” (2013a, 2013b) category of national universities.

Revisiting the research conducted at Indiana University helps emphasize why additional research is needed to resolve contradictions in the literature. First, the findings seem to refute the hypothesis of a common deficit characteristic among the general population of student veterans. Second, as student veterans fit the definition of nontraditional students (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015; Molina & Morse, 2015; Patillo, 2011), findings from the study support Kasworm’s (1990) critique of using traditional theories of student growth and development to define success for nontraditional students in higher education. Finally, it is possible findings of the study were somehow related to the context of a veteran-friendly campus environment.

Several researchers have used Schlossberg’s adult transition theory to study the student veteran experience in the Post-9/11 era (DiRamio et al., 2008; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Hamrick, Rumann, & Associates, 2013; Livingston & Bauman, 2013; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). The theory emphasizes the importance of a supportive environment. It also accounts for challenges student veterans encounter as they “change relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012, p. 39) when they move between military

environments and higher education environments. Despite its utility in the study of the student veteran transition experience, adult transition theory has not helped researchers understand the complex issues associated with student veteran acculturation to campus. Griffin and Gilbert (2015) drew the following conclusion:

A lack of consistent interest in connecting socially suggests student veterans may not perceive transitions in a uniform way, and the unique perspectives held by veterans about their interests and expectations when it came to social integration, participation, and climate make it clear that there is no consistent panacea institutions can use to perfectly support all students in this community (p. 92).

Livingston and Bauman (2013) noted that “because the theory is applicable to adult populations in general, it may lack the specificity needed to encompass the unique nature of the student service members’ experience” (p. 60).

Clearly, traditional student theories and even adult transition theory have helped advance research related to the student veteran campus experience; however, they have not been useful in making sense of what seems like deficit characteristics associated with “an inability to connect with peers and faculty” (Barry, Whiteman, & Wadsworth, 2014, p.30) and “a lack of consistent interest in connecting socially” (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015, p. 92). While many qualitative studies have focused on the student veteran experience from a personal student veteran perspective, it seems as though there is a need for studies that include a collective account of specific environmental characteristics of a veteran-friendly campus environment and how those characteristics may or may not be related to the student veteran experience.

Timing in the life cycle of a military career. While student veterans share a common culture, there is a complex fabric of diversity within the student veteran population (Molina & Morse, 2015a; Vaccaro, 2015). Accounting for the timing of the student veteran acculturation to campus experience in the lifecycle of a military career may help administrators have a better understanding of student veteran cultural patterns.

The SOC program was developed to coincide with the Department of Defense (DOD) decisions in 1973 to abandon its conscription policy and to implement an All-Volunteer Force (AVF) policy to satisfy new requirements for human capital (Warner & Asch, 2001). At that time, research and development efforts were on the verge of introducing major advancements in defense systems technology, and with those advancements came an exponential increase in the need for recruits with a high aptitude and a personal motivation for military service. The major shift in technology and the corresponding shift in recruitment strategy, both of which are still factors, mean that most people who serve in the military may be college bound at some point in their lifetime (Asch, Kilburn, & Klerman, 1999).

Along with higher recruitment standards came more stringent promotion and retention standards. The Defense Officer Personnel Management Act of 1980 is one example of how changes were introduced in various stages over time. The higher standards required various levels of civilian education achievement in order for a service member to be competitive for retention and promotion opportunities in a military career. The new standards increased personal motivation among service members to pursue post-secondary education, and more generous education benefits made post-secondary education more affordable. The higher standards were introduced across all active, reserve, and National Guard components of the DOD. These

changes to the military personnel system comingled the timing of the student veteran acculturation to campus experience and the lifecycle of a military career.

A study sponsored by RAND's National Defense Research Institute identified and characterized five different patterns of how service members and veterans combine college and military service: the officer track, the college-enlisted track, the enlisted-college track, the enlisted-officer track, and the concurrent track (Asch, Kilburn, & Klerman, 1999). Both the officer track and the college-enlisted track involve attending college and then transitioning from civilian-academic culture to military culture. The enlisted-college track, the enlisted-officer track, and the concurrent track involve transitioning from civilian culture to military culture before attending college. Regardless of which path one follows, if they decide to extend their military career beyond their initial service obligation, in almost every case, they will experience the student veteran process of acculturation to campus, perhaps multiple times. Essentially, pursuing a college education may not always involve the intent to transition from a military career to a civilian career.

Certainly, some student veterans (especially the enlisted-college track) may have no intention to return to military service. They may even be motivated by the opportunity to transition from military service to a civilian career and exhibit attitudes and behaviors associated with an assimilation strategy. On the other hand, some student veterans (especially the enlisted-officer track and the concurrent track) will have full intentions of continuing or returning to their military career. They may be motivated to maintain, and perhaps even strengthen, their military cultural identity and exhibit attitudes and behaviors that reflect a separation strategy.

In some cases, the transition from military service to civilian life may be an involuntary event brought on by a service related injury or illness. The length of the present conflict and the smaller size of our military has increased the likelihood that student veterans have been exposed to combat, perhaps multiple times, during their military service. Exposure to combat has been linked to difficulties in readjusting to civilian life (Elliott, Gonzalez, & Larsen, 2011; Skopp et al., 2012). Also, the nature of modern warfare has increased the likelihood of post-traumatic stress (PTS), traumatic brain injury (TBI), and musculoskeletal injuries from exposure to combat (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015). Aside from acculturating to campus, a student veteran transition can, in some cases, involve adapting to very new, challenging, uninvited, and unexpected realities of life.

Again, accounting for the timing of the student veteran acculturation to campus experience in the lifecycle of a military career may help administrators understand student veteran cultural patterns. In any case, an institutional strategy of integration should be able to accommodate all student veterans, no matter what their motivation for a particular acculturation strategy.

Summary of Chapter Two

This chapter provided a review of literature related to reciprocal interactions in the process of acculturation to campus, reciprocal interactions in the context of a SOC program institution, and the time and timing of reciprocal interactions in the Post-9/11 era. The *PPCT* model of human ecology theory was used as a framework. The review of literature showed that student veterans are an acculturating group on campus and that acculturative stress among student veterans may be related to their cultural identity and their belief that they matter to others

on campus. The review of literature also showed that SOC program administration involves the process of acculturation at a SOC program institution, and people involved in SOC program administration may have an attitude of indifference, ambivalence, or supportiveness toward student veterans and toward the institutional commitment to support SOC program principles and criteria. Finally, a review of associated literature suggested a contextual perspective is missing in studies of the student veteran experience in the Post-9/11 era and also suggested that a deficit image of student veterans may have emerged because studies have failed to recognize important cultural patterns of student veterans who pursue higher education for the purpose of furthering their military career.

There is a tendency to teach about methods of inquiry independent of the personal, cultural, and ethical factors that often attend the pursuit of truth.

E. Grady Bogue and Kimberly Bingham Hall

Chapter 3

Methods and Procedures

Introduction

For more than four decades the Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC) program has served as a cornerstone of support for student veteran success in higher education. Almost half of all colleges and universities in the United States have maintained a formal commitment to support SOC program principles and criteria. However, there is no evidence that connects the SOC program and a welcoming campus environment for student veterans at a SOC program institution. A perspective based on the logic of human ecology theory suggests that SOC program provisions should be related to the student veteran perspective of the campus environment at a SOC program institution (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1995; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Evans et al., 2010; Renn & Arnold, 2003; Vacchi & Berger, 2014).

The purpose of this study was to explore a theoretical connection between the SOC program and the campus environment through a student veteran lens. A mixed methods approach facilitated the collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data to address the following research questions (RQ):

RQ1 – Does the analysis of quantitative evidence indicate student veterans relate SOC program provisions to a welcoming campus environment?

RQ2 – Does the analysis of qualitative evidence suggest student veterans associate SOC program provisions with a welcoming campus environment?

RQ3 – To what extent does evidence from two different types of data support a theoretical perspective that suggests there is a connection between SOC program provisions and a welcoming campus environment for student veterans?

RQ4 – Does the evidence of this study suggest inequalities for any identifiable subgroup(s) of the student veteran population?

This chapter provides information about the methods and procedures for the study as well as information about the site selection, the population of interest, the sources of data, and the variables of interest. Validity and trustworthiness are discussed, and limitations and delimitations are also addressed.

Research Design

This study used a concurrent transformative approach in a mixed methods research design (Creswell, 2009, 2015; Mertens, 2007). The rationale for this design is the collective strength it offers when findings from two different types of data converge in ways that are also consistent with a theoretical perspective of a research problem (Creswell, 2015; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003). Accordingly, the study was “guided by the use of a specific theoretical perspective as well as the concurrent collection of both quantitative and qualitative data” (Creswell, 2009, p. 228). Figure 3.1 is a procedural diagram that shows how a quantitative strand and a qualitative strand were used to collect and analyze data related to the student veteran campus experience at a SOC program institution. As discussed in Chapter 2, human ecology

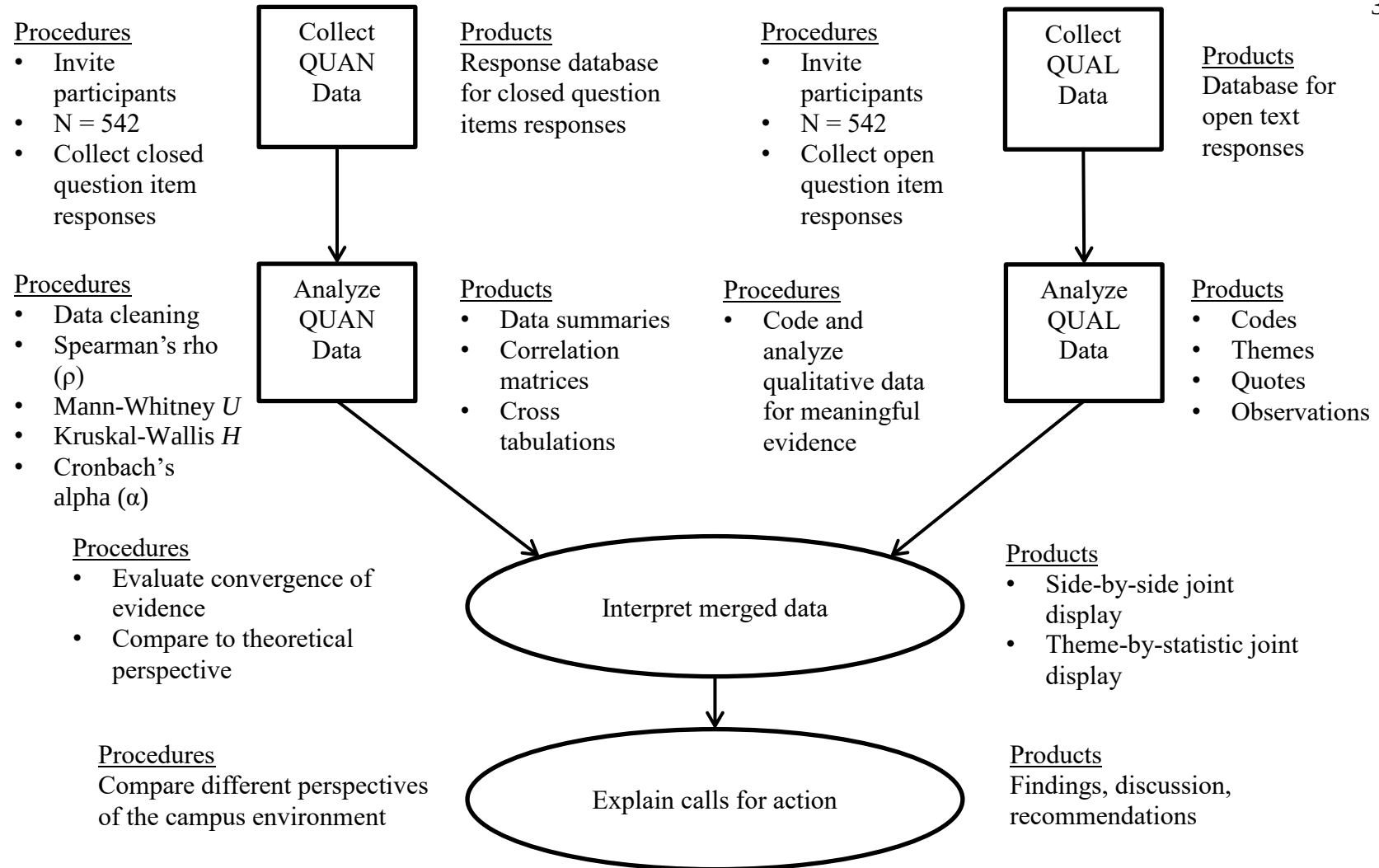


Figure 3.1. Procedural Diagram for the Convergent Mixed Methods with a Transformative Design Study of the Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges Program

theory was used to suggest a connection between SOC program provisions and a welcoming campus environment for student veterans. A transformative paradigm was incorporated to “address the complexities of research in culturally complex settings that can provide a basis for social change” (Mertens, 2007, p. 212). Essentially, the transformative paradigm illuminated the cultural complexities involved in the student veteran campus experience and provided a platform to advocate for a more culturally competent approach in conducting and interpreting research related to the student veteran campus experience.

Research Method

For this mixed methods study (Creswell, 2009, 2015), survey research (Fowler, 2014) was incorporated to facilitate the concurrent collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. Yin (2014) noted the value of using survey research to test correlations of complex variables in a real world context and “to examine the underlying processes that might explain such correlations” (p. 23). A literature review was conducted to identify variables of interest. Survey items were developed so that closed question items and open question items for the variables of interest were parallel and facilitated the collection of two different types of comparable data (Creswell, 2015).

For RQ1, descriptive data and Spearman’s rho (ρ) were calculated. Results were examined for evidence of relationships between ordinal variables (Bryman & Cramer, 2011, pp. 222-223). For RQ2, qualitative data were coded for positive, negative, and neutral comments which were then analyzed for meaningful evidence in quotes and themes related to the variables of interest in this study (Merriam, 2009, pp. 175-193). For RQ3, findings drawn from quantitative and qualitative perspectives were integrated (Creswell, 2015) in side-by-side

displays (p. 85) and theme-by-statistic joint displays (p. 85) to compare evidence for similarities and differences. Cases were also categorized into distinct subgroups (embedded units of analysis) to compare evidence for similarities and differences (Yin, 2014, pp. 49-56). The convergence of evidence was then evaluated for consistency with a theoretical perspective derived from human ecology theory (Creswell, 2015, pp. 16-17). The Mann-Whitney *U* test was used to examine correlations involving ordinal data (Bryman & Cramer, 2011, pp. 164-166). Cronbach's alpha was used to measure internal reliability for multi-item scales (Bryman & Cramer, 2011, pp. 78-81). For RQ4, evidence from the analysis of quantitative data was merged with evidence from the analysis of qualitative data to assess inequalities between the student veteran subgroups represented by participants in this study. Spearman's rho (ρ) was used to examine correlations involving ordinal data. The Mann-Whitney *U* test and the Kruskal-Wallis *H* test were used to examine differences between subgroups involving ordinal data (Bryman & Cramer, 2011, pp. 163-167).

Site and Population

The site selected for this study was The University of Tennessee Knoxville (UTK). A single site study is appropriate when circumstances and conditions of the site “captures the circumstances and conditions of an everyday situation” that might provide an opportunity to learn lessons “about the social processes related to some theoretical interest” (Yin, 2014, p. 52). UTK is a typical public land grant research institution and its SOC program provisions were predetermined to meet or exceed the minimum standards for serving student veterans (Petree, 2014). UTK also has a reputation for being a veteran-friendly institution as suggested by its

recognition by *U. S. News & World Report* as one among the “Best Colleges for Veterans” (Best Colleges for Veterans National Universities, 2017, #66).

There was evidence of ongoing efforts to provide a welcoming campus environment for student veterans at UTK. For example, student veterans were included in the work of the Veterans Resource Team on campus. Also, the construction of a Veterans Resource Center (VRC) was underway and nearing completion, in part because the student government at UTK passed resolutions of support in 2013 for a VRC to be built on campus. Also, student veteran organizations at UTK formed in 2014 and maintained an active agenda for providing social support for veterans on campus; participating in community service activities on campus and in the local community; and, helping staff and faculty design, develop, and deliver Military Cultural Awareness training within the campus community.

In addition to the favorable circumstances and conditions at the micro- and mesosystem levels, the UTK campus was situated within a socially and politically supportive environment at the macro- and exosystems levels. While examples of support for veterans are abundant in the southeastern region and areas surrounding the UTK campus, the Tennessee Veterans Education Transition Support (VETS) Act passed by the Tennessee General Assembly in 2014 is an example of how a culture of support for veterans can extend to the student veteran experience. The Tennessee VETS Act established a program and criteria to recognize higher education campuses for their support of student veterans and their families. The VETS Campus criteria reflect SOC program principles and criteria, and UTK received a VETS Campus designation in June 2016.

Student enrollment data at UTK indicated a growing subpopulation of students with military affiliation (see Table 3.1). Some of the increase reflected a recent change that allowed student veterans to transfer their Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to a dependent family member. Sadly, too, some of the increase reflected an increase in the number of deceased veterans' dependents enrolled at the institution (69 in 2014 to 114 in 2016). Accounting for these subgroups of the military affiliated student population helped focus the data collection process on student veterans as defined for this study – a currently enrolled student who was continuing to serve or had ever served as a member of a U. S. military unit.

Prior to Academic Year 2014 – 2015, records were not kept in sufficient detail to distinguish student veterans from military affiliated students who were dependents of veterans. Since then, records have been kept to account for these distinctions. Institutional data since 2015 indicated that the growing number of military affiliated students at UTK included a growing number of student veterans. The student veteran enrollment number was 523 for the fall semester of 2015 and increased to 562 for the fall semester of 2016.

Table 3.1. Enrollment data for military affiliated students at UTK

Semester	Undergraduate	Graduate	Total	Percent of total enrollment
Fall 2014	560	91	651	2.4
Fall 2015	737	191	928	3.3
Fall 2016	775	210	985	3.5

Source. Data provided by The Office of Strategic Enrollment Reporting and Analysis (SERA) at UTK and The Office of Veteran Student Affairs at UTK

There were 542 self-identified student veterans enrolled at UTK in the spring semester of 2017. They represented approximately 2 % of the total student population at UTK. While most were required to self-identify their veteran status to receive military education benefits, 12.5 % voluntarily self-identified even though they were not receiving military education benefits. There may have been other student veterans who opted out of opportunities to self-identify or had not yet found an opportunity to self-identify as a student veteran at the institution.

The average age of the 542 self-identified student veterans at UTK was 31 years old, and 28.6 % of them were 25 years old or younger. The youngest student veteran was 17 years old, and the oldest student veteran was 77 years old (see Figure 3.2).

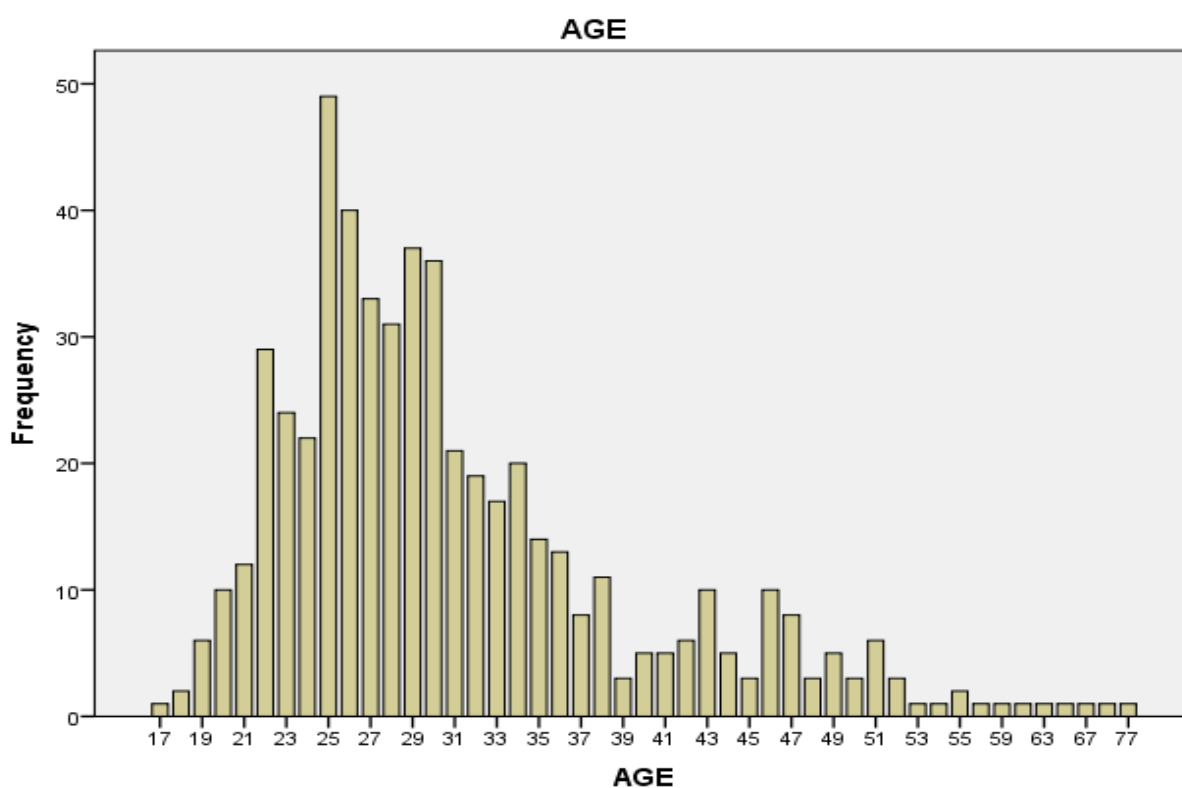


Figure 3.2. Age Frequency for Student Veterans at UTK, Spring 2017

The majority of student veterans at UTK were male (80.4 %). Also, as shown in Table 3.2., the majority of student veterans at UTK were white.

Sources of Data

The primary sources of data for this study were student veterans' self-reported responses to items on a researcher developed questionnaire. The format and content of the questionnaire were outcomes of an iterative process that involved a series of consultations with members of the faculty, the staff, and student veteran organizations at UTK; consultations with members of the NASPA Veterans Knowledge Community; and, my personal reflections from years of experience as a participant observer among student veterans at several different institutions. A small group of undergraduate and graduate student veterans at UTK volunteered to pilot test the survey site and give their advice and perspectives regarding ease of access, functionality, and clarity of meaning and purpose of items in the questionnaire. See Appendix A for the questionnaire created and used for this study – *The SOC Student Veteran Survey at UTK*.

Table 3.2. Ethnicity for student veterans at UTK, spring 2017

	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
American Indian	1	.2	.2	.2
Asian or Pacific Islander	10	1.8	1.8	2.0
Black, Not Hispanic	34	6.3	6.3	8.3
Hispanic	26	4.8	4.8	13.1
Multiracial	17	3.1	3.1	16.2
Unclassified	21	3.9	3.9	20.1
White, Not Hispanic	433	79.9	79.9	100.0
Total	542	100.0	100.0	

Several measures to reduce respondent fatigue were considered in designing the questionnaire. Fatigue can cause respondents to either give careless responses or abandon their decision to participate in a study. Research related to respondent fatigue offered three recommendations that were followed: consider the purpose of the research, consider the motivation for potential respondents to participate in the survey; and, consider the likelihood those potential respondents will respond to the method of administering the survey (Colton & Covert, 2007, pp. 296-297).

In response to each recommendation, first, as the purpose of this study was to explore a theoretical connection between the SOC program and the campus environment through a student veteran lens, the consequences of the study were not likely to have an immediate, drastic, or misguided effect on human lives. Second, regarding potential respondents' motivations to participate in the survey, student veterans have generally not demonstrated a high level of tolerance for a lengthy battery of questions in other studies. For example, Patillo (2011) administered an electronic survey that contained 59 items in a research project that involved student veterans at Auburn University ($n = 48$). The average time to complete the survey was just over 21 minutes, and the response rate for the student veteran population ($N = 210$) was 22.9%. With the Auburn study as an example in mind, the length and complexity of the survey for this study were minimized so that participants needed less than 15 minutes to provide responses to 37 items. Regarding the third and final recommendation to consider the likelihood that potential respondents would respond to the method of administering the survey, the survey was configured for easy Web based access, and survey software was used to administer the questionnaire electronically. Easy access and electronic administration made it possible for student veterans to

use either a computer or a smart phone to conveniently and anonymously self-report their responses. In summary, the considerations given to purpose, brevity, and ease of access were expected to minimize error related to respondent fatigue.

Variables

While the theoretical connection between SOC program provisions and the student veteran campus experience at a SOC program institution could involve a myriad of variables, the scope of this study was limited to the following variables of interest:

- Opinions and experiences associated with SOC program provisions at the institution
- Ratings and descriptions of the campus environment as a welcoming environment for student veterans
- Beliefs regarding student veteran mattering to others on campus
- Attitudes and behaviors on campus related to student veteran status
- A narrow set of student veteran demographic items

Again, the primary source of data for the variables of interest was self-reported student veteran responses to an electronically administered questionnaire that was designed and developed specifically for this study. The questionnaire contained a total of 37 items.

Opinions and experiences associated with SOC program provisions. Fourteen items facilitated the collection of both quantitative and qualitative responses from student veterans about their opinions and experiences associated with SOC program provisions. Half of the 14 items were designed to facilitate closed question responses (Q1, Q3, Q5, Q7, Q9, Q11, and Q13) and half were designed to facilitate open question responses (Q2, Q4, Q6, Q8, Q10, Q12, and Q14).

Each closed question item included a statement crafted to represent one of the seven SOC program principles and criteria. For example, one of the items stated “SOC program institutions accommodate student veterans who experience interruptions or delays in the educational process caused by military service.” Each statement was paired with a question that asked participants to use a response set to rate the extent to which the SOC program provision helped them feel welcomed as a student veteran at the institution. The response set for each closed question item included five options: to a very great extent, to a great extent, to a moderate extent, to some extent, and to little or no extent. Each response was assigned a value ranging from a highest value of 5 for the most welcoming response to a lowest value of 1 for the least welcoming response. Assigned values facilitated the collection of quantitative data related to each one of the seven SOC program provisions.

After participants provided their response to one of the seven closed question items, they were presented an open question item crafted to match the SOC program provision. The open question item asked participants to describe a personal experience or opinion associated with the same SOC program provision “in a way that will help others understand how it affects the student veteran experience at the institution.” A response block formatted for participants to provide open text entries facilitated the collection of qualitative data associated with each one of the seven SOC program provisions.

Ratings and descriptions of a welcoming campus environment. Similar to the approach used in collecting both quantitative and qualitative data associated with SOC program provisions, two items (Q15 and Q16) were used to collect responses to reflect the ratings and descriptions of student veterans regarding the campus environment. First, a closed question

response item (Q15) asked participants to use a response set to rate “In general, how welcoming is the campus environment for student veterans at this institution?” To facilitate the collection of quantitative data for this item, the response set included five options ranging from extremely welcoming to not at all welcoming. Each one was assigned a corresponding value ranging from a highest value of 5 for the most welcoming response to a lowest value of 1 for the least welcoming response. When participants submitted a response to the closed question item they were presented with an open question item (Q16) that asked them to “please describe what came to mind (people, places, symbols, experiences, etc.) when you rated how welcoming the campus environment is for student veterans at this institution.” A response block formatted for open text entries facilitated the collection of qualitative data associated with the campus environment.

Student veteran mattering to others on campus. The five item *General Mattering Scale (GMS)* (Marcus, 1991 as cited in Dixon & Robinson Kurpius, 2008, pp. 416-417; Dixon Rayle & Myers, 2004, p. 83; Gibson & Myers, p. 651; Rayle, 2005, pp. 755-758) was modified to fit the context of this study and to gauge the beliefs of student veterans regarding how much the student veteran population matters to others at the institution. Each item of the *GMS* was tailored for the study to prompt student veterans to think of the context of their campus environment as they reflected on and responded to each item. For example, the question “how important do you feel you are to other people” was contextualized to read “how important do you feel student veterans are to others on this campus.” Other researchers have used this approach with the *GMS* in the context of a higher education campus environment, most notably, Myers and Bechtel (2004) with an ethnically diverse sample of 179 cadets at West Point, Gibson and Myers (2006) with 234 cadets at The Citadel ($\alpha = .83$), and, Dixon Rayle and Chung (2007) with

a majority female sample of undergraduate students at a four year institution ($\alpha = .93$). The four-point Likert response scale for the *GMS* was used to provide a response set for each item that ranged from “very much” with an assigned value of 4 to “not at all” with an assigned value of 1. The response that indicated the highest level of mattering was assigned a value of 4 and the response that indicated the lowest level of mattering was assigned a value of 1. The scored responses for the five items provided an aggregated score for the construct of mattering that ranged from a highest score of 20 to a lowest score of 5.

Attitudes and behaviors on campus related to student veteran status. Two scales – the Veteran Identity Centrality Scale (VICS) and the Positive Regard for Veteran Identity Scale (PRVIS) – were modified to fit the context of this study and to gauge student veteran attitudes and behaviors on campus related to their student veteran status. Di Leone et al. (2015) used the VICS and the PRVIS to study the attitudes and behaviors of female veterans ($n = 407$) toward the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). The VICS scale had an alpha coefficient of .73 and correlated with measures of other variables such as exposure to combat ($r = .21$), depression ($r = .22$), post-traumatic stress ($r = .29$), entitlement to VHA services ($r = .34$), and fit within the VHA setting ($r = .35$). The PRVIS had a coefficient alpha of .67 and correlated with measures of other variables such as age ($r = .21$), length of time in military ($r = .19$), sexual harassment ($r = -.12$), post-traumatic stress ($r = -.16$), depression ($r = -.17$), entitlement to VHA services ($r = .25$), and fit within the VHA setting ($r = .15$). While a positive correlation was found between veteran identity centrality and positive regard for veteran identity ($r = .49$) researchers were careful to note that each construct is independent of the other (p. 2).

The five VICS items were modified to prompt student veterans to think of the campus environment as the context for their responses. For example, the statement “I feel more connected to civilians than to other veterans” was contextualized to read “On campus, I feel more connected to civilians than to other veterans.” For each statement, participants were asked to use a response set that ranged from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” The response indicating the highest veteran-identity centrality for an item was assigned a value of 5, and the response indicating the lowest veteran-identity centrality was assigned a value of 1. Thus, the highest possible composite score for this scale was 25 and the lowest possible composite score was 5.

The three PRVIS items were also modified to prompt student veterans to think of the campus environment as the context for their responses. The statement “I am proud to be a veteran” was contextualized to read, “I am proud to be a veteran on campus.” The statement “when I meet other veterans I prefer to keep my veteran status to myself” was contextualized to read “when I meet other veterans on campus I prefer to keep my veteran status to myself.” And, the statement “I like it when people know I’m a veteran” was contextualized to read “I like it when people on campus know I’m a veteran.” Participants were asked to use a response set ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” The response that indicated the highest positive regard for veteran identity was assigned a value of 5, and the response that indicated the lowest positive regard for veteran identity was assigned a value of 1. The highest possible composite score for this scale was 15, and the lowest possible composite score was 3.

Demographics. Participants were asked to provide information about seven personal characteristics – their student tenure at the institution (how many semesters); their current status

with the military (active, guard, reserve, inactive); their intent to either continue or return to military service after completing their current goal for post-secondary education; if they were ever exposed to combat, hostile fire, or imminent danger while serving in the military; their age; their sex; and, their race/ethnicity.

Other information. The final item of the questionnaire gave participants the opportunity to provide any additional comments or information they wanted to share.

Procedures

Before completing the research design, I shared the purpose and general concept of the study with the Administrator of Veteran Student Affairs at UTK. The administrator provided a letter of support for the study. To develop the questionnaire and procedures for the study proposal, I consulted leaders of the student veteran organization at UTK, members of the Veterans Resource Committee at UTK, members of the NASPA Veterans Knowledge Community, members of my dissertation committee at UTK, and members of the research consultant staff at UTK. The UTK Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and approved the study proposal. I then coordinated assistance from the research consultant staff at UTK to prepare the survey site for data collection and coordinated assistance from The Office of Veteran Student Affairs at UTK to invite all self-identified student veterans at the institution to participate in the study.

Data collection. A survey site was used to electronically administer the questionnaire and collect data over a period of 25 days during the 2017 spring semester. A series of three email messages was used to explain the purpose of the study and to invite participation in the study. The series of three messages included an initial SOC Survey Invitation Email (Appendix B), a

SOC Survey Invitation Reminder Email (Appendix C), and a SOC Survey Closing Invitation Email (Appendix D). The Administrator of Veteran Student Affairs at UTK sent the series of messages to the email accounts maintained in the student veteran LISTSERV. The first message was sent after the survey site was opened for data collection. The second message was sent on the sixth day after the survey site was opened, and the last message was sent on the fourteenth day after the survey site was opened. I monitored the site for signs of problems during the data collection period. No problems were observed or reported. I closed the survey site after the third message was sent and seven consecutive days of no respondent activity.

Each one of the email invitation messages included an active electronic link for recipients to access the survey site. When a recipient used the active electronic link, the SOC Campus Consent Statement (See Appendix E) introduced them to the survey site with information about the purpose of the study, the SOC program, the format of the questionnaire, and the amount of time and the kind of activities involved if they decided to complete the questionnaire. The statement also reaffirmed that participation in the study was both voluntary and anonymous. Participants had to use an active submit button on the consent page before they could access the questionnaire.

Survey software (*Qualtrics*) was used to administer the questionnaire, create a case each time the survey site was accessed, and collect electronic data associated with each case. A total of 98 cases were created during the data collection period. Data collected for the 98 cases were stored and are maintained in a password protected account on the OIT server at UTK.

Data analysis. Of the 98 cases created during the data collection process, 53 were counted as incomplete and 45 were counted as complete. A software function was set to allow

participants to opt out of participating in the study if they simply closed the window at any time after entering the site. An incomplete case was created when a respondent closed the window without accessing and responding to each item on the questionnaire.

Another software function was set to allow participants to opt out of each individual item on the questionnaire. A complete case was created only when a respondent accessed each item on the questionnaire and responded to each item in one of two ways – either they provided data for the item or they used the opt out function for that item.

The data collected and stored for each one of the 53 incomplete cases were reviewed for value. In 18 of the 53 cases, no responses were given for any of the questionnaire items. In the other 35 cases, responses were given for some items; however, in all but one case, the responses that were collected indicated the respondent did not venture beyond the items pertaining to SOC program provisions. In most cases, the responses were limited to three items or less. This observation was interpreted to reflect the activity of respondents who either decided to wait until a later time to participate in the survey or decided to not participate in the survey at all. For this reason, data from the 53 incomplete cases were not included in the data analysis leading to findings for this study. However, 12 of the 53 respondents wrote a statement similar to “never heard of SOC” or “SOC does not apply to me” and then opted out of participating in the study. This observation seemed to indicate a lack of SOC program awareness and will be revisited in Chapters 4 and 5.

A copy of the raw data set containing both quantitative and qualitative data for the 45 cases containing completed questionnaires was saved to a local file and prepared for the data analysis process. To prepare the data, I created a codebook (see Appendix F) to serve two

purposes. First, the codebook documents how question numbers generated in the survey software correspond to item numbers on the questionnaire in Appendix A. Technical aspects of using the survey software to electronically administer the questionnaire generated a different set of question numbers from what is shown on the questionnaire in Appendix A. Second, the codebook documents how data labels were created and used to associate raw data with the appropriate items on the questionnaire in Appendix A. The data labels helped manage raw data throughout the analysis process and were used to present evidence in Chapter 4.

After data labels were associated with raw data, the response cells for closed question items were checked for missing data (Bryman & Cramer, 2011; Fowler, 2014). One case had missing data for items 7, 9, and 13. Mean imputation (Bryman & Cramer, 2011, pp. 60-62; Fowler, 2014, pp. 136-137) was used to compute and enter values for those three data cells. The data set was then checked for duplicate cases by comparing responses for demographic items – number of semesters on campus, status with the military, intent to either continue or return to military service, exposure to combat, age, sex, and race/ethnicity. The comparison indicated that each case differed from all other cases in the study by at least one demographic item. Scores for closed question items pertaining to SOC program provisions, mattering to others on campus, veteran identity centrality on campus, and positive regard for veteran identity on campus were aggregated. The aggregated scores were coded as new variables – SOCAgg, MattAgg, VICSAgg, and PRVISAgg, respectively (Bryman & Cramer, 2011, pp. 57-60). Finally, responses for open question items were coded (Merriam, 2009), first for positive, negative, and neutral quotations related to SOC program provisions; then for positive, negative, and neutral quotations related to the campus environment; and, then for quotations that were consistent with

the theoretical perspectives of human ecology theory as used in this study (Yin, 2014, pp. 143-147).

The process of analyzing data was conducted in three parts. In the first part, quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed separately for evidence of a connection between SOC program provisions and a welcoming campus environment. Evidence from the separate analyses was used to answer RQ1 and RQ2.

In the second part, evidence from the two different types of data was merged and compared in side-by-side joint displays (Creswell, 2015, p. 85) to help identify and evaluate convergence. A theme-by-statistic joint display (Creswell, 2015, p. 85) was then used to further examine the evidence for consistency with the theoretical perspectives used to guide the study. Using a single site provided a common point of reference for participants' perspectives. The common point of reference allowed alternate perspectives, or realities, to be identified and explored. Perspectives of those who rated the campus environment as welcoming was compared to perspectives of those who rated the campus environment less welcoming. Differences and similarities between the two were explored and provided evidence to answer RQ3.

The third part of the data analysis process involved the search for evidence of inequalities for any identifiable subgroup(s) of the student veteran population. Both quantitative and qualitative data were compared for evidence of meaningful differences among identifiable subgroups of student veterans represented by participants in the study.

Validity and Trustworthiness

Onwuegbuzie and Johnson (2006) described legitimization as the integration of validity in quantitative research and trustworthiness in qualitative research. In this study, closed question

items were used to collect quantitative data for a large number of participants, and quantitative methods were used to analyze statistical relationships within the data. Also, open question items were used to collect qualitative data for the same participants, and qualitative methods were used to “allow participants’ experiences to be understood in context” (Creswell, 2015, p. 5). Thus, the strengths of each method addressed vulnerabilities of the other, provided more data, and strengthened the validity and trustworthiness of findings from the study.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

While the collective strengths of using mixed methods increased the validity and trustworthiness of this study, four limitations affect the utility of the findings. One stems from using a single site for the study. Although a common set of principles and criteria guide the SOC program at the macrosystems level, the findings of this study reflect distinct environmental conditions at the microsystems level. Thus, the findings of this study represent the perspectives of one group of participants at one institution at one point in time. The multitude of variables involved in the connection between SOC program provisions and the campus environment are always subject to change from time to time, from place to place, and from one group of student veterans to another. Nevertheless, a perspective based on human ecology theory was used to guide this study, and findings that are consistent with a theoretical perspective may be generalizable to other settings (Yin, 2014, pp. 40-45). A second limitation stems from the low response rate. Only 10.5% (57) of the student veteran population at UTK provided useable data in their response to invitations to participate in the study, and only 8% of the student veteran population completed all items of the questionnaire. A third limitation stems from the apparent lack of SOC program awareness. Of the 57 cases that contained usable data for the study, more

than half indicated a lack of SOC program awareness. Finally, to some degree, the findings of this study reflect the subjectivity of the researcher's perspective. The limitations of this study are addressed further in Chapters 4 and 5.

Summary of Chapter Three

This chapter provided an explanation of the methods, procedures, and instrumentation used in collecting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data for this study. It also provided detailed information about the site and population involved in the study. Legitimation of a mixed methods study design was discussed, and limitations and delimitations were also addressed.

To different minds, the same world is a hell, and a heaven.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Chapter 4

Findings

Introduction

This study explored the student veteran perspectives of the Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC) program and the campus environment at a SOC program institution. At the center of this study was the problem of bounded awareness, described by Bazerman and Tenbrunsel (2011) as the gap between the reality of an institution as seen by an administrator and the reality of an institution as seen from a different point of view. Reflecting the concept of bounded awareness, an administrator might assume a SOC program institution is a welcoming environment for student veterans. This study explored the reality of the environment at a SOC program institution from a student veteran point of view.

A mixed methods research design was used for the strength of evidence offered when findings from both quantitative data and qualitative data converge in ways that are consistent with a theoretical perspective of the research problem (Creswell, 2015; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003). Human ecology theory was used to hypothesize a connection between SOC program provisions and a welcoming campus environment for student veterans (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1995; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Evans et al., 2010; Renn & Arnold, 2003; Vacchi & Berger, 2014). A concurrent transformative mixed methods design (Creswell, 2009, 2015; Mertens, 2007) incorporated survey research (Fowler, 2014) to collect and analyze data.

Data representing the student veteran point of view were collected using a researcher developed questionnaire designed for this study. Student veterans' self-reported responses to both closed question items and open question items were the primary source of data. The items focused participants' responses on (a) opinions and experiences associated with SOC program provisions at the institution, (b) ratings and descriptions of a welcoming campus environment for student veterans, (c) beliefs regarding student veteran mattering to others on campus, (d) attitudes and behaviors related to student veteran status on campus, and (e) a narrow set of demographic descriptors.

All self-identified student veterans at one SOC program institution were invited to participate in this study. A series of three invitations to participate was sent, one initial and two follow-ups, to the email address of record for self-identified student veterans at the institution. To participate in the study, a student veteran had to use either a computer or a cell phone to open one of the invitations, use the active link in the invitation to access a survey site, acknowledge terms of a consent cover statement, and either provide a response or choose the opt out feature for items. To provide a response, participants had to either click on a circle to indicate their response for a closed question item or use a keyboard to type the text of their response to an open question item. Participating in the study was voluntary and anonymous. There were no payments or incentives used to encourage student veterans to participate in the study.

Survey software (*Qualtrics*) was used to administer the questionnaire and to record data during the data collection period. The quantitative and qualitative data collected through the questionnaire were analyzed separately and then integrated for further analysis. *Qualtrics*, *SPSS*, and *NVivo* were used to analyze the data and to present findings associated with four research

questions. Quantitative data were analyzed for evidence to answer RQ1 – Does the analysis of quantitative evidence indicate student veterans relate SOC program provisions to a welcoming campus environment? Qualitative data were analyzed for evidence to answer RQ2 – Does the analysis of qualitative evidence suggest student veterans associate SOC program provisions with a welcoming campus environment? Evidence from the separate analysis of the two types of data was then merged and analyzed for evidence to answer RQ3 – To what extent does evidence from two different types of data support a theory based hypothesis of a connection between SOC program provisions and a welcoming campus environment for student veterans? Finally, quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed to answer RQ4 – Does the evidence of this study suggest inequalities for any identifiable subgroup(s) of the student veteran population?

This chapter addresses the findings of the study, beginning with information about the site and information about the participants. The findings associated with each of the four research questions are also addressed.

Demographic Data

The site selected for this study was The University of Tennessee Knoxville (UTK), a SOC program institution situated within a geographic area known for a culture of support for the military, veterans, and military family members. All self-identified student veterans at UTK (N = 542) were invited to participate in the study. A questionnaire was administered electronically through a survey site opened for 25 consecutive days during the spring semester of 2017. Survey software (*Qualtrics*) was used to administer the questionnaire and recorded 98 cases of the survey site being accessed during the data collection period. Of the 98 recorded cases, only 57 (10.5%) provided useable data, and only 45 (8%) contained a completed questionnaire.

Of the 45 cases that contained a completed questionnaire, slightly more than half (24) represented participants who had been enrolled at UTK for three semesters or less (see Figure 4.1). Almost two thirds (29) represented participants who reported no active status in the military, and the other one third represented participants with an active membership in an Active Duty (6), a National Guard (5), or a Reserve (5) status. Twelve represented participants who intended to continue or return to military service after they completed their education, and 33 represented participants who did not intend to continue or return to military service. Two thirds (31) represented participants who reported they had received combat pay, hostile fire pay, or imminent danger pay at some time during military service, and one third (14) represented participants who reported they had not.

Most of the 45 participants (91.2 %) in this study were 26 years old or older (see Figure 4.2). The average age was 32.7 years old, slightly older than the average age of 31 for the student veteran population at UTK. The youngest age reported was 21 years old, and the oldest age reported was 56 years old.

Eleven participants (24.4 %) were female and 34 (75.6 %) were male, slightly different from the 1:4 female to male ratio for the student veteran population at UTK. The majority (73 %) self-identified as either white or Caucasian when they responded to an open question item that asked participants to self-identify their race/ethnicity (see Table 4.1). When compared to data for the student veteran population at UTK (see previous chapter), student veterans in the White, Not Hispanic category and those in the Hispanic category were slightly under represented in this study. Student veterans in the American Indian, Asian or Pacific Islander, Multiracial, and Unclassified categories were slightly over represented in this study. Unfortunately, no student

Including the current semester, how many semesters have you attended classes at this campus? - semesters

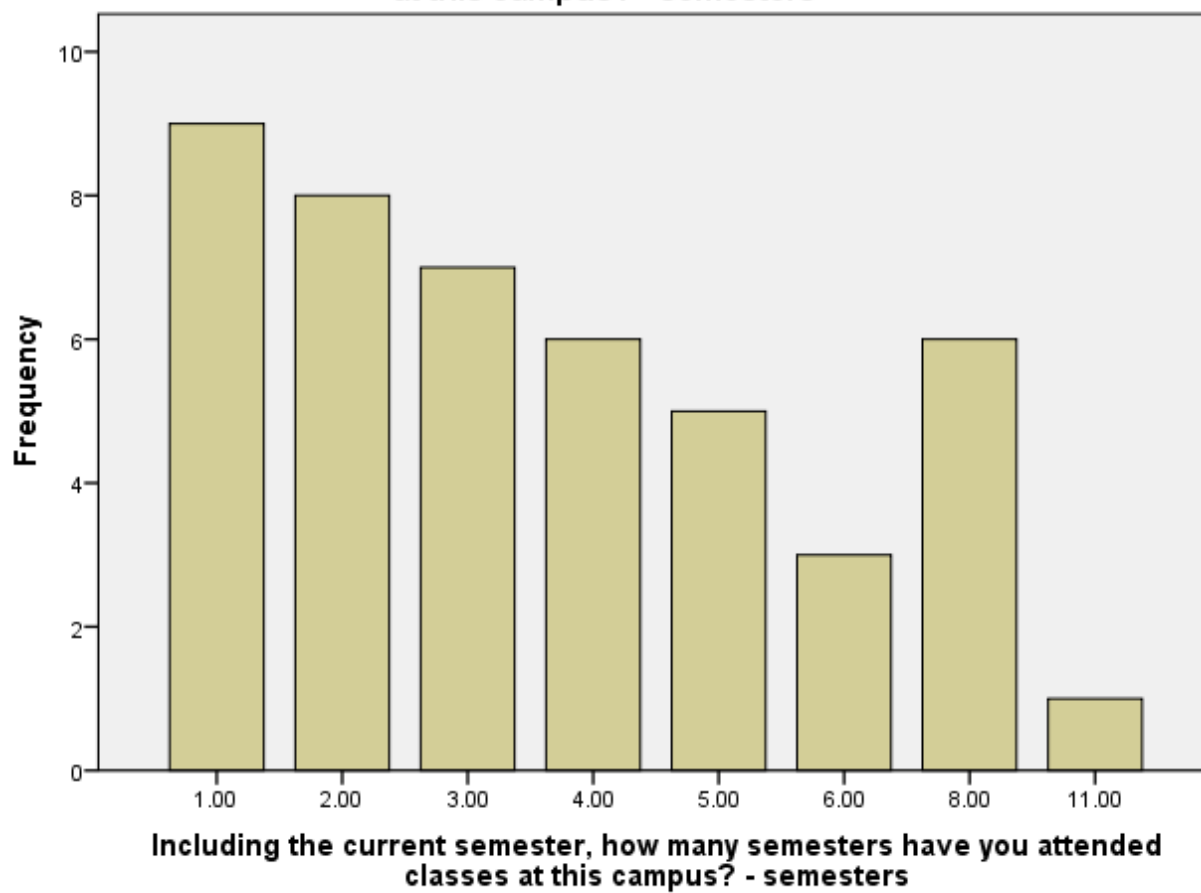


Figure 4.1. Numbers of Semesters Study Participants Attended Classes at UTK

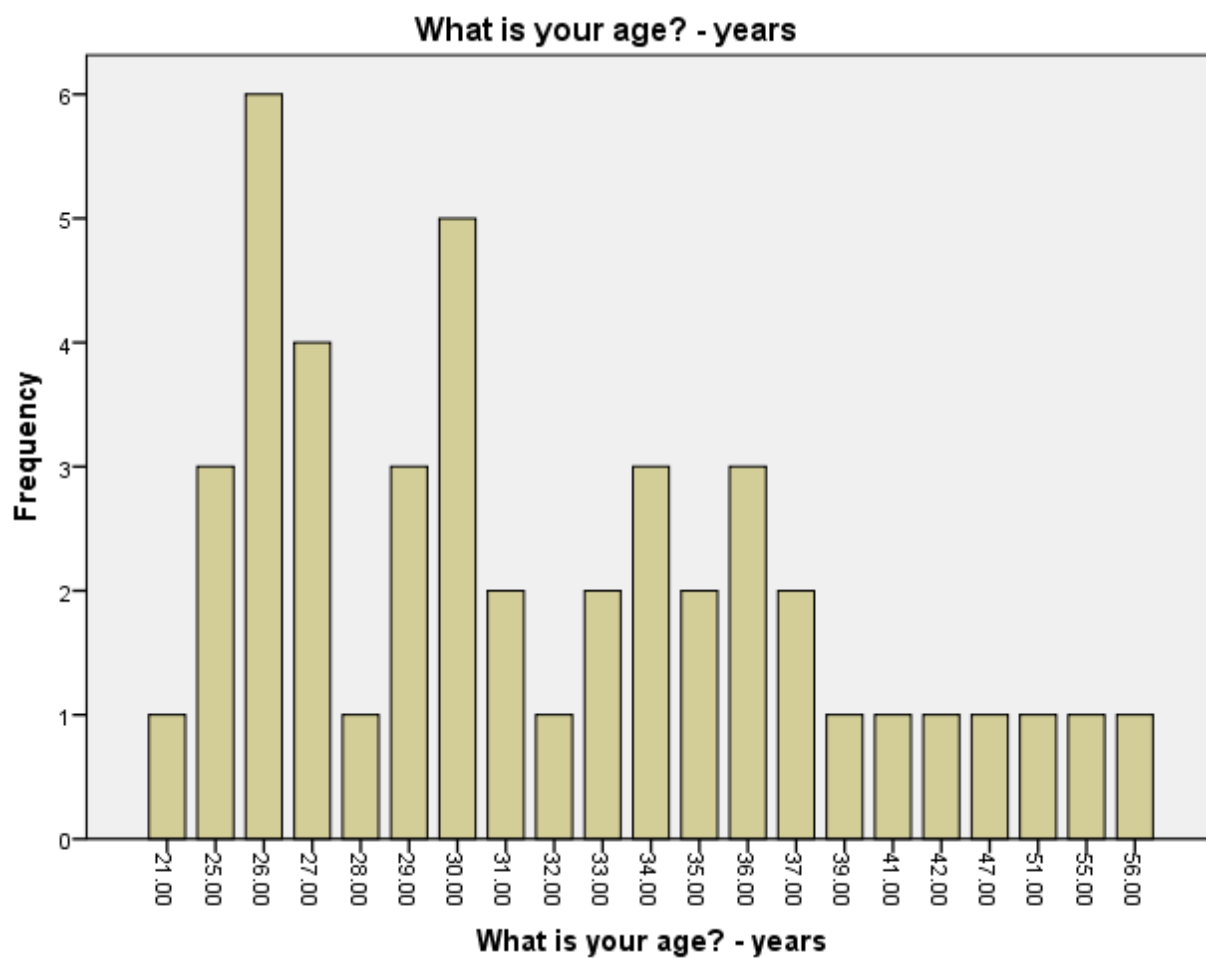


Figure 4.2. Number of Study Participants by Age in Years

Table 4.1. Self-identified race/ethnicity of study participants

Self-descriptions categorized	Frequency	%
American Indian	1	2.2
Asian or Pacific Islander	1	2.2
Black, Not Hispanic	0	0
Hispanic	2	4.4
Multiracial	4	8.8
Unclassified	4	8.8
White, Not Hispanic	33	73.3
Total	45	100*

* rounded

veterans in the Black, Not Hispanic category participated in this study.

Findings

Findings for each research question are reported in this section. Findings were derived from the analysis of self-reported data provided by the 45 participants who completed the questionnaire designed for this study. Data for incomplete questionnaires were not included in the analysis.

RQ1. *Does the analysis of quantitative evidence indicate student veterans relate SOC program provisions to a welcoming campus environment?*

Participants indicated their opinions related to seven closed question items that represented specific SOC program provisions at the institution (Q1, Q3, Q5, Q7, Q9, Q11, and Q13) and one closed question item to rate how welcoming the campus environment was for student veterans at UTK (Q15). Descriptive data for these items were calculated and displayed in Table 4.2.

Correlation coefficients for the ordinal data were analyzed using Spearman's rho (ρ) and displayed in Table 4.3. Positive correlation coefficients statistically significant at $p < .05$ were found for the measure of a welcoming campus environment with SOC item 1 ($\rho = .333$) and SOC item 2 ($\rho = .352$). According to Cohen and Holliday as cited in Bryman and Cramer (2011, p. 214), the measures of correlation were low. Positive correlation coefficients statistically significant at $p < .01$ were found among the measures for all seven SOC items.

Cronbach's Alpha measure of reliability for the seven SOC program opinion items was .937. Measures for SOC program opinions were aggregated by case (SOCAgg). Correlation

Table 4.2. Data labels and descriptive data for responses to SOC program items and the campus environment item ($N = 45$)

Questionnaire number – item description	Min	Max	M	SD
Q1 – SOC item 1, provided the information that veterans needed about the process of admissions	1	5	2.40	1.54
Q3 – SOC item 2, provided veterans access to high quality educational opportunities	1	5	2.27	1.42
Q5 – SOC item 3, accommodated interruptions or delays in the educational process caused by military service	1	5	2.02	1.36
Q7 – SOC item 4, accepted transfer credits if it satisfied a specific requirement of the program of study at the institution	1	5	1.93	1.29
Q9 – SOC item 5, awarded credits for military training or experience if it satisfied a specific requirement of the program of study at the institution	1	5	1.64	1.07
Q11 – SOC item 6, demonstrated flexibility with the minimum amount of course work to complete in residence at the institution	1	5	2.04	1.43
Q13 – SOC item 7, provided student veterans the opportunity to earn college credits through the College-Level Examination Program (CLEP)	1	5	2.00	1.38
Q15 – WelcRate, rate how welcoming the campus environment is for student veterans at this institution	1	5	3.53	1.12

Table 4.3. Data analysis for Spearman's rho (ρ) related to opinions of SOC program provisions and welcoming campus environment ratings

		SOC1	SOC2	SOC3	SOC4	SOC5	SOC6	SOC7	Welc Rate
SOC1	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.933**	.735**	.604**	.594**	.658**	.669**	.333*
SOC2	Correlation Coefficient	.933**	1.000	.792**	.565**	.568**	.671**	.685**	.352*
SOC3	Correlation Coefficient	.735**	.792**	1.000	.696**	.647**	.815**	.691**	.206
SOC4	Correlation Coefficient	.604**	.565**	.696**	1.000	.794**	.742**	.695**	.071
SOC5	Correlation Coefficient	.594**	.568**	.647**	.794**	1.000	.743**	.670**	.152
SOC6	Correlation Coefficient	.658**	.671**	.815**	.742**	.743**	1.000	.546**	.158
SOC7	Correlation Coefficient	.669**	.685**	.691**	.695**	.670**	.546**	1.000	.136
Welc Rate	Correlation Coefficient	.333*	.352*	.206	.071	.152	.158	.136	1.000

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

between SOCAgg and participants' ratings for a welcoming campus environment (WelcRate) was analyzed. Results are displayed in Table 4.4. The correlation coefficient for SOCAgg and WelcRate ($\rho = .238$) was found to be not statistically significant ($p > .05$).

In summary, the analysis of quantitative data for participants in this study revealed low, statistically significant ($p < .05$) positive correlation coefficients between ratings related to a welcoming campus environment and opinions related to SOC program item 1 ($\rho = .333$) and SOC program item 2 ($\rho = .352$). Also, the analysis revealed statistically significant ($p < .01$) positive correlations and a high level of internal reliability ($\alpha = .937$) among the seven SOC program items used in this study.

Table 4.4. Data analysis for Spearman's rho (ρ) related to aggregated measures of SOC program opinions and welcoming campus environment ratings

			WelcRate	SOCAgg
Spearman's rho	WelcRate	Correlation	1.000	.238
		Coefficient		
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.116
	SOCAgg	N	45	45
		Correlation	.238	1.000
		Coefficient		
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.116	
		N	45	45

RQ2. *Does the analysis of qualitative evidence suggest student veterans associate SOC program provisions with a welcoming campus environment?*

Participants provided descriptive responses for seven open question items related to specific SOC program provisions at the institution (Q2, Q4, Q6, Q8, Q10, Q12, and Q14) and one open question item (Q16) related to the campus environment at the institution. Responses were coded (Merriam, 2009), first for positive, negative, and neutral quotations related to SOC program provisions and then for positive, negative, and neutral quotations related to the campus environment. Quotations were analyzed for evidence that student veterans connect SOC program provisions to the campus environment. Findings for each are addressed in subsections below.

SOC item 1. SOC institutions provide information veterans need to help them through the process of admissions. The majority of participants (37 of 45) provided a descriptive response.

Seventeen participants included comments similar to “I have never heard of the SOC program until now” and “I was unaware that such a program exists.” Other participants used words like wonderful, welcoming, helpful, encouraging, responsive, and “well taken care” to describe their experience during the admissions process. Some participants named a specific staff member in writing about their experience. One participant wrote “They already knew most of the hurdles for someone in my position and were prepared to help and provide information.”

Conversely, several participants commented about the lack of information and the lack of support in the admissions process for veterans. Four suggested that more information was needed about campus resources available to student veterans. Three commented that incoming student veterans needed more information specifically about the SOC program at UTK, and another one wrote “[the SOC program at UTK] must be either transparent or not effective.” One participant

described the admissions process as “a huge struggle,” and another described feeling “very much on my own” while trying to sort out details between the VA and various departments at UTK. One other participant described “a very time consuming and stressful process” in having to get a military official to call an administrator at UTK and “explain the laws regarding [education benefits for] active duty military.”

SOC item 2. SOC institutions provide veterans access to high quality educational opportunities. Sixty percent (27 of 45) of participants provided a descriptive response. Twelve comments related to lack of knowledge about the SOC program. Two stated the need for more information about the SOC program.

One participant wrote about having “many chances to be a part of student groups and panels as well as very intellectually challenging events” at UTK. Another credited the SOC program in general for providing a “sense of community and stability to the crazy student experience,” and another specifically credited “the great people who understand what we have been through and what we are going through by going back to school.”

On the other hand, one participant wrote “I’ve seen better,” and then described behaviors of staff members and qualities of facilities identified with a different institution. Comments written by two other participants suggested there were no differences perceived in the opportunities and support available to student veterans and non-veteran students at the institution. Another participant wrote “you are here to learn so get to it.”

SOC item 3. SOC institutions accommodate interruptions or delays caused by military service. Seventy-one percent (32 of 45) of participants provided a descriptive response. Seven wrote comments related to lack of knowledge about the SOC program.

Although one participant wrote about witnessing “many times [when] the staff worked hard to get all problems resolved” for other student veterans who were called for duty, no one described a first-hand personal experience related to this SOC program provision. In fact, 19 specifically commented they had not experienced any interruptions or delays in their education due to military service. However, one posed a question about whether this SOC program provision includes accommodations for members of the National Guard and Reserve who experience interruptions or delays related to intermittent reserve component service requirements, and another wrote about a strict attendance policy that seemed to be common among faculty at UTK.

SOC item 4. SOC institutions accept transfer credits if they are related to a specific program of study at the institution. Sixty-four percent (29 of 45) of participants provided a descriptive response. Six comments related to a participant’s lack of knowledge about the SOC program. Seven participants had not attempted to transfer credits for their program of study at UTK, and four of those seven believed this SOC provision did not apply to student veterans at the graduate level.

Five participants wrote about a successful transfer credit process. A comment from one seemed to indicate success in “petitioning for a few courses” to be accepted as transfer credits.

Nine participants described frustrations associated with losing credits when transferring to UTK, including the “frustrating retakes of courses.” One of the nine described how an academic program advisor said one thing about transfer credits while a general studies advisor said something different and asked “why are they not on the same page?” Only one of the nine wrote about submitting an appeal for decisions about their transfer credits, but also wrote that

five months had gone by with no response. Two who had received some credits in the transfer process described how their transfer credits were used to fill all of their elective requirements. Filling their elective requirements prevented them from “taking any electives to break up some of the tougher classes” and also prevented them from “branching out and finding other things they might want to learn since the Post 9/11 bill won’t pay if it is recognized that the course isn’t [required]” for the student veterans’ specific program of study.

SOC item 5. SOC institutions award credits for program-related military training or experience. Sixty percent (27 of 45) of participants provided a descriptive response. Six comments related to lack of knowledge about the SOC program. Four participants believed this SOC provision did not apply to student veterans at the graduate level.

Only one participant indicated they were awarded credits in their program of study for their military training and experience. Some participants wrote about understanding the fact that credit for military training and experience was not logical in their case. For example, one wrote that their training and experience as a mechanic did not translate well for credits in a program of study for a degree in business administration, and another wrote that their training and experience as a military policeman did not translate well for credits in a program of study for a degree in engineering.

On the other hand, one participant wrote “two years of intense training and 4 years of experience accounted for nothing – kind of a bummer,” and another wrote “I’m burning through my GI Bill retaking things that I should already have credit for – kind of ridiculous.” Another participant wrote “I hope that eventually some of our training and experience can be considered more than elective courses.”

SOC item 6. SOC institutions demonstrate flexibility for in residence course requirements for veterans. Sixty percent (27 of 45) of participants provided a descriptive response. Six wrote comments related to lack of knowledge about the SOC program. Ten indicated this provision was unrelated to their experience.

Two participants believed there was no difference between the requirements for student veterans and the requirements for non-veteran students. There were no cases that provided data for a first-hand personal experience related to this provision. However, one participant commented that they knew of a case when a special provision was granted for a fellow student veteran.

SOC item 7. SOC item 7, the SOC institution provided veterans the opportunity to earn credits through CLEP. Sixty-nine percent (31 of 45) of participants provided a descriptive response. Five participants indicated a lack of knowledge about the SOC program. Twelve participants were either not eligible or not interested in this SOC program provision.

Only two participants indicated they had taken advantage of the CLEP opportunity. One participant wrote they did not know about CLEP, but “if it is true, it makes me feel welcomed that they make the extra effort” at this institution.

Eight participants indicated student veterans needed more information about this program provision. One participant wrote “If I had known about this I wouldn’t be stuck in freshman English for a year.” Another wrote, “This would have been nice to know.”

A welcoming campus environment. SOC institutions have a welcoming campus environment for student veterans. Seventy-one percent (32 of 45) of participants provided a descriptive response.

More than half (17) described a welcoming campus environment. They associated the welcoming campus environment with support from the Office of Veteran Student Affairs, support from other student veterans, and “friendly students and faculty that make you feel welcome.”

Ten described a less than welcoming campus environment with comments like there was “nothing on an institutional level that I’ve noticed” to make student veterans feel welcome and “it seemed as if being a veteran did not make a difference from the perspective of the institution.” Another participant wrote “the campus doesn’t do much to support veterans.”

Five participants responded to this item from a more neutral perspective. For example, one wrote “It is no one’s job to make you feel anything. That is your own issue to deal with.” Another wrote “I feel out of place from time to time but that may be because I am surrounded by 18 year olds in class whom I cannot relate to.”

In summary, the qualitative data for participants in this study offered glimpses of how student veterans might associate SOC program provisions with a welcoming campus environment at a SOC program institution. However, analysis of the data revealed a lack of SOC program awareness for approximately one third of the cases. Analysis of the other two thirds revealed descriptive responses that ranged from extremely welcoming to not welcoming at all related to SOC items 1, 2, 4, and 5; a lack of first-hand experience related to SOC items 3, 6, and 7; and, a tendency for some to view the SOC program as synonymous with and perhaps limited to services related to The Office of Veteran Student Affairs.

RQ3. *To what extent does evidence from two different types of data support a theory based hypothesis of a connection between SOC program provisions and a welcoming campus environment for student veterans?*

The evidence drawn from two different types of data was used to answer RQ3. First, a side-by-side display was used to help visualize convergence of evidence. Table 4.5 is a joint display of evidence related to the SOC program items (Q1 – Q14) and the welcoming campus environment items (Q15 and Q16).

In the side-by-side comparison one could observe the potential for some of the evidence to have reflected a “source of error” stemmed from a lack of knowledge (Fowler, 2014, pp. 92 – 94), more specifically, a lack of SOC program awareness and a lack of first-hand personal experiences related to one or more SOC program provisions. Having no knowledge of the SOC program might have influenced some participants to choose the closed response item “to little or no extent” when asked how much a SOC program provision helped them feel welcomed at the institution.

To explore this apparent convergence of evidence, a case-by-case review of both types of data was used to determine how to account for the potential for error related to a lack of knowledge. An integrated approach revealed thirteen cases (cases 4, 8, 12, 18, 20, 24, 25, 27, 31, 36, 37, 39, and 41) wherein two conditions were met – (a) there was no variance among the responses given for all seven closed question items (1 = to little or no extent) that asked how much each SOC program provision helped them feel welcomed at the institution and (b) descriptive responses for the associated open question items provided only clarifying statements similar to “I am not aware of the SOC program.” In other words, there was no evidence in the

Table 4.5. Joint display of SOC program related evidence

Description	Quantitative evidence	Qualitative evidence
SOC item 1 – provide information in the admissions process	• 45 of 45 responded • 49% “to little or no extent”	• “well taken care of; a huge struggle” • “not aware of SOC” (17 of 37 responses)
SOC item 2 – provide veterans access to high quality education	• 45 of 45 responded • 51% “to little or no extent”	• “people who understand; chances to be a part of . . . ; I’ve seen better” • “not aware of SOC” (12 of 27 responses)
SOC item 3 – provide accommodations for military service	• 45 of 45 responded • 58% “to little or no extent”	• No first-hand experiences. One witnessed “staff working hard to resolve problems for others” • “not aware of SOC” (7 of 32 responses)
SOC item 4 –transfer credits if related to degree program	• 44 of 45 responded • 59% “to little or no extent”	• “frustrating retakes of courses; advisors not on the same page; caused problems with Post-9/11 GI Bill” • “not aware of SOC” (6 of 29 responses)
SOC item 5 – award credits for military training or experience related to degree program	• 44 of 45 responded • 68% “to little or no extent”	• Student veterans understand “program-related” • “years of intense training and experience counts for nothing – bummer; paying to retake things – ridiculous” • “not aware of SOC” (6 of 27 responses)

Table 4.5. Joint display of SOC program related evidence (continued)

Description	Quantitative evidence	Qualitative evidence
SOC item 6 –flexibility with the minimum amount of course work to earn a degree from the institution	• 45 of 45 responded • 58% “to little or no extent”	• No first-hand experiences. One knew of flexibility given for another student veteran • “no difference between student veterans and nonveteran students” • “not aware of SOC” (6 of 27 responses)
SOC item 7 –College Level Examination Program (CLEP)	• 44 of 45 responded • 61% “to little or no extent”	• Two used CLEP at UTK • “would have been nice to know” • “not applicable/interested” (12) • “not aware of SOC” (5 of 31 responses)
SOC program provisions related to a welcoming campus environment for student veterans	• SOC item 1, $\rho = .33, p < .05$ • SOC item 2, $\rho = .35, p < .05$ • SOC items 3 – 7, $p > .05$ • SOCagg, $p > .05$	• Lack of SOC program awareness • Lack of first-hand experiences related to some SOC program provisions • More than half described a welcoming environment • One third described a lack of support for student veterans

thirteen cases to dispute lack of knowledge as a potential source of error for data related to the SOC program items.

For the other 32 cases, the same integrated case-by-case approach was used to explore the lack of first-hand personal experience related to at least one of SOC items 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7. This approach revealed that in all 32 cases, participants varied their responses for closed question items within each case and also gave descriptive responses that seemed to reflect deliberate consideration of the open question items even if they had no personal experience with that item. For example, one participant wrote “I have not seen or experienced this, but if it is true then I would say that it makes me feel welcomed that they make the extra effort.” The same participant also indicated “To a very great extent” when asked about how much the SOC provision helped them feel welcomed as a student veteran at the institution. In other words, despite the often stated lack of experience associated with SOC items 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7, the integrated data analysis for all 32 cases appeared to reflect deliberate consideration of each SOC program provision from a student veteran perspective.

New evidence from an integrated analysis. Because the case-by-case review of integrated data suggested that student veteran opinions related to SOC program provisions were confounded by a lack of SOC program awareness in 13 cases, the quantitative data for the other 32 cases were analyzed separately to help control for the lack of SOC program awareness as a potential source of error. When quantitative data for the 32 cases were reconsidered, mean values for questionnaire items 7, 9, and 13 were recalculated (2.32, 1.9, and 2.42 respectively) and entered into the appropriate missing data cells for case 13. Descriptive data for the 32 cases were then recalculated and displayed in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6. Recalculated descriptive data ($n = 32$)

	SOC1	SOC2	SOC3	SOC4	SOC5	SOC6	SOC7	Welc Rate
Mean	2.97	2.78	2.44	2.32	1.90	2.47	2.42	3.44
Median	3.00	3.00	2.50	2.00	1.00	2.00	2.71	3.00
Mode	1	1 ^a	1	1	1	1	1	3
Std. Dev.	1.49	1.39	1.41	1.35	1.17	1.50	1.45	1.11
Minimum	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Maximum	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5

a. Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown. Another mode exists at 3.

Correlation coefficients (ρ) for opinions of SOC program items and ratings of the campus environment were also recalculated. See Table 4.7 for results.

Statistically significant positive correlations were observed for the relationships between ratings related to a welcoming campus environment and opinions related to SOC item 1 ($\rho = .661, p < .01$), SOC item 2 ($\rho = .637, p < .01$), and SOC item 3 ($\rho = .421, p < .05$). According to Cohen and Holliday as cited in Bryman and Cramer (2011, p. 214), the measures of correlation were modest. Essentially, the measure of correlation and the statistical significance of the correlation for SOC items 1 and 2 were greater after data for the 32 cases were analyzed separately. The measure of correlation for SOC item 3 was also significant after the 32 cases were analyzed separately.

Statistically significant positive correlations among the seven SOC program provisions were observed, and the recalculated value for Cronbach's Alpha among the seven SOC items was .91.

Values for SOCAgg and WelcRate were recalculated and correlation between the recalculated values was analyzed. Results are shown in Table 4.8. A positive correlation coefficient for the two measures ($\rho = .545$) was found to be statistically significant at $p < .01$. According to Cohen and Holliday as cited in Bryman and Cramer (2011, p. 214), the measure of correlation was modest.

In summary, the convergence of evidence from RQ1 and RQ2 illuminated the potential for error in quantitative data related to a lack of SOC program awareness. On reconsideration, the quantitative data analysis provided stronger evidence of a connection between SOC program provisions and a welcoming campus environment. The new analysis revealed modest, positive,

Table 4.7. Recalculated data analysis for Spearman's rho (ρ) related to SOC program opinions and welcoming campus environment ratings ($n = 32$)

		SOC1	SOC2	SOC3	SOC4	SOC5	SOC6	SOC7	Welc Rate
SOC1	ρ	1.000	.895**	.651**	.459**	.446*	.553**	.512**	.661**
SOC2	ρ	.895**	1.000	.712**	.419*	.430*	.574**	.530**	.637**
SOC3	ρ	.651**	.712**	1.000	.607**	.580**	.772**	.581**	.421*
SOC4	ρ	.459**	.419*	.607**	1.000	.768**	.660**	.598**	.252
SOC5	ρ	.446*	.430*	.580**	.768**	1.000	.613**	.566**	.293
SOC6	ρ	.553**	.574**	.772**	.660**	.613**	1.000	.380*	.334
SOC7	ρ	.512**	.530**	.581**	.598**	.566**	.380*	1.000	.321
Welc Rate	ρ	.661**	.637**	.421*	.252	.293	.334	.321	1.000

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 4.8. Recalculated data analysis for Spearman's rho (ρ) related to aggregated measures of SOC program related opinions and welcoming campus environment ratings ($n = 32$)

			SOCAgg	WelcRate
Spearman's rho	SOCAgg	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.545**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.001
	WelcRate	Correlation Coefficient	.545**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

and statistically significant correlation coefficients for SOC items 1, 2, and 3 – providing information veterans need in the admissions process, providing veterans access to a high quality education, and accommodating student veterans who experience interruptions or delays in their education due to military service. Also, correlations for all seven SOC program items were statistically significant and internal reliability measured .91. Finally, aggregate scores for SOC program items (SOCAgg) and ratings for the campus environment (WelcRate) had a modest, positive correlation coefficient ($\rho = .545$) with statistical significance ($p < .01$).

Analysis of integrated evidence within a human ecology framework. A human ecology perspective of the student veteran campus experience suggests SOC program provisions and a welcoming campus environment are connected from a student veteran point of view. According to human ecology theory, reciprocal interactions between student veterans and the institution would involve SOC program provisions as environmental conditions and a myriad of student veteran characteristics. The questionnaire for this study collected data for several student veteran characteristics reflected in the literature review. Data were analyzed for evidence of relationships among the characteristics and compared with a human ecology perspective to answer RQ3.

Student veteran opinions related to SOC program provisions and student veteran ratings related to a welcoming campus environment were the primary variables of interest. Other variables of interest included mattering to others on campus, veteran identity centrality on campus, and positive regard for veteran identity on campus. Likert response items related to each variable were included in the questionnaire – five items for mattering to others on campus (Q17, Q18, Q19, Q20, and Q21), five items for veteran identity centrality on campus (Q22, Q23, Q24, Q25, and Q26), and three items for positive regard for veteran identity on campus (Q27, Q28,

and Q29). Responses for the items related to each construct were quantified and then aggregated for analysis (MattAgg, VICSAgg, and PRVISAgg) (Bryman & Cramer, 2011, 57-60).

Additionally, subgroups of the student veteran population were identifiable by self-reported demographic information – student tenure at the institution (Q30), military status (Q31), intent to continue or return to military service (Q32), exposure to combat (Q33), age (Q34), sex (Q35), and race (Q36). Each of the 45 cases in this study contained a response for all items related to the constructs of interest and the demographic items of interest. However, integrated data for only 32 cases were analyzed because the other 13 cases reflected a lack of SOC program awareness.

Cronbach's Alpha measured for MattAgg, VICSAgg, and PRVISAgg were .861, .781, and .766 respectively. Correlations between SOCagg, WelcRate, MattAgg, VICSAgg, and PRVISAgg were analyzed. Correlations are displayed in Table 4.9. The analysis revealed positive correlation coefficients for SOCagg and WelcRate ($\rho = .545$), SOCagg and MattAgg ($\rho = .654$), and WelcRate and MattAgg ($\rho = .564$) statistically significant at $p < .01$. A negative

Table 4.9. Theme-by-statistic data analysis for Spearman's rho (ρ) related to SOCagg, WelcRate, MattAgg, VICSAgg, and PRVISAgg ($n = 32$)

		SOCagg	WelcRate	MattAgg	VICSagg	PRVISAgg
SOCagg	Correlation coefficient	1	.545**	.654**	.000	.284
WelcRate	Correlation coefficient	.545**	1	.564**	-.429*	.166
MattAgg	Correlation coefficient	.654**	.564**	1	-.090	.301
VICSagg	Correlation coefficient	.000	-.429*	-.090	1	.329
PRVISAgg	Correlation coefficient	.284	.166	.301	.329	1

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

correlation coefficient ($\rho = -.429$) was found to be statistically significant at $p < .05$ for WelcRate and VICSagg. According to Cohen and Holliday as cited in Bryman and Cramer (2011, p. 214), all of the measures of correlation were modest. Correlation coefficients for PRVISagg were found to be not statistically significant ($p > .05$).

Embedded units of analysis (EUAs). Yin's (2014, pp. 49-67) concept of embedded units of analysis (EUAs) was incorporated to explore the strength of the relationship between responses related to SOC program items and responses related to a welcoming campus environment from different perspectives within the student veteran population. After considering the 32 cases as a separate unit of analysis (UA), one EUA was identified as a subgroup of participants who rated the campus environment as welcoming (EUA1). Another EUA was identified as a subgroup of participants who rated the campus environment as less welcoming (EUA2). The mode for WelcRate was used to code each case as either EUA1 or EUA2. Cases with a WelcRate equal to or greater than 3 were coded EUA1, and cases with a WelcRate less than 3 were coded EUA2. The 26 cases coded EUA1 rated the campus environment moderately welcoming (12 cases), very welcoming (7 cases), or extremely welcoming (7 cases). The six cases coded EUA2 rated the campus environment either slightly welcoming (5 cases) or not at all welcoming (1 case). Table 4.10 is a joint display of data for EUA1, EUA2, and the UA.

The joint display of data revealed higher mean values related to SOCagg, Mattagg, and PRVISagg for EUA1 than for EUA2, and a higher mean value related to VICSagg for EUA2 than for EUA1. The display did not reveal any obvious differences between EUA1 and EUA2 related to demographic data. Quantitative evidence, qualitative evidence, and integrated evidence of differences and similarities between EUA1 and EUA2 were explored.

Table 4.10. Joint display of data for EUA1 and EUA2 with comparable UA data

	EUA1 (<i>n</i> = 26) (WelcRate $\geq$ 3)	EUA2 (<i>n</i> = 6) (WelcRate < 3)	UA (<i>n</i> = 32) (WelcRate 1 – 5)
SOCagg (Range = 7 – 35)	M = 18.83	M = 10.67	M = 17.3
MattAgg (Range = 5 – 20)	M = 12.7	M = 6.33	M = 11.47
VICSagg (Range = 5 – 25)	M = 16.3	M = 20.33	M = 17.06
PRVISagg (Range = 3 – 15)	M = 11.9	M = 10.00	M = 11.53
Tenure on campus	M = 4 semesters	M = 4 semesters	M = 4 semesters
Military status	3 Active Duty 3 National Guard 3 Reserves 17 Inactive	1 Active Duty 1 National Guard 1 Reserves 3 Inactive	4 Active Duty 4 National Guard 4 Reserves 20 Inactive
Intent regarding future military service	7 yes 19 no	2 yes 4 no	9 yes 23 no
Combat	18 yes 8 no	4 yes 2 no	22 yes 10 no
Age	2 < 26 10 26 – 30 11 31 – 40 1 41 – 50 2 51 – 60	2 < 26 2 26 – 30 2 31 – 40	4 < 26 12 26 – 30 13 31 – 40 1 41 – 50 2 51 – 60
Sex	22 male 4 female	5 male 1 female	27 male 5 female
Self-identified race/ethnicity	19 campus majority 7 campus minority	4 campus majority 2 campus minority	33 campus majority 12 campus minority

Quantitative evidence of differences and similarities between EUA1 and EUA2. A

Mann-Whitney *U* test was used to explore differences between EUA1 and EUA2 for SOCAgg, MattAgg, VICSagg, and PRVISAgg. Table 4.11 is a theme-by-statistic joint display of results. Mann-Whitney *U* test results indicated the differences between EUA1 and EUA2 were statistically significant ($p < .05$) for SOCAgg and MattAgg. Differences between EUA1 and EUA2 were not statistically significant ($p > .05$) for VICSagg and PRVISAgg.

A crosstabulation controlling for mattering to others on campus was used to test for differences between EUA1 and EUA2 related to SOC program opinions and welcoming campus environment ratings (Bryman & Cramer, 2011, pp. 282 – 287). SOCAgg values equal to or greater than the median (15.0) and SOCAgg values less than the median were coded high (1) and low (2) respectively. MattAgg values equal to or greater than the median (12.0) and MattAgg values less than the median were coded high (1) and low (2) respectively. Table 4.12 is a display of the crosstabulation data for EUA1 and EUA2.

The results indicated a moderated relationship between opinions related to SOC program provisions and ratings related to a welcoming campus environment when controlling for mattering. It showed that the 16 cases with high aggregate scores for mattering reflected a stronger relationship between SOC program provisions and perceptions of the campus environment than the 16 cases with low aggregate scores for mattering. In other words, the crosstabulation showed that for some participants in this study the SOC program was more connected to the campus experience, and those participants rated the campus environment more welcoming for student veterans.

Table 4.11. Data analysis of Mann-Whitney U Test Statistics^a for differences

	SOCAgg	MattAgg	VICSAgg	PRVISAgg
Mann-Whitney U	30.500	2.500	38.000	50.500
Wilcoxon W	51.500	23.500	389.000	71.500
Z	-2.303	-3.689	-1.939	-1.341
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.021	.000	.052	.180
Exact Sig. [2*(1-tailed Sig.)]	.019 ^b	.000 ^b	.055 ^b	.189 ^b

a. Grouping Variables: EUA1 ($n = 26$) and EUA2 ($n = 6$)

b. Not corrected for ties.

Table 4.12. Data analysis of crosstabulation with EUA1 and EUA2 coded for high and low SOCAgg values, controlling for mattering to others on campus

Mattering High = 1 (≥ 12)						
Mattering Low = 2 (< 12)				EUA1	EUA2	Total
1	SOC High = 1	1 (≥ 15)	Count	13		13
			% within EUA	81.3%		81.3%
	SOC Low = 2	2 (< 15)	Count	3		3
			% within EUA	18.8%		18.8%
	Total		Count	16		16
			% within EUA	100.0%		100.0%
2	SOC High = 1	1 (≥ 15)	Count	5	2	7
			% within EUA	50.0%	33.3%	43.8%
	SOC Low = 2	2 (< 15)	Count	5	4	9
			% within EUA	50.0%	66.7%	56.3%
	Total		Count	10	6	16
			% within EUA	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Total	SOC High = 1	1 (≥ 15)	Count	18	2	20
			% within EUA	69.2%	33.3%	62.5%
	SOC Low = 2	2 (< 15)	Count	8	4	12
			% within EUA	30.8%	66.7%	37.5%
	Total		Count	26	6	32
			% within EUA	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Qualitative evidence of differences and similarities between EUA1 and EUA2.

Qualitative data related to open question items were analyzed for evidence of a connection between SOC program provisions and a welcoming campus environment for student veterans. A comparison of data revealed one notable difference between EUA1 and EUA2. Cases representing EUA1 reflected both welcoming and less welcoming SOC program experiences. Cases representing EUA2 reflected only less welcoming SOC program experiences.

The comparison of data also revealed several explicit and implicit similarities in descriptions of conditions related to welcoming SOC program experiences. The similarities in Table 4.13 showed a convergence of evidence to suggest that having staff members who are both supportive of veterans and conscious of veterans' issues in higher education is a condition for welcoming experiences related to SOC items 1, 2, and 3. Another convergence of evidence suggested that having SOC program related information available for student veterans is a condition for welcoming experiences related to SOC items 1, 2, 4, 5, and 7. Yet another convergence of evidence suggested that having counselors, advisors, faculty, and administrators who are sensitive to veteran perspectives of veterans issues is a condition for welcoming experiences related to SOC items 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7.

Qualitative data for open question items Q16 (campus environment) and Q37 (other information) were evaluated for evidence related to the connection between SOC program provisions and a welcoming campus environment for student veterans. Two EUA1 cases related a welcoming campus environment to having staff members who were both supportive of veterans and conscious of veterans' issues in higher education. Two other EUA1 cases and one

Table 4.13. Qualitative data for conditions related to welcoming SOC program experiences

SOC provisions	Conditions related to welcoming SOC program experiences
SOC item 1 admissions process	Based on qualitative data from 14 EUA1 cases and 3 EUA2 cases • staff members supportive of veterans and conscious of veterans issues in higher education • information about veteran services available on campus
SOC item 2 access to high quality education	Based on qualitative data from 9 EUA1 cases ^a • staff members supportive of veterans and conscious of veterans issues in higher education • information about veteran services available on campus • “veterans only” space on campus
SOC item 3 accommodations for delays and interruptions due to military service	Based on qualitative data from four EUA1 cases and one EUA2 case ^b • staff members supportive of veterans and conscious of veterans issues in higher education • a flexible attendance policy among faculty to accommodate military service in the National Guard or Reserves • accommodations for disabilities related to military services
SOC item 4 transfer credits	Based on qualitative data from eleven EUA1 cases and one EUA2 case ^b • agreeing with decisions regarding transfer credits • information about how to appeal decisions • timely decisions
SOC item 5 credits for military training and experience	Based on qualitative data from 12 EUA1 cases ^{a, b} • agreeing with decisions regarding credits for military training and experience • having information about this SOC program provision
SOC item 6 in residence policies	Based on qualitative data from three EUA1 cases and one EUA2 case ^b • agreeing with decisions and policies regarding course work in residence
SOC item 7 CLEP	Based on qualitative data from nine EUA1 cases and one EUA2 case ^b • opportunity to take CLEP and have results accepted for credit • more CLEP tests accepted for credit is better • having information about CLEP tests and policies regarding CLEP tests

^a No EUA2 cases offered qualitative data for this item

^b More than half of the cases described a less than welcoming experience for this item

EUA2 case related a welcoming campus environment to having faculty and administrators who accommodated student veterans' service related disabilities.

Additionally, data for open question items Q16 (campus environment) and Q37 (other information) from the 13 previously separated cases were evaluated for evidence related to the connection between SOC program provisions and a welcoming campus environment for student veterans. Seven of the 13 cases described some of the same conditions described in cases for both EUA1 and EUA2. Six of the seven cases related a welcoming campus environment to having staff members who are both supportive of veterans and conscious of veterans' issues in higher education. Two of the seven related a welcoming campus environment to having information tailored to student veterans' needs. One of the seven related a welcoming campus environment to having staff members, faculty members, and administrators who are sensitive to student veterans' issues in higher education. When the qualitative data for all cases were considered ($N = 45$), participants in twelve cases (27 %) described conditions related to a welcoming campus environment for student veterans in terms that reflected descriptions of welcoming SOC program experiences.

Qualitative data for Q16 and Q37 were also analyzed for evidence of mattering to others on campus as an alternative explanation for a welcoming campus environment for student veterans. The evidence in Table 4.14 showed the potential for SOC program experiences and mattering to others on campus to be interrelated from a student veteran point of view. Table 4.15 showed the potential for a welcoming campus environment and mattering to others on campus to be interrelated from a student veteran point of view. In essence, the qualitative evidence reflected

Table 4.14. Qualitative data related to mattering to others on campus from responses to SOC program items

Source	Evidence of mattering to others on campus
EUA1 (<i>n</i> = 26)	• Twelve cases (46%) used words like welcomed, encouraged, helped, “cared about,” and “taken care of” to describe their feelings related to at least one SOC program provision • “I very much felt like I was on my own.” • “There isn’t much offered that isn’t available to non-veteran students.”
EUA2 (<i>n</i> = 6)	• “One person [in the Office of Veterans Affairs at UTK] welcomed me. No one else on campus really cares if you exist.”
Separated cases (<i>n</i> = 13)	• My veteran status “pretty much went unnoticed. Unfortunately, not being recognized for your service is par for the course.”

Table 4.15. Qualitative data related to mattering to others on campus from responses to welcoming campus environment item

Source	Evidence of mattering to others on campus
EUA1 (<i>n</i> = 26)	• “The school, the VA office on campus, students, and faculty make you feel welcome.” • “Most faculty and staff appreciate a veteran’s service.” • “Students have been supportive. Fellow veterans have been welcoming. Staff doesn’t seem to care if I am a veteran.” • “Knowing other veterans in your class makes you feel more welcome and not alone.” • “Student veteran support group is great.” • “Disappointed to see there was no physical space on campus for veterans.” • “The campus doesn’t do much to support veterans. We are largely a forgotten group. The University cares more about supporting the Pride Center than it does its veterans.” • “I like UT because it is closer to the real world. NO ONE CARES who you are or where you came from. You are there to learn and better yourself. IT IS NO ONE’S JOB TO CARE ABOUT YOUR FEELINGS.” • “Other institutions have far outpaced UTK in terms of integrating veterans on campus.”
EUA2 (<i>n</i> = 6)	• “It seemed as if being a veteran did not make a difference from the perspective of the institution.” • “It is almost as if the UT student population is too large for anyone to have time to care about strenuous circumstances that some student veterans may be enduring.” • “Last fall, students on campus . . . burning the flag we fought for. I don’t really feel comfortable with students disrespecting us.”
Separat ed cases (<i>n</i> = 13)	• “People always thank me for my service when I tell them I was in the [military].” • “Everyone has been very welcoming and respectful of my prior service.”

quantitative evidence of the interrelatedness of SOC program provisions, a welcoming campus environment, and mattering to others on campus.

Evidence integrated with theory. The evidence from both quantitative data and qualitative data for EUA1 and EUA2 suggested a moderated relationship between the SOC program and a welcoming campus environment when controlling for mattering. In other words, the analysis suggested that welcoming SOC program experiences are beneficial to student veterans' beliefs related to mattering to others on campus and to their perspectives of a welcoming campus environment for student veterans.

Furthermore, some evidence suggested a connection between student veteran perspectives and the general concepts of human ecology theory. For example, one participant described how the political environment associated with recent elections affected the campus environment. Some participants described how DOD policies regarding military education benefits affected their education experience in different ways. One participant wrote "the South is welcoming for student veterans, so the campus is indirectly welcoming," and another wrote about "strong military support in the State." All of these comments reflected how conditions of the macrosystems, exosystems, and mesosystems can influence the student veteran campus experience at an institution.

In summary, the data analysis for RQ3 found that student veteran opinions related to SOC program provisions were confounded by a lack of SOC program awareness. After controlling for the potential error related to a lack of SOC program awareness, evidence from quantitative was recalculated and evidence from qualitative data was reconsidered. Further analysis revealed evidence of a statistically significant relationship ($\rho = .545, p < .01, n = 32$)

between SOC items and the welcoming campus environment item and also revealed evidence that student veterans associate a welcoming campus environment with SOC program related experiences. An in-depth analysis of evidence derived from the analysis of qualitative data revealed three SOC program related conditions that participants referred to when they described a welcoming campus environment. The three common conditions were (a) having staff members who are both supportive of veterans and conscious of veterans' issues in higher education; (b) having SOC program related information available for student veterans; and (c) having counselors, advisors, faculty, and administrators who are sensitive to veteran perspectives of SOC program related issues in higher education. Furthermore, the evidence suggested mattering to others on campus and veteran identity centrality on campus are related to the connection between the SOC program and a welcoming campus environment for student veterans. Finally, the correlation coefficients for the seven SOC program items used in this study were statistically significant, and Cronbach's Alpha for the seven items was .91.

RQ4. *Does the evidence of this study suggest inequalities for any identifiable subgroups of the student veteran population?*

The overarching objective of a transformative design for this study involved a search for evidence of inequalities for identifiable subgroup(s) of the student veteran population. Student veteran subgroups were identifiable by self-reported data related to demographic items on the questionnaire. Although the joint display of data for EUA1 and EUA2 (Table 4.10) showed no discernable pattern of differences related to demographic information, the crosstabulation of data for EUA1 and EUA2 (Table 4.12) suggested that some participants benefitted from SOC program provisions more so than others.

Spearman's rho was used to analyze correlations between student veteran tenure at the institution (Q30) and the ordinal data for SOCAgg, WelcRate, MattAgg, VICSAgg, and PRVISAgg. Correlation coefficients were found to be not statistically significant ($p > .05$) for participants in this study.

One qualitative data point indicated student veterans in National Guard or Reserve status may have a different perspective than student veterans in an inactive status. To explore the possibility of differences among student veterans on Active Duty, National Guard, Reserve, and inactive status (Q31), the Kruskal-Wallis H test was used to analyze differences related to SOCAgg, WelcRate, MattAgg, VICSAgg, and PRVISAgg. Differences among the subgroups were found to be not statistically significant ($p > .05$). However, to consider the possibility of a difference between active and inactive military status, the values for Active Duty, National Guard and Reserve were recoded (Bryman & Cramer, 2011, pp. 54-57) into a different variable (ActiveMil) to create one subgroup of participants in active status to compare with the subgroup of participants with an inactive status. The Mann-Whitney U test was used to explore differences between the two subgroups, and the differences were found to be not statistically significant ($p > .05$).

The Mann-Whitney U test was used to explore differences between student veterans who do intend to either continue or return to military service after completing their education and those who do not (Q32). Differences for the two subgroups related to SOCAgg, WelcRate, MattAgg, VICSAgg, and PRVISAgg were found to be not statistically significant ($p > .05$). There was no qualitative evidence observed to suggest a difference between the two subgroups.

The Mann-Whitney U test was used to explore differences between student veterans who were and student veterans who were not exposed to combat, hostile-fire, or imminent danger while serving in the military (Q33). Differences between the two subgroups related to SOCagg, WelcRate, MattAgg, VICSagg, and PRVISAgg were found to be not statistically significant ($p > .05$). There was no qualitative evidence observed to suggest a difference between the two subgroups.

The joint display of data for EUA1 and EUA2 in Table 4.10 showed no discernable pattern of differences related to age; however, a few cases mentioned their difference in age compared to other students as a reason for “feeling out of place.” Spearman’s rho was used to analyze correlations between student veteran age (Q34) and the ordinal data for SOCagg, WelcRate, MattAgg, VICSagg, and PRVISAgg. All of the correlations were found to be not statistically significant ($p > .05$) for the participants in this study.

One case described a student veteran campus experience that suggested there may be a difference between male and female student veteran experiences (Q35). The Mann-Whitney U test was used to explore differences between the two subgroups related to SOCagg, WelcRate, MattAgg, VICSagg, and PRVISAgg. Differences were found to be not statistically significant ($p > .05$).

The Mann-Whitney test U was used to explore differences between a subgroup of participants who self-identified with the white or Caucasian majority student population on campus and a subgroup of participants who self-identified with a race or ethnicity other than white or Caucasian, a mixed race, or a mixed culture (Q36). Differences between the two subgroups related to SOCagg, WelcRate, MattAgg, VICSagg, and PRVISAgg were found to be

not statistically significant ($p > .05$). However, there were no participants to represent student veterans in the Black, Non-Hispanic category, and the sample size for representatives of all categories other than White, Non-Hispanic was small.

In summary, the results for RQ4 found no evidence from the analysis of quantitative data and few examples of evidence from the analysis of qualitative data to suggest there were any inequalities for identifiable subgroups of student veterans represented by participants in this study. However, given the small sample of participants in this study and the even smaller samples of participants to represent various subgroups within the student veteran population, the results for RQ4 are inconclusive.

Summary of Chapter Four

The data analysis for this study considered four research questions. RQ1 sought quantitative evidence that student veterans relate SOC program provisions to a welcoming campus environment. Analysis of quantitative data found the correlations for SOC items 1 and 2 were statistically significant. Analysis also found statistically significant correlations and a high level of internal reliability among the seven SOC program items; however, the correlation between aggregate scores for SOC items and ratings for a welcoming campus environment were found to not be statistically significant.

RQ2 sought qualitative evidence that student veterans associate SOC program provisions with a welcoming campus environment. Analysis of qualitative data offered evidence of how some student veterans might associate SOC program provisions with a welcoming campus environment. Among, the most prevalent findings from the analysis were the lack of SOC

program awareness among almost one third of the participants and the lack of first-hand personal experience with one or more SOC program provisions among all other participants.

RQ3 sought evidence from the two different types of data that would support a hypothesis based on human ecology theory. The hypothesis suggests that SOC program provisions and a welcoming campus environment are connected from a student veteran perspective. The analysis of evidence revealed that student veteran opinions related to SOC program provisions were confounded by a lack of SOC program awareness in thirteen cases. After separating 13 cases to control for the potential error related to a lack of SOC program awareness, evidence revealed (a) a high level of internal reliability ($\alpha = .91$) for the seven SOC program items used in this study; (b) a statistically significant relationship between aggregate values for SOC program provisions and values for a welcoming campus environment ($\rho = .564$, $p < .01$, $n = 32$); and, (c) reciprocal interactions involving SOC program provisions that multiple participants related to a welcoming campus environment for student veterans. Furthermore, the analysis revealed that welcoming SOC program experiences were more advantageous for some participants than for others. Essentially, the integrated analysis of a mixed methods approach illuminated findings that may have eluded a study devoted to either a quantitative or qualitative approach.

RQ4 sought evidence of inequalities for any identifiable subgroup(s) of the student veteran population. Participants in this study represented student veteran subgroups identifiable by their tenure at the institution, military status, intentions regarding continued or future military service, exposure to combat, age, sex, or minority status on campus. Quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed, and the findings were inconclusive.

It makes me feel welcomed that they make the extra effort.

SOC program study participant

Chapter 5

Summary, Discussion and Conclusions

Introduction

The problem addressed by this study is the bounded awareness associated with the Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC) program in higher education. Bazerman and Tenbrunsel (2011) described bounded awareness as the gap between the reality of an institution as seen by an administrator and the reality of the institution as seen from a different point of view. In 2014, only SOC program institutions were recognized by *U. S. News & World Report* as one of the “Best Colleges for Veterans” (Best Colleges for Veterans Methodology, 2014). Essentially, even though there was no evidence from a student veteran point of view, SOC program principles and criteria were assumed to help provide a welcoming environment for student veterans. The purpose of this study was to explore the connection between the SOC program and the campus environment through a student veteran lens.

A concurrent transformative mixed methods design (Creswell, 2009, 2015; Mertens, 2007) incorporated survey research (Fowler, 2014) to collect and analyze data. A questionnaire was designed with closed question items and open question items to collect two different types of parallel and comparable data. The data from two different perspectives were collected concurrently. The data sets were analyzed separately. Evidence from the separate analyses was merged and then analyzed for convergence of evidence and compared for consistency with a

theoretical perspective of a connection between the SOC program and a welcoming campus environment for student veterans. An overarching transformative design facilitated the analysis of data for evidence of inequalities related to any identifiable subgroup of student veterans represented by participants in the study.

Four research questions were addressed:

RQ1 – Does the analysis of quantitative evidence indicate student veterans relate SOC program provisions to a welcoming campus environment?

RQ2 – Does the analysis of qualitative evidence suggest student veterans associate SOC program provisions with a welcoming campus environment?

RQ3 – To what extent does evidence from two different types of data support a theory based perspective that suggests a connection between SOC program provisions and a welcoming campus environment for student veterans?

RQ4 – Does the evidence of this study suggest inequalities for any identifiable subgroups of the student veteran population?

This chapter includes a summary of the findings and a discussion of associated implications from a student veteran point of view. Conclusions are drawn from the study and recommendations are offered to enhance the effectiveness of SOC programs at the institutional level. Recommendations for future research are also discussed.

Summary of the Findings

- Statistically significant positive correlations and internal reliability ($\alpha = .91$) among the seven SOC program items used in this study

- A convergence of evidence connecting the SOC program and a welcoming campus environment for student veterans
 - Correlation between aggregate values for opinions related to SOC items used in the study (SOCAgg) and ratings for how welcoming the campus environment is for student veterans (WelcRate) ($\rho = .564, p < .01, n = 32$)
 - Connections between SOC program provisions and a welcoming campus environment for student veterans in written descriptions from twelve study participants
- A convergence of evidence relating mattering to others on campus to the connection between the SOC program and a welcoming campus environment
 - Study participants who rated the campus environment as welcoming for student veterans (SOCAgg) were more likely to have a higher aggregate score for mattering to others on campus (MattAgg) than those who rated the campus environment less welcoming for student veterans
 - Approximately half of the study participants who rated the campus environment welcoming for student veterans also described a welcoming experience related to at least one SOC program provision in terms that reflected factors associated with the construct of mattering
 - Study participants who rated the campus environment less welcoming did not describe any welcoming experience related to the SOC program and described the campus environment in terms that reflected marginality

- Quantitative evidence of an inverse relationship between student veteran ratings for a welcoming campus environment (WelcRate) and aggregate scores for veteran identity centrality on campus (VICSAgg) ($\rho = -.429, p < .05, n = 32$)
- Qualitative evidence of a tendency among student veterans to view the SOC program as emanating from one centralized office or staff at the institution
- A convergence of evidence to indicate a lack of SOC program awareness among student veterans
 - Thirteen cases of study participants who responded “to little or no extent” when asked how much each SOC program provision helped them feel welcomed at the institution and also stated a lack of SOC program awareness in open text responses
 - Twelve respondents who wrote statements similar to “never heard of SOC” and chose to not complete the questionnaire for this study
- No evidence to relate positive regard for veteran identity on campus to other variables in the study
- Inconclusive results for the question of inequalities for identifiable subgroups of student veterans related to their student tenure at the institution (how many semesters); their current status with the military (active, guard, reserve, inactive); their intent to either continue or return to military service after completing their current goal for post-secondary education; if they were ever exposed to combat, hostile fire, or imminent danger while serving in the military; their age; their sex; and, their race/ethnicity

Discussion

A review of literature indicated a need for a contextual perspective in studies related to the student veteran experience (Vacchi & Berger, 2014). Human ecology theory suggests the student-institution relationship reflects the influence of factors in the macro-, exo-, and mesosystems of the environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1995; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Evans et al., 2010; Renn & Arnold, 2003). Participants in this study indicated the validity of using human ecology theory to study the student veteran campus experience when they described their campus as “indirectly welcoming” because “the South is welcoming for student veterans” and because there was “strong military support in the State.” Some indicated the validity of human ecology theory when they described how DOD policies affected their education experience.

The SOC program and campus environment connection. A human ecology perspective was used to hypothesize a connection between SOC program provisions and a welcoming campus environment for student veterans. The *process, person, context, time/timing (PPCT)* model of human ecology theory was used as a framework to review literature and guide this study of the theoretical connection.

Findings in this study offered a convergence of evidence to suggest there is a lack of SOC program awareness among student veterans. However, after controlling for this limiting factor, further analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data indicated student veterans relate SOC program provisions to a welcoming campus environment even if they don’t recognize the provisions as part of efforts at an institution to operationalize SOC program principles and criteria. A statistically significant correlation coefficient ($\rho = .564, p < .01, n = 32$) was found for

aggregate values related to SOC program provisions and values related to a welcoming campus environment. Essentially, the correlation coefficient for participant responses at this institution indicated the student veteran perspective of a welcoming campus environment was partially related to SOC program provisions. The analysis of qualitative evidence also indicated the student veteran perspective of a welcoming campus environment was associated with SOC program provisions. Twelve study participants wrote descriptions of a welcoming campus environment in terms that reflected their personal perspectives and experiences associated with SOC program provisions at the institution. Both perspectives (quantitative and qualitative) were consistent with the theoretical perspective of a connection between the SOC program and the campus environment.

The SOC program and acculturation to campus connection. The goal of the SOC program is to smooth the transition from the environment of military service into an academic environment and then onward, either to civilian employment or a return to military service with an opportunity for enhanced effectiveness and greater responsibility as a soldier, sailor, airman, or marine. The human ecology perspective, the literature, and the evidence of this study suggest that being a veteran in an academic environment may be a less than welcoming experience simply because of cultural differences.

The review of literature suggested that reciprocal interactions involving SOC program provisions are part of the process of acculturation to campus for student veterans at SOC program institutions and that student veterans may experience acculturative stress (Berry, 1997, p.13) in the process. The literature related to acculturation to campus connected acculturative stress to a sense of belonging among acculturating group members (Mena, Padilla, &

Maldonado, 1987), a sense of belonging to “mattering to others on campus” (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 17), and mattering to “positive student experiences with institutional agents such as instructors and counselors, and with student centered programs, policies, and procedures” (Tovar, Simon, & Lee, 2009, p. 174). Results of this study were consistent with the literature. Mattering to others on campus was found to be related to a welcoming campus environment and SOC program provisions. The findings suggest mattering to others on campus may be a useful measure to gauge the success of institutional efforts (including SOC program provisions) intended to facilitate the integration of student veterans in a campus environment.

The literature also connected acculturative stress to strength of identity among acculturating group members in a campus environment (Mena, Padilla, & Maldonado, 1987). Again, results of this study were consistent with the literature. Veteran identity centrality on campus was found to have an inverse relationship with the student veteran perspective of a welcoming campus environment. This may suggest that within group differences among student veterans are related to strength of veteran identity centrality more so than other factors. If so, it would be consistent with other research findings that indicate military cultural identity has been found to “take precedence over other common identities such as race, gender, sexual orientation, political party, or socioeconomic status” (Meyer, Writer, & Brim, 2016, p. 5).

Cultural complexities and a transformative paradigm. An overarching transformative paradigm (Creswell, 2015; Mertens, 2007) of this study focused on advocacy for a more culturally competent approach in designing research and interpreting findings from research associated with the student veteran experience. The overarching goal of a transformative paradigm is to “improve the lives of individuals in our society today” (Creswell, 2015, p. 7) by

addressing “problems that reside in practice or in the real world that need to be addressed” (p. 13).

The results of this study indicate SOC program principles and criteria can make a difference in the student veteran experience; however, how and how much they make a difference may depend on the strength of each student veteran’s identity with military culture. It is reasonable to assume that an institutional commitment to support SOC program principles and criteria sends a message to student veterans that they are “accepted, respected, valued by, and important to others on campus” (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 17), and if student veterans perceive the same message in reciprocal interactions with institutional agents, policies, and procedures in the administration of SOC program provisions, then they are likely to believe the institutional commitment is genuine and also believe their cultural identity matters to others at the institution. On the other hand, if they perceive their identity is not accepted, respected, valued, or important on campus, they might believe the institutional commitment is disingenuous and also believe their identity does not matter to others at the institution.

In this study, participants used the following words and phrases to describe their feelings associated with “persons, objects, and symbols” in the campus environment of a SOC program institution – “helped, welcomed, appreciated, supported, not alone, cared about, taken care of, respected, on my own, unnoticed, forgotten, disrespected, and no one else cares.” While the words and phrases expressed a range of student veteran perspectives, there were no indications that student veterans respond to environmental stimuli in any ways that are different from other nontraditional students. In the few cases of participants who mentioned “feeling out of place” and not being able to find common interests with traditional 18 year old students, they attributed

their feelings to a difference in age, a difference in marital status, and a difference in the amount of time they spend on campus. Their explanations reflected findings in an abundance of research that prompted Kasworm (1990) to write “Adult students are not the same creatures as young adult undergraduates. They participate in a marginal status in higher education . . . reflected by the part-time enrollment each semester, the limited physical presence on the college campus, or the limited out-of-class interactions within the academic community” (p. 366).

Within a supportive human ecology framework, this study provided evidence of a natural range of attitudes and behaviors among student veterans in response to stimuli of the campus environment at a SOC program institution. The contextual approach allowed findings to emerge that were free of stigma and stereotypes that have perhaps been unfairly generalized to the student veteran population.

The strength of mixed methods. Evidence from the study was strengthened by the advantage of focusing the quantitative strand and the qualitative strand on parallel and comparable variables. If focused exclusively on quantitative data for RQ1, the evidence of this study would have indicated low statistically significant correlations (Bryman & Cramer, 2011, p. 214) for only two of the seven SOC program items and no statistically significant relationship between ratings of the campus environment and aggregate ratings for the SOC program items. However, because the study included qualitative data in a parallel fashion, a potential source of error related to a lack of SOC program awareness among study participants was revealed in the analysis of data for RQ2.

After separating the data for thirteen cases to control for a lack of SOC program awareness, the evidence of this study “contributed more to understanding the research problem

than one form of data collection (quantitative or qualitative) could on its own” (Creswell, 2015, p. 3). When the quantitative data was recalculated, the evidence of this study indicated modest statistically significant correlations (Bryman & Cramer, 2011, p. 214) for three of the seven SOC program items and a modest statistically significant positive correlation between ratings for the campus environment and aggregate ratings for the SOC program items. Also, when the qualitative data was reanalyzed, trends and personal experiences revealed three SOC program related conditions that participants connected to a welcoming campus environment for student veterans.

Participants wrote explicit and implicit comments in their open text responses to infer three conditions are important in the connection between SOC program experiences and a welcoming campus environment – having staff members who are both supportive of veterans and conscious of veterans’ issues in higher education; having SOC program related information available for student veterans; and having counselors, advisors, faculty, and administrators who are sensitive to veteran perspectives of veterans’ issues in higher education. The three conditions emerged from common themes in the qualitative data presented in Table 4.13. Comments written by student veterans related the three conditions to the seven SOC program provisions used in this study. The connections between the three conditions and the seven SOC program provisions were condensed for display in Table 5.1.

The connections emerged from similarities in qualitative data reflected across three groupings of cases in this study – cases representing participants who rated the campus environment welcoming for student veterans, cases representing participants who rated the campus environment less than welcoming for student veterans, and cases representing

Table 5.1. Conditions for welcoming SOC program experiences related to a welcoming campus environment for student veterans

	SOC1	SOC2	SOC3	SOC4	SOC5	SOC6	SOC7
Staff members who are both supportive of veterans and conscious of veterans' issues in higher education	X	X	X				
SOC program related information available for student veterans	X	X		X	X		X
Counselors, advisors, faculty, and administrators who are sensitive to veteran perspectives of veterans' issues in higher education			X	X	X	X	X

participants who stated they had a lack of SOC program awareness. Accordingly, the similarities were expressed from favorable perspectives, from unfavorable perspectives, and from a lack of SOC program awareness.

For SOC items 1, 2, and 3, participant responses indicated a supportive environment if institutional agents seemed to understand and exhibit a desire to help resolve student veteran issues in the admissions process and in the orientation process. Evidence for items 1, 2, and 3 was primarily favorable; however, for SOC items 1, 2, 4, 5, and 7, participants specifically mentioned either a lack of SOC program awareness or a need for student veterans to have more information about the specific SOC program provision.

For SOC items 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7, more than half of the participants described some dissatisfaction. Related to SOC item 3, participants expressed uncertainty about how to seek

accommodations for service requirements in their National Guard or Reserve units and how to seek accommodations for service related disabilities that affected their academic performance. Participants expressed dissatisfaction with decisions related to transfer credits (SOC item 4), decisions related to credits for military training and experience (SOC item 5), not having information about how to appeal decisions, and, in one case, waiting what seemed like too long for a response to an appeal. Although no participant had a first-hand experience with SOC item 6, some participants expressed doubt that a reprieve would be granted for in residence course work requirements. For SOC item 7, participants expressed frustration because they did not know about the College Level Examination Program (CLEP) opportunity on campus.

Limitations and Delimitations.

As briefly discussed in Chapter 3, the findings of this study are limited by several factors. First, the study involved one group of student veterans at one institution at one point in time. Any number of human ecology characteristics affecting the connection between the SOC program and the campus environment for student veterans can change over time. As suggested by the human ecology perspective, changes that affect the student veteran experience at a SOC program institution may occur at any level. Consequently, the findings from this study are limited by time.

The findings from this study are also limited by a low participation rate and a lack of SOC program awareness among student veterans. However, the convergence of evidence derived from the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data collected from student veterans within the context of a SOC program institution suggested that relationships among the variables of

interest were consistent with theoretical perspectives in higher education. Future research can address the limitations of this study and will be addressed later in this chapter.

Finally, the findings of this study are limited by my personal experiences. I have lived in the student veteran perspective of the central issues of this study. At different points in time during my military career, I was a student veteran associated with four of the five different patterns that Asch, Kilburn, and Klerman (1999) identified as the different ways student veterans combine college and military service. I have also lived in the college administrator perspective of the central issues of this study. For several years during my academic career, I was a counselor and advisor for student veterans in all five of the cultural patterns. I often had a first-hand perspective of the tension involved in trying to find an appropriate balance between student veterans' interests and institutional interests within the framework of policies and provisions guided by SOC program principles and criteria. While my different perspectives of the central issue are based on personal and professional experience, they are nevertheless grounded in the subjectivity of my world view.

Creswell (2009) offered a discussion of the transformative design as a distinct form of research that “uses a theoretical lens as an overarching perspective” (p. 235) within a design that mixes the “bias-free” commitment of quantitative methods with the “bias-laden” commitment of qualitative methods to study issues related to a marginalized group (pp. 66-67). My interpretation of Creswell's discussion of the transformative design helped me to recognize the advantages of this niche among the several possible designs I considered for this study. Using a questionnaire administered electronically to concurrently collect both quantitative and qualitative data provided the opportunity to leverage my personal and professional experience while minimizing the direct

influence I might have had on study participants. In preparation for the study, I relied on the advice and perspectives of experienced faculty, staff, administrators, and graduate and undergraduate student veterans regarding the design and protocols used in the study. Finally, I relied on theoretical perspectives and the expertise of faculty members to reflect on and address the vulnerabilities associated with my personal and professional bias regarding the central issues of the study. Thus, while this study is “bias-laden” with my lifelong participation in the multiple student veteran experiences with SOC program institutions, it was carried out in a way that incorporated every reasonable precaution to conduct a study that can “improve the lives of individuals in our society today” (Creswell, 2015, p. 7) by addressing “problems that reside in practice or in the real world that need to be addressed” (p. 13).

Recommendations

Participants in this study identified three general conditions that connect SOC program experiences to the student veteran perception of a welcoming campus environment (Table 5.1). Their observations invite suggestions that may enhance efforts to promote a welcoming campus environment for student veterans at a SOC program institution. The following suggestions are offered from my perspective as a participant observer.

- Combine military cultural competency and SOC program principles and criteria in recruitment, admissions, academic advising, and college and career counseling for student veterans.

Topics on military cultural competency (Meyer, Writer, & Brim, 2016) and counseling adults in transition (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012) can be incorporated in staff and faculty development programs (Kelley, Smith, & Fox, 2013). Particular attention should be given

to cultural patterns for members of reserve components. Our national defense, homeland security, and disaster response capabilities are heavily dependent on our reserve components. A student veteran who is an active member of a reserve or National Guard unit may experience multiple transition events as they attempt to maintain academic progress between military service requirements, different policies and procedures at academic institutions, and perhaps a leave of absence and then returning to their civilian job after activation for duty. In some cases, a transition event may involve treatment and rehabilitation for medical issues related to military service. Furthermore, all student veterans are not transitioning to an identity outside of their military career, and may not be interested in shedding their identity with military culture. This reality may affect how their attitudes and behaviors are perceived by members of academic and civilian cultures.

Topics related to SOC program principles and criteria should be incorporated in staff and faculty development programs to help them understand how SOC principles and criteria relate to the student veteran experience at the institution. If institutional agents understand how veterans' issues in higher education include SOC program related issues, then they may be able to help student veterans overcome institutional barriers to success.

- Enlarge the scope of responsibility for SOC program administration on campus.

In this study, data analysis revealed the lack of SOC program awareness among student veterans. Enlarging the scope of responsibility for SOC program administration should include providing SOC program information to student veterans. Data analysis revealed a tendency among some student veterans to believe SOC program provisions are limited to the services available through one administrator and staff in one office on campus. Clearly, the rights and

responsibilities associated with SOC program provisions cut across the spectrum of an elaborate campus bureaucracy, and a student veteran will need some direction if they are to engage the right college official(s) in the right way for resolution of a SOC program related issue. As one participant made it clear in this study, a student veteran can feel like they are “very much on my own” as they attempt to navigate the bureaucracy of a different culture in their quest to complete their goal for higher education. Although a central point of contact to direct student veterans to the right point of contact on campus is a good idea, the central point of contact can become the scapegoat for student veteran frustrations if other appropriate institutional agents (counselors, academic advisors, faculty, and administrators) are not identified, trained, empowered, and actively engaged in administering SOC program provisions at the institution. The potential for this issue to develop in an institutional setting is connected to the next suggestion.

- Develop an advocacy network on campus with people who are interested and capable of providing support for student veterans who need assistance with SOC program provisions (Arminio, Grabosky, & Lang, 2015).

Advocates for student veterans must be knowledgeable of SOC program issues and also sensitive to student veteran perspectives regarding those issues. They must be willing to engage the people and circumstances that pit institutional interests against student veteran interests in resolving those issues at any level. A robust advocacy network should involve advocates at the student level, the systems level, the community level, and the public arena level (pp. 57-73).

- Develop institutional policies and procedures to facilitate the process of evaluating and awarding credit for military training and experience and the process of transferring credit.

Decisions regarding the transfer and award of credit should reflect guidelines of the *Joint Statement on the Transfer and Award of Credit* developed by the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO), the American Council on Education (ACE), and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). SOC program institutions should use the *ACE Guide to the Evaluation of Educational Experiences in the Armed Services* to evaluate military training and experience and make decisions about awarding credit.

Developing policies and procedures would involve an expanded scope of responsibility for SOC program administrators. Implementing the policies and procedures would include education and training for gatekeepers, decision makers, and advocates in the organization to understand the methodology behind *ACE Guide* recommendations and how to interpret the recommendations within the scope of academic requirements for degree programs offered at the institution.

Policies should clearly state the procedures for submitting an appeal and a timeline to expect a decision for an appeal.

- Develop a schedule and protocol for evaluating the SOC program at routine intervals.

Although the results of this study suggest the SOC program is connected to a welcoming campus environment for student veterans at SOC program institutions, the evidence was not based on favorable student veteran perspectives in every case. While many cases reflected the statement “it makes me feel welcomed that they make the extra effort,” some cases reflected the statement “it seemed as if being a veteran did not make a difference from the perspective of the institution.” Other cases reflected the statements “never heard of SOC” and “SOC does not apply to me.” The range of perspectives certainly showed how much the campus experience can vary among student veterans; however, the range of perspectives also showed how the student veteran

perspective is a vital source of feedback that can help administrators strive for continuous improvement in program delivery.

Future Research

There are several possible next steps related this study. One would be to conduct a more in-depth analysis of data that relates veteran identity centrality on campus to the connection between a welcoming campus environment and mattering to others on campus. Surprisingly, the analysis of data for this study found no correlation between veteran identity centrality and aggregate scores for SOC program items. Were the relationships among SOC program provisions, mattering, and the campus environment stronger than relationships involving veteran identity centrality? Or, was the rate of participation simply insufficient for the amount of data needed to assess relationships between veteran identity centrality and the other variables of this study? Also, veteran identity centrality may be stronger among a different group of study participants and provide different results under different environmental circumstances.

Another next step would be related to the strength of correlation and internal reliability among measures for the seven SOC items. A follow up study could involve collecting data from more student veterans at other SOC program institutions to determine how the items perform with diverse subsets of student veterans at different types of SOC program institutions. The suitability of using the seven items in SOC program evaluations could then be assessed. However, given evidence from this study to indicate opinions related to SOC program items were confounded by a lack of SOC program awareness among student veterans, perhaps removing references to SOC in each item could help avoid confusion and thereby help participants and researchers focus on perceptions related to SOC program provisions.

If the entire questionnaire were employed on a larger scale, the additional data could be analyzed to see if the relationships among variables hold true for the general population of student veterans who attend SOC program institutions. For this study, only 8% of the student veteran population completed the questionnaire, and statistical sampling techniques were not employed. The low return rate for completed questionnaires from a predominantly white male student veteran population at a predominantly white institution may have contributed to the fact that there was little evidence to suggest that inequalities were perceived by subgroups of student veterans associated with any of the demographic identifiers used in this study. Further inquiry regarding inequalities perceived by subgroups of student veterans is warranted.

To explore the perspectives of subsets of the student veteran population at an institutional level, a researcher could include an invitation for study participants to voluntarily participate in a follow up interview. Depending on characteristics of the student veteran population at the institution, respondents may or may not provide a representative sample of the subsets of interest. To explore the perspectives of subsets of the student veteran population may require a large scale approach. A stratified random sample could be drawn from a representative cross section of student veterans attending multiple SOC program institutions. The data collection period would need enough time for researchers to vigorously follow up with student veterans to provide a complete response to the questionnaire. An adequate response rate from a random sample of a larger pool of student veterans could provide adequate representation for the various subsets of interest.

The results of this study suggest one more next step may be appropriate. Although the results were inconclusive regarding inequalities for any subset of student veterans at a SOC

program institution, the results do suggest the SOC program makes a difference in student veteran perceptions of the campus environment. A study of student veteran perceptions of the campus environment at an institution not participating in the SOC program could help answer an important question for one subset of the student veteran population. Are there inequalities for student veterans who attend those institutions when their experience is compared to the experience of student veterans who attend SOC program institutions?

Conclusions

This study addressed the gap between the reality of a SOC program institution as seen by an administrator and the reality of the institution as seen through a student veteran lens. The context for this study was at a place and point in time that administrators might assume to be a supportive human ecology for student veterans. A concurrent transformative mixed methods design was used to collect and analyze both quantitative and qualitative data through a student veteran lens. The findings of this study offered a convergence of evidence to suggest there is a lack of SOC program awareness among student veterans. However, the findings of this study also offered evidence to suggest student veterans relate SOC program provisions to a welcoming campus environment even if they don't recognize the provisions to be part of institutional efforts to operationalize SOC program principles and criteria. Finally, findings suggest student veterans relate three institutional conditions to a welcoming campus environment: having staff members who are both supportive of veterans and conscious of veterans' issues in higher education; having SOC program related information available for student veterans; and, having counselors, advisors, faculty, and administrators who are sensitive to veteran perspectives of veterans' issues in higher education.

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Appendices

Appendix A – SOC Student Veteran Survey at UTK Questionnaire

Q1 The University of Tennessee Knoxville (UTK) supports the Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC) program. SOC program institutions provide the information that veterans need during the admissions process. To what extent has this SOC program provision helped you feel welcomed as a student veteran at this institution?

- ☐ To a very great extent (5)
- ☐ To a great extent (4)
- ☐ To a moderate extent (3)
- ☐ To some extent (2)
- ☐ To little or no extent (1)

Q2 Please describe your experience or your opinion related to this SOC program provision in a way that will help others understand how it affects the student veteran experience at this institution.

Open text response

Q3 SOC program institutions provide veterans access to high quality educational opportunities.

To what extent has this SOC program provision helped you feel welcomed as a student veteran at this institution?

- ☐ To a very great extent (5)
- ☐ To a great extent (4)
- ☐ To a moderate extent (3)
- ☐ To some extent (2)
- ☐ To little or no extent (1)

Q4 Please describe your experience or your opinion related to this SOC program provision in a way that will help others understand how it affects the student veteran experience at this institution.

Open text response

Q5 SOC program institutions accommodate student veterans who experience interruptions or delays in the educational process caused by military service. To what extent has this SOC program provision helped you feel welcomed as a student veteran at this institution?

- ☐ To a very great extent (5)
- ☐ To a great extent (4)
- ☐ To a moderate extent (3)
- ☐ To some extent (2)
- ☐ To little or no extent (1)

Q6 Please describe your experience or your opinion related to this SOC program provision in a way that will help others understand how it affects the student veteran experience at this institution.

Open text response

Q7 SOC program institutions accept transfer credits for previously completed course work if the course work satisfies a requirement of the student veterans' specific program of study at the institution. To what extent has this SOC program provision helped you feel welcomed as a student veteran at this institution?

- ☐ To a very great extent (5)
- ☐ To a great extent (4)
- ☐ To a moderate extent (3)
- ☐ To some extent (2)
- ☐ To little or no extent (1)

Q8 Please describe your experience or your opinion related to this SOC program provision in a way that will help others understand how it affects the student veteran experience at this institution.

Q9 SOC program institutions award credits for military training or experience if it satisfies a requirement of the student veterans' specific program of study at the institution. To what extent has this SOC program provision helped you feel welcomed as a student veteran at this institution?

- ☐ To a very great extent (5)
- ☐ To a great extent (4)
- ☐ To a moderate extent (3)
- ☐ To some extent (2)
- ☐ To little or no extent (1)

Q10 Please describe your experience or your opinion related to this SOC program provision in a way that will help others understand how it affects the student veteran experience at this institution.

Open text response

Q11 SOC program institutions are flexible with the minimum amount of course work student veterans must complete in residence at the institution in order to earn a degree from the institution. To what extent has this SOC program provision helped you feel welcomed as a student veteran at this institution?

- ☐ To a very great extent (5)
- ☐ To a great extent (4)
- ☐ To a moderate extent (3)
- ☐ To some extent (2)
- ☐ To little or no extent (1)

Q12 Please describe your experience or your opinion related to this SOC program provision in a way that will help others understand how it affects the student veteran experience at this institution.

Open text response

Q13 SOC program institutions provide student veterans the opportunity to earn college credits through the College-Level Examination Program (CLEP). To what extent has this SOC program provision helped you feel welcomed as a student veteran at this institution?

- ☐ To a very great extent (5)
- ☐ To a great extent (4)
- ☐ To a moderate extent (3)
- ☐ To some extent (2)
- ☐ To little or no extent (1)

Q14 Please describe your experience or your opinion related to this SOC program provision in a way that will help others understand how it affects the student veteran experience at this institution.

Q15 In general, how welcoming is the campus environment for student veterans at this institution?

- ☐ Extremely welcoming (5)
- ☐ Very welcoming (4)
- ☐ Moderately welcoming (3)
- ☐ Slightly welcoming (2)
- ☐ Not at all welcoming (1)

Q16 Please describe in 50 words or more what came to mind (people, places, symbols, experiences, etc.) when you rated how welcoming the campus environment is for student veterans at UTK.

Open text response

The following questions are about your opinions of how much student veterans matter to others at this campus. Each question has four responses ranging from very much to not at all.

Q17 How important do you feel student veterans are to others on this campus?

- ☐ Very much (4)
- ☐ Somewhat (3)
- ☐ Very little (2)
- ☐ Not at all (1)

Q18 How much are student veterans needs given attention on this campus?

- ☐ Very much (4)
- ☐ Somewhat (3)
- ☐ Very little (2)
- ☐ Not at all (1)

Q19 How much would student veterans be missed if they stopped coming to this campus?

- ☐ Very much (4)
- ☐ Somewhat (3)
- ☐ Very little (2)
- ☐ Not at all (1)

Q20 How much are people on this campus interested in what student veterans have to say?

- ☐ Very much (4)
- ☐ Somewhat (3)
- ☐ Very little (2)
- ☐ Not at all (1)

Q21 How much do people on this campus depend on student veterans being a part of the campus community?

- ☐ Very much (4)
- ☐ Somewhat (3)
- ☐ Very little (2)
- ☐ Not at all (1)

The following statements are related to how you feel when you are on campus. Please use the five point response scale to indicate how much you agree with each statement.

Q22 When I am on campus, being a veteran is a central part of who I am.

- ☐ Strongly agree (5)
- ☐ Mostly agree (4)
- ☐ Somewhat agree (3)
- ☐ Mostly disagree (2)
- ☐ Strongly disagree (1)

Q23 When I am on campus, my status as a veteran is rarely on my mind.

- ☐ Strongly agree (1)
- ☐ Mostly agree (2)
- ☐ Somewhat agree (3)
- ☐ Mostly disagree (4)
- ☐ Strongly disagree (5)

Q24 When I am on campus, I relate best to other veterans.

- ☐ Strongly agree (5)
- ☐ Mostly agree (4)
- ☐ Somewhat agree (3)
- ☐ Mostly disagree (2)
- ☐ Strongly disagree (1)

Q25 When I am on campus, I feel more connected to civilians than to other veterans.

- ☐ Strongly agree (1)
- ☐ Mostly agree (2)
- ☐ Somewhat agree (3)
- ☐ Mostly disagree (4)
- ☐ Strongly disagree (5)

Q26 When I am on campus, I spend most of my time with other veterans.

- ☐ Strongly agree (5)
- ☐ Mostly agree (4)
- ☐ Somewhat agree (3)
- ☐ Mostly disagree (2)
- ☐ Strongly disagree (1)

Q27 I am proud to be a veteran on campus.

- ☐ Strongly agree (5)
- ☐ Mostly agree (4)
- ☐ Somewhat agree (3)
- ☐ Mostly disagree (2)
- ☐ Strongly disagree (1)

Q28 When I meet other veterans on campus I prefer to keep my veteran status to myself.

- ☐ Strongly agree (1)
- ☐ Mostly agree (2)
- ☐ Somewhat agree (3)
- ☐ Mostly disagree (4)
- ☐ Strongly disagree (5)

Q29 I like it when people on campus know I'm a veteran.

- ☐ Strongly agree (5)
- ☐ Mostly agree (4)
- ☐ Somewhat agree (3)
- ☐ Mostly disagree (2)
- ☐ Strongly disagree (1)

Your responses to a few more items will help researchers know more about the demographics of those who responded to this survey. Again, your responses are voluntary and will be confidential.

Q30 Including the current semester, how many semesters have you attended classes at this campus?

_____ semesters

Q31 Which one of the following best describes your current membership status in a military unit?

- ☐ Active duty (5)
- ☐ National Guard (4)
- ☐ Reserves (3)
- ☐ No current membership (2)
- ☐ Never served in the military (1)

Q32 Do you intend to either continue or return to military service after you complete your education?

☐ Yes (1)

☐ No (2)

Q33 Did you ever receive combat pay, hostile fire pay, or imminent danger pay while serving in the military?

☐ Yes (1)

☐ No (2)

Q34 What is your age?

_____ years

Q35 What is your sex?

☐ Male (1)

☐ Female (2)

Q36 What is your race/ethnicity?

Q37 Additional comments:

Thank you for participating in this survey, and thank you for your military service!

If you have questions or comments about this survey, please send a message to the researcher at gpetree@utk.edu with the words "Volunteer Research" in the subject line.

Appendix B – SOC Survey Invitation Email

Subject: Student veteran survey at UTK

Dear student veterans,

I invite you to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to collect, analyze, and share information that may help college and university administrators have a better understanding of the student veteran campus experience at an institution that supports the Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC) program. The University of Tennessee Knoxville (UTK) is a SOC program institution, so all service members and veterans enrolled at UTK are eligible to participate in this study. Your participation is voluntary and will involve taking an online survey. Please complete this survey if you are now serving or have ever served for any period of time in the US military (Active Duty, National Guard, or Reserve). Your responses will add value to the outcome of this study.

Participating in the survey will involve clicking on a circle to indicate your choice from among multiple choice response sets and using either your PC or smartphone keyboard to type some open text responses. Providing your responses may take as much as fifteen minutes of your time. Your participation is completely voluntary, and your responses will be anonymous.

You may access the survey site at the following link [*link inserted here*]. Access will be available for a limited period of time.

I appreciate your participation in this study. Feel free to contact me at gpetree@utk.edu if you have any questions or concerns.

Gary Petree

Graduate student veteran at UTK

Appendix C – SOC Survey Reminder Invitation Email

Subject: Student veteran survey at UTK invitation reminder

Dear student veterans,

This is a reminder of a previous invitation to take an online survey as a participant in a study regarding your campus experience at The University of Tennessee Knoxville (UTK). If you have already completed the survey, thank you! If you have not, please take time to do so now.

Again, participating in the survey is completely voluntary, and your responses are anonymous.

Access to the survey site is available at the following link [*link inserted here*] for a limited period of time.

Feel free to contact me at gpetree@utk.edu if you have any questions or concerns.

Gary Petree

Graduate student veteran at UTK

Appendix D – SOC Survey Closing Invitation Email

Subject: Student veteran survey at UTK closing invitation

Dear student veterans,

The opportunity to take an online survey regarding the student veteran campus experience at The University of Tennessee Knoxville (UTK) will close soon. If you have already completed the survey, thank you! If you have not yet completed the survey and want to participate, please access the survey site at the following link [*link inserted here*]. Again, your participation is completely voluntary, and your responses are anonymous.

Feel free to contact me at gpetree@utk.edu if you have any questions or concerns.

Gary Petree

Graduate student veteran at UTK

Appendix E – SOC Campus Consent Statement

INTRODUCTION

Student veterans are invited to participate in a research study. For the purpose of this study, the term veteran includes anyone who has served for any period of time as well as anyone who is currently serving in the US military (Active Duty, National Guard, or Reserve). Please complete this survey if you are a veteran and also enrolled for at least one credit hour as a student at The University of Tennessee Knoxville (UTK) campus.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to know more about the campus experience of student veterans attending an institution that supports the Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC) program. UTK is a SOC program institution. The SOC program has seven general provisions. You will be asked to give a rating for each provision and to describe either your experience or your opinion related to SOC program provisions at UTK. Also, you will be asked to rate and describe the campus environment at UTK and to give your responses to items related to your individual characteristics.

INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY

Your participation is voluntary and anonymous. You may decline to participate now, and you may also end your participation at any time after starting the survey by simply closing this window. You may also skip any individual item(s) in the survey if you do not want to share your response(s). All of your responses will be electronically aggregated with all other responses before analysis. Responding to all of the items contained in this survey may take up to fifteen minutes, depending on the amount of information you choose to share. Participating in this

survey will involve clicking on a circle to indicate your choice from among multiple choice response sets and using your keyboard to type open text responses.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks associated with participating in this research other than those encountered in everyday life. That said, there is some risk that participating in this survey may trigger an individual need for assistance. The Veterans Crisis Line is available at 1-800-273-8255 (Press 1) to offer assistance for any urgent need that you may have. And, the Student Health Center is available at 1-865-974-3648 to offer assistance for any routine needs that you may have.

BENEFITS

As a student veteran at this institution, your candid responses add value to the study, and the study may help administrators add value to SOC program provisions at this and other institutions.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Again, your participation will be anonymous. All responses collected in this study will be stored securely and made available only to persons conducting the study. No reference will be made in oral or written reports to link individual participants to the study.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures (or if you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study) you may contact the researcher, Gary Petree, at gpetree@utk.edu and 865-643-3117 or the Faculty Advisor for this research, Dr. Patrick Biddix at pbiddix@utk.edu and 865-974-6157. If you have questions about your rights as a participant,

you may contact the University of Tennessee IRB Compliance Officer at utkirb@utk.edu or (865) 974-7697.

PARTICIPATION

Again, your participation in this study is voluntary, and you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

CONSENT

I have read the above information. I have received (or had the opportunity to print) a copy of this form. Clicking on the button to continue and completing the survey constitutes my consent to participate.

Appendix F – Codebook: SOC Student Veteran Survey Item Numbers and Data Labels

Qualtrics item #	Questionnaire item #	Quantitative data label	Qualitative data label	Item description
Q1	na	na	na	Consent cover statement
Q2	Q1	SOC1Opin	na	SOC item 1 – provide the information that veterans need during the admissions process
Q3	Q2	na	SOC1Xper	
Q4	Q3	SOC2Opin	na	SOC item 2 – provide veterans access to high quality education
Q5	Q4	na	SOC2Xper	
Q6	Q5	SOC3Opin	na	SOC item 3 – accommodate student veterans who experience interruptions or delays in the educational process caused by military service
Q7	Q6	na	SOC3Xper	
Q8	Q7	SOC4Opin	na	SOC item 4 – accept transfer credits for previously completed course work if the course work satisfies a requirement of the student veterans’ specific program of study at the institution
Q9	Q8	na	SOC4Xper	
Q10	Q9	SOC5Opin	na	SOC item 5 – award credits for military training or experience if it satisfies a requirement of the student veterans’ specific program of study at the institution
Q11	Q10	na	SOC5Xper	

Qualtrics item #	Questionnaire item #	Quantitative data label	Qualitative data label	Item description
Q12	Q11	SOC6Opin	na	SOC item 6 – demonstrate flexibility with the minimum amount of course work student veterans must complete in residence at the institution in order to earn a degree from the institution
Q13	Q12	na	SOC6Xper	
Q14	Q13	SOC7Opin	na	SOC item 7 – provide student veterans the opportunity to earn college credits through the College Level Examination Program (CLEP)
Q15	Q14	na	SOC7Xper	
Q16	Q15	WelcRate	na	How welcoming is the campus environment for student veterans at this institution?
Q17	Q16	na	WelcDesc	
Q18	na	na	na	Qualtrics transition statement – click to proceed
Q19	Q17	Matter1	importance	Mattering item 1 – importance of student veterans to others
Q20	Q18	Matter2	needs	Mattering item 2 – attention to needs of student veterans
Q21	Q19	Matter3	missed	Mattering item 3 – student veterans would be missed if not on campus
Q22	Q20	Matter4	voice	Mattering item 4 – attention given to what student veterans say
Q23	Q21	Matter5	inclusion	Mattering item 5 – depend on student veterans to be part of campus

Qualtrics item #	Questionnaire item #	Quantitative data label	Qualitative data label	Item description
Q24	na	na	na	<i>Qualtrics</i> transition statement– click to proceed
Q25	Q22	VICS1	veteran centrality	Veteran identity centrality item 1 – veteran is a central part of who I am
Q26	Q23	VICS2	veteran awareness	Veteran identity centrality item 2 – being veteran is rarely on my mind
Q27	Q24	VICS3	veteran preference	Veteran identity centrality item 3 – relate best to other veterans
Q28	Q25	VICS4	civilian preference	Veteran identity centrality item 4 – connection to civilians
Q29	Q26	VICS5	time with veterans	Veteran identity centrality item 5 – time spent with other veterans
Q30	Q27	PRVIS1	proud veteran	Positive regard for veteran identity item 1 – proud to be a veteran
Q31	Q28	PRVIS2	stealth veteran	Positive regard for veteran identity item 2 – hide veteran identity from other veterans
Q32	Q29	PRVIS3	like others to know veteran	Positive regard for veteran identity item 3 – like others to know I’m a veteran
Q33	na	na	na	<i>Qualtrics</i> transition statement– click to proceed
Q34	Q30	semester	na	Number of semesters on campus
Q35	Q31	milistat	military status	Select Active, Guard, Reserve, or inactive military status

Qualtrics item #	Questionnaire item #	Quantitative data label	Qualitative data label	Item description
Q36	Q32	svcafter	intent for future	Intend to return to or continue military service after completing education? yes/no
Q37	Q33	combat	combat exposure	Ever receive combat pay, hostile fire pay, or imminent danger pay? yes/no
Q38	Q34	age	age	Enter age >17
Q39	Q35	sex	sex	Select male/female
Q40	Q36	race	race	Identify race/ethnicity
Q41	na	na	na	Not used
Q42	na	na	na	Not used
Q43	Q37	na	additional comments	Additional comments

Vita

Gary Lee Petree was born to parents Lester and Lois Whaley Petree and raised with two brothers, Jack and Tim, in Knoxville, Tennessee. He married Charleen Lambert of Sumter, South Carolina, and they have two children, Jessica and Brian.

Gary graduated magna cum laude with a Bachelor of Arts in Government and International Studies from the University of South Carolina. He earned a Master of Science in Human Resource Management from Troy State University while serving in the military. After eight years of enlisted service, he completed Officer Candidate School at The Palmetto Military Academy. He was commissioned as a field artillery officer and eventually served as a staff officer for The Adjutant General of South Carolina. He is a graduate of the U. S. Army Command and General Staff College.

Gary enjoys the learning environment of higher education. His work experience in higher education includes outreach service as an external consultant to local government agencies, teaching a variety of undergraduate courses in organizational leadership and management, and service as an academic advisor and admissions counselor. He has worked at two large public universities, a regional campus, a private college, an HBCU, and a community college.

His research interests are generally related to the practical application of organizational and administrative theories as they relate to the effects of climate and culture on the human condition in organizations. He has a personal and professional interest in the symbiotic relationship between higher education and national defense, especially as policies and practices in the two institutions affect (a) the availability of human capital for national defense and (b) the veteran transition experience between military and academic/civilian life.