

*The Impact of Post-Secondary Interventions Aimed at Veteran Academic Success:
An Urban Technical College Study in Middle America*

by

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Stout, Brian M. *The Impact of Post-Secondary Interventions Aimed at Veteran Academic Success: An Urban Technical College Study in Middle America*

Abstract

In 2021, the number of Post-9/11 Era veterans of the Armed Forces of the United States will reach 5.1 million. As veterans transitioned from military service and began using education benefits, they tended to experience difficulties entering and succeeding in the civilian educational environment. Their academic performance was adversely impacted by a host of combat and non-combat related veteran issues. Recognizing the challenges faced by many former service members, higher education institutions responded by providing comprehensive services to veteran students. This study examined the impact of interventions focused at assisting veterans in attaining educational objectives. The study centered on knowledge, likelihood of use, and overall satisfaction associated with specific interventions and sought to capture the veteran student experience. The performance of veteran students was compared to the general student population and other subgroups through analysis of course completion rates and retention rates. Results revealed that veteran students were largely aware of the interventions available at the institution but that there were gaps in the level of awareness. The study concluded that veteran students were most likely to utilize the resources that were the most visibly dedicated to providing services to veterans. Veterans also expressed a high level of satisfaction with the service provided by the institution and off-campus entities focused on supporting veterans. Recommendations for improvements focused on communication between the college and the veteran student and accessibility to veteran-focused interventions. Potential exists for additional studies regarding awareness of the campus veteran population and direct academic support.

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Chapter I: Introduction

The number of military veterans who served in the Armed Forces of the United States (U.S.) is large and growing. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) reported that as of 2016 there were just under 4.4 million living veterans who served as part of the Global War on Terror (GWOT) campaigns that began in October 2001 and became known as the Post-9/11 Era. The National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics (2018) projected that the number of Post-9/11 veterans will grow to approximately 5.1 million by 2021. Of the current 4.4 million living veterans, 2.77 million service members have completed 5.4 million deployments and the number continues to grow (McCarthy, 2018).

Veterans who transitioned from military service tended to utilize federal education benefits but experienced challenges in doing so. Parker et al. (2019) reported that more than half of Post-9/11 Era veterans enrolled in school after leaving the military, a higher rate than veterans from any previous generation. As these large numbers of veterans separated from the military and began to utilize their Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits, they faced challenges related to entering higher education and transitioning from military service. Reports by Parker et al. (2019), Coll et al. (2011), and others determined that veterans generally experienced difficulties entering and succeeding in academia and/or transitioning from military service. The Pew Research Center (2011) found that 44% of recent veterans described their transition to civilian life as difficult (Kurzynski, 2014). The same study found that 48% of veterans experienced family readjustment problems, 37% experienced Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)-related stress, and 84% felt that the American public did not understand their challenges (Kurzynski, 2014).

While leaving military service and entering higher education individually prove to be daunting experiences, veterans often face these challenges simultaneously. Describing the

average veteran as young and trying to cope with the aftermath of stressful situations, Woods (2012) stated that many veterans tried to enter the civilian educational environment at the same time that they had to deal with emotional and psychological problems subsequent to military deployments. Recognizing that military service had taken a toll on men and women of the armed forces, a 2014 Veterans Health Administration report found that military veterans accounted for 20% of suicides in the U.S., with 60% of those having been diagnosed with a mental health condition. Making situations even more challenging, prevalent perceptions within the military culture included a deep-seated stigma that the act of seeking assistance for personal and psychological problems displayed distained weaknesses. Danish and Antonides (2009) reported that the military culture sometimes provided a barrier to veterans seeking assistance for problems such as PTSD, Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), and depression. The hesitancy of veterans to seek assistance extended to academia, and while services for transitioning veterans existed and were generally robust, large numbers of veterans failed to utilize transition services due to a perceived lack of availability (Rausch, 2014). The result of the combination of social attitudes and failure to seek assistance has negatively impacted the ability of veterans to successfully adjust to post-military educational environments.

The nature of military service has changed since the beginning of the Post-9/11 Era. Physically and psychologically, military veterans of this generation experienced unique challenges that other generations generally did not face. First, veterans linked to the Global War on Terror underwent more frequent and longer deployments. Seventy-seven percent of the Post-9/11 Era veterans deployed at least once, compared to 58% of the prior generation (Parker et al., 2019). The Committee on the Assessment of the Readjustment Needs of Military Personnel, Veterans, and their Families (2013) found that veterans deployed an average of 1.72 times each

with a frequency range from 1 to 47. Among deploying veterans, 43% deployed multiple times with 10% deploying three times and 6% deploying four or more times (The Committee on the Assessment of the Readjustment Needs of Military Personnel, Veterans, and their Families, 2013). Second, deployments experienced by recent veterans were longer than those who served prior to the start of the Post-9/11 Era. The average length of post-9/11 deployments ranged from 4.5 months for Air Force personnel to 9.4 months for Army personnel with means for all services of 7.7 months, 8.3 months for one-time deployers and 6.8 months for multiple-time deployers (Board on the Health of Select Populations, 2013).

As a result of more frequent and longer deployments, Post-9/11 Era veterans experienced a greater proclivity for combat-related emotional and physical scarring (Pew Research Center, 2011). The U.S. Census Bureau determined in its 2016 American Community Survey that 35.9% of Post-9/11 Era veterans had a service-connected disability while among all other veterans the rate was 18.6% (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2018). This was troubling given the fact that Post-9/11 veterans exhibited a noticeably decreased propensity to be enrolled in VA healthcare programs compared to prior generations (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2018). These data points, along with improved medical techniques and higher injury survival rates, descriptively framed a veteran population that harbored physical scars in addition to wounds that could not be seen through casual observation.

As large numbers of veterans returned from terrorism-related deployments and began to utilize their Post-9/11 G.I. Bill benefits, veteran students faced barriers while entering post-secondary institutions. Described by Kurzynski (2014) as experiencing a culture shock, veterans identified the most significant obstacles of transitioning from the military to academia as being linked to personal and familial financial issues, acculturation into the academic world, and

problems gaining access to veteran-related services. Often unaware of veteran services and programs, Cook and Kim (2009) stated that veterans often had to pay out-of-pocket for their education during the time that they had to wade through the paperwork to obtain veteran benefits. Additionally, obtaining credit for military training proved to be complicated and time consuming and some institutions did not award academic credit for military training or experience (Cook & Kim, 2009). Even if the students were able to overcome these barriers to enrollment, Walton-Radford (2009) found that 37% of part-time and 16% of full-time students dropped out within nine months of initial enrollment. In addition, Durdella and Kim (2012) suggested that grade point averages were negatively impacted by additional life demands compared to the average student and a host of combat-related veteran issues.

Assuming that veterans were able to successfully enter the educational institution and program of their choice, Post-9/11 Era veterans faced numerous academic barriers while attempting to stay on the path to program completion. Most significantly, veterans reported a challenge in transitioning from the military style of instruction and learning that vastly differed from the less structured, more informal learning style in civilian institutions. According to Durdella and Kim (2012), veterans described the academic environment as being less ordered and chaotic. Borsari et al. (2017) found that the barrier posed by the differences between the world of academia and the military hierarchical structure was manifested in an unwillingness to seek academic assistance and an inability to manage time and effort. The situation proved problematic because veterans who had been away from education and generally older veterans experienced an erosion of basic math, writing, science, and study skills that affected academic success (Durdella & Kim, 2012). The transition to academia forced veteran students to mentally

shift from an almost entirely team-focused approach to one in academia that was generally focused on individual accomplishment (Borsari et al., 2017).

Among the many barriers negatively influencing academic program completion experienced by Post-9/11 veterans was the lack of social connections among each other and connections to the institution (Cate, 2014). Cate (2014) posited that the perceived lack of connection resulted from a general feeling of not being accepted and the self-perceptions stemming from being in a different phase in life from other students. A 2011 study conducted by the Pew Research Center found that only 58% of Post-9/11 Era veterans felt proud of their service compared to 70% of the prior generation, and that only 33% felt optimistic about their future compared to 50% of the prior generation (Parker et al., 2019). Findings suggested that more recent veterans experienced a corresponding decrease in connections to each other and to society. Borsari et al. (2017) proposed that the struggle between wanting to be accepted as a veteran and desiring to assimilate into the campus culture may have been an important factor for the lack of retention and completion.

As a result of academic barriers, veteran academic program completion rates were lower than the general student population and veterans generally took longer to earn post-secondary degrees than their non-veteran counterparts (Cate, 2014). Ochinko and Payea (2018) reported that 20% of veterans who entered a higher education program in the 2011-2012 academic year left their academic institution without completing their academic objectives after three years. The same report found that 20% of the enrolled veteran population departed their institution and returned to complete their academic studies at least once during their academic experience (Ochinko & Payea, 2018). Furthermore, analysis of the time-to-completion for veteran students who graduated at the end of the 2015-2016 academic year determined that 41% of those veterans

who graduated began their post-secondary education programs in 2005 or earlier compared to only 32% of non-veterans (Ochinko & Payea, 2018).

While frequently held stereotypes of veterans painted a picture of an emotionally and physically broken heterosexual male, unshaven, combat traumatized, and heavily drinking, the fact remained that common stereotypes of this nature failed to capture the strengths and positive characteristics that veterans brought from the service to the academic environment (DeCoster, 2018). DeCoster (2018) argued that veteran students were able to function in high stress environments, were fast-paced learners, and bottom-line up-front thinkers. They thrived in environments that required teamwork and were generally mission focused and organized in their ways of thinking and behaving (DeCoster, 2018). In addition, veterans experienced a level of diversity through military service that proved unequaled in the civilian environment.

Recognizing the challenges that many service members experienced as they transitioned to academia, higher education institutions responded by providing comprehensive services to existing and prospective veteran students. Many interventions went beyond general counseling and advising services offered to the general student populations and aimed to assist veterans with overcoming academic completion barriers (Ellison et al., 2012). Interventions included the establishment of a supportive, influential administrative leadership team; providing on-site transition services; peer-to-peer counseling; offering college-level, credit-bearing transition classes; and providing licensed mental health counselors in addition to traditional veteran support centers and associated administrative support personnel (Ellison et al., 2012).

The federal government responded as well by providing a number of educational benefit options to veterans attempting to obtain an education. The benefit most widely used was the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill which made higher education and vocational training available to military

personnel in large numbers not seen since post-World War II. DeCoster (2018) posited that the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill stimulated the growth of higher education to the point that in some cases resulted in a veteran population at some institutions representing 49% of the total enrolled student population. The Post-9/11 G.I. Bill provided full tuition and fees for public institutions with tuition at private institutions capped at the national maximum rate. The benefit provided a monthly living stipend, referred to as Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) that provided for housing, food, and living expenses (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2020a).

Veterans from Wisconsin were also able to utilize the Wisconsin G.I. Bill, which remitted tuition and segregated fees for eligible veterans for up to eight semesters or 128 credits, whichever was greater, at any University of Wisconsin System or Wisconsin Technical College System institution. This benefit was distinct and entirely separate from the federal benefit (Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.-a).

Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC), a large, urban technical college in the Midwest, served as one data point that provided information regarding the existing support structure for the veteran student population. With total student population of 36,000 distributed across five campuses in the Milwaukee Metropolitan Area, the College provided support in the form of three full-time employees located at the main campus in downtown Milwaukee. Referred to as the Military Education Support Office (MESO), the support staff included a School Certifying Official (SCO), Veteran Specialist (VS), and one administrative assistant. The role of the SCO was to assist veteran students by working with them to apply for veteran education benefits. Located in the Admissions Office, the SCO supported walk-ins and appointments and worked proactively with approximately 200 veterans and 138 spouses and/or dependents of veterans. Co-located with the SCO was the administrative support staff member who provided

general support to the SCO and one-on-one support to recipients of educational benefits. The SCO and the administrative staff member focused on educational financial benefits but referred students to other offices such as the mental health office in Student Services, the Milwaukee County Veterans Service Officer, the VA, and others as individual needs became apparent while dealing with clients.

The role of the Veteran Specialist (VS), as a member of the Student Life team at MATC, was to manage the resource center, encourage veteran-to-veteran and veteran-to-non-veteran engagement, advise the student veteran club, and link veterans to available resources at the county, state, and federal levels. A significant responsibility was to educate veteran students about opportunities for obtaining various forms of support and where to obtain assistance for various needs. Establishing a connection to the campus was perceived as vital but also challenging in that many veterans possessed differing worldviews compared from their instructors and fellow students. Coordinating social events and veteran recognition days for the institution made great strides in normalizing relationships between veterans and their fellow students. Among other programs, the VS instituted a program to educate non-veteran staff and faculty about the nature of good interaction and interventions that supported veteran student outcomes.

Statement of the Problem

Post-9/11 Era veterans who transitioned from military service to post-secondary academic programs experienced barriers that their non-veteran counterparts generally did not have to face. In addition to the traditional challenges of academic adjustment, veterans experienced a greater propensity for culture shock, which included a feeling of a lack of belonging and a failure to connect with each other and their fellow students (Cook & Kim,

2009). They also experienced greater challenges related to family and financial issues, PTS-related issues, and problems gaining access to available resources (Ellison et al., 2012). DeCoster (2018) cited examples of challenges as that of starting over as a college student, a dominant feeling of being isolated and alone, mental, and physical problems linked to military service, and a greater propensity for self-harm. Newport (2009) further found that veterans had value conflicts in an environment surrounded by non-veteran college students. And, although recent studies determined that veterans exhibited mental health problems at roughly the same rates as other students, their likelihood for self-harm was greater. The severity of the impact of the aforementioned issues was made more significant when taking into consideration the decreased likelihood that veterans would seek assistance for their problems (DeCoster, 2018).

In an effort to assist veterans with the transition to the civilian education environment, higher education institutions across the country began to provide a robust series of interventions to support veterans in their transition from the military to the academic environment. Educational institutions have sought classification as a Military Friendly Institution, a designation awarded by a private company that identified higher education institutions that held high standards for servicing military personnel and their families. Designation as a Military Friendly Institution was earned by providing critical information through a self-reporting process. Designation criteria included graduation rates for veterans and the general population, retention rates at the one and two-year points, student loan default rates, job placement rates, and college transfer rates (VIQTORY, 2020). The accrediting body, VIQTORY, also published a list of “Bad Actors,” institutions that were cited for breaking federal laws, violating VA regulations, participating in predatory practices, or falsifying statistics (VIQTORY, 2020). Post-secondary institutions that

met the accreditation criteria were designated in four categories in descending order of classification: gold, silver, bronze, and designated (VIQTORY, 2020).

Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC) earned the “designated” classification (VIQTORY, 2020). The institution maintained a Military Education Support Office (MESO) with the objective of addressing veteran needs in terms of academic and logistical support (Milwaukee Area Technical College, n.d.-a). The office provided benefit certification for students to obtain federal and state educational benefits, tutoring services, career counseling, and case management services (Milwaukee Area Technical College, n.d.-a). The institution also provided a Veteran Resource Center that was staffed during regular academic hours with a veteran who worked directly for the Director of Student Life. The division of labor among veteran-dedicated staff and the placement of the MESO under the Director of Student Life was an intentional strategy on the part of the institution to provide general support to veterans and plan and conduct various activities that encourage camaraderie and a sense of belonging (W. Walker, personal communication, February 3, 2020). For training purposes, the college offered the nationwide Veterans on Campus (VOC) program, an online program designed to assist faculty and staff in creating a supportive environment for veterans (Milwaukee Area Technical College, n.d.-b). Lastly, veterans at MATC also enjoyed federal and state G.I. Bill education benefits and were given a one-day advanced, priority registration opportunity for classes based on state-wide legislation (Wisconsin State Legislature, 2013).

While MATC offers some services to veteran students, it is unknown whether or not these interventions provide veteran students with the tools to overcome academic program barriers. First, while the MESO possesses a high degree of fidelity regarding the number of veterans and family members who are receiving federal and state educational assistance, the

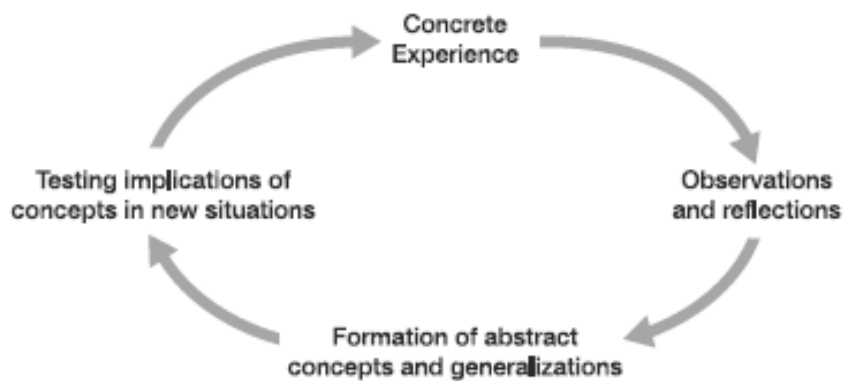
institution does not use the total number of veterans who attend the institution as any kind of measure (B. Baerbock, personal communication, February 3, 2020). The current veteran population receiving federal or state educational benefits is 196, based on those who currently use veteran benefits to fund their educational programs (Y. Wang, personal communication, December 22, 2020). If the reported number is accurate, veterans would only account for 0.5% of the total student enrollment in 2016 (N=36,935; MATC, 2016). This would be a disproportionately low ratio compared to other institutions in the University of Wisconsin System and the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS). Second, the degree to which interventions provided by the institution aid veteran students in overcoming barriers is largely not understood. There is no formal process to determine whether or not a student who sought assistance in overcoming barriers such as mental health, homelessness, or hunger was classified as a veteran or was aligned with another subgroup of the student population. That is because there are no dedicated counselors to assist veteran students with the exception of the staff in the Veteran Resource Center. Furthermore, there are no screening processes to determine if new or continuing veteran students are in need of available community support. Referrals are made by the MESO based on personal observation by untrained personnel or are requested in an unsolicited manner by the veteran student (B. Baerbock, personal communication, February 3, 2020). Third, MATC is uncertain about the services that are not being offered by the institution, but which might better support the veteran student population. Of central importance is the fact that MATC leadership lacks sufficient information about whether or not institutional policies and practices satisfactorily support the needs of the student veteran population.

Theory Base

This research based its theoretical approach on the Experiential Learning Theory as championed by David A. Kolb and Carl Rogers and displayed in Figure 1. An extension of the concept of “learning by doing” that was first forwarded by John Dewey and Jean Piaget, the central theme of the Experiential Learning Theory was the combination of cognitive learning through formal school experiences and the individual’s life experiences in the context of self-assessed learning (Ouyang & Stanley, 2014).

Figure 1

A Representation of David A. Kolb’s Experiential Learning Theory Model



Note. This representation of Kolb’s Experiential Learning Theory model was accessed from P. Dennison, 2009, *Journal of Learning and Teaching*, 1(1) (<https://journals.gre.ac.uk/index.php/compass/article/view/12/28>).

Kolb’s four-stage experiential learning cycle involves concrete experience followed by observation and experience. The cycle then involves forming abstract concepts and lastly testing new situations (Smith, 2013). Kolb posited that the learning cycle began in any of the four

stages. His theory suggested that the learning process often began with a person taking part in some action and then observing the outcome of that action in a given situation (Smith, 2013). Smith (2013) described step two of the model as understanding the effects in a given situation so that the same outcome might occur by similar actions in similar situations. Step three was to develop an understanding of a general principle linked to the aforementioned actions. Step four includes the ability of the individual to link actions and their effects over a wide range of situations (Smith, 2013).

The Experiential Learning Theory formed the basis of this research because the subjects of the research, former military service members, had largely developed it in the military through its application. The military provided an exceptional example of a form of the Experiential Learning Model. Moreover, when military service members transitioned to higher education, they carried with them a preference for a similar mode of instructional delivery. As argued by Cook and Kim (2009) and Borsari et al. (2017), one of the significant reasons why veteran students had difficulty transitioning to civilian higher education institutions was the stark difference between the learning models experienced in the military as compared to those in the civilian sector.

Purpose of the Study

MATC provides specialized transition and acculturation services to veterans who enroll at the institution. The purpose of this study is to establish the extent to which MATC satisfactorily fulfills the needs of veteran students in helping them overcome barriers to academic program completion. Gaps will be identified regarding awareness of support programs, utilization of those programs, and what additional services might better meet the needs of the diverse group of veterans who currently undertake academic studies at MATC. Beyond the

institutional level, this study is intended to inform similar institutions and the larger community about which interventions prove to be most effective with the goal of aiding the educational community in applying limited resources for the best possible outcomes.

A secondary purpose for the study is to provide MATC and similar institutions with a potential way forward in addressing some of the impending financial challenges. As the total population of high school seniors decreases due to shifting demographics across the nation and in the State of Wisconsin, the Post-9/11 Era veteran population continues to grow. Meyerhofer (2018) stated that the projected number of high school graduates across Wisconsin in the 2019-2020 academic year was projected to be just over 64,000, the lowest experienced in the last 20 years. Roughly one-third of all Wisconsin high school graduates enroll in the University of Wisconsin (UW) system and even fewer find their way into the technical college system. With shifting demographics and reductions in the ratio of revenues that come from state funding, it will become increasingly more important to attract and retain various targeted segments of the potential student population. The population of veteran students, while facing less traditional academic completion barriers and needing the application of increasingly scarce institutional resources, bring with them a potentially significant financial benefit to the institution for a minimal investment.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to address the unknowns regarding the population of veterans, their specific barriers to academic program completion, their awareness of available resources and their propensity to seek out assistance through various government and community-based efforts. They were further developed to determine veteran student

perceptions about how well specific interventions addressed the individual barriers which the body of veterans faced during their academic journey.

Framed within the context of Milwaukee Area Technical College and the students served there, the research questions are as follows:

1. To what extent are veteran students aware of the support services available to them at the institutional, county, state, and federal levels?
2. With what proclivity do veteran students utilize the services and interventions that are available to them?
3. How well do the support services and interventions provided by the institution satisfy the specific needs of the veteran students?
4. What practices might the institution modify to further enhance veteran students' satisfaction and academic success?

Assumptions of the Study

The collection and analysis of veteran-related data poses some challenges related to validity and repeatability. One assumption is that veterans are who they purport to be and had the experiences that they claim to have had. Urbina (2009) reported numerous cases regarding military experiences, awards, and injuries claimed by those who never served or who greatly exaggerated the extent and characterization of their military service. In essence, anybody could walk into the Veteran Resource Center and claim to be a veteran. However, expecting veterans to provide proof of their service in the form of their Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active-Duty form, Department of Defense Form 214, with its accompanying sensitive, personal information would be exceptionally challenging.

Another assumption is that veterans will be truthful and open about identifying specific needs that are or are not being met. Because military culture traditionally views the need to seek counseling or forms of assistance as a sign of weakness, veterans may be reluctant to share their physical, monetary, emotional, and psychological challenges (Ellison, 2012). Also, because the associated surveys will be administered in the Veteran Resource Center, the assumption is that a large percentage of veterans on campus visit the facility and that they represent the distribution of veteran students on campus. In the COVID-19 environment, the alternate plan for data collection is to utilize the institution email services. Email as a modality for survey solicitation serves to mitigate the impact of collecting data at a physical location but introduces different challenges.

Other assumptions are that the researcher will be able to obtain a number of respondents that are sufficient to achieve a 90% confidence level and that 90% confidence is sufficient to make meaningful conclusions as the data is analyzed. When the sample size of a population for any study is exceptionally small, uncertainty in the results increases. The total population was estimated by the MATC Office of Institutional Research to 196 (Y. Wang, personal communication, December 22, 2020). Utilizing a sample size calculator developed by Raosoft, Inc. and Cochran's sample size formula with a margin of error of 10%, confidence level of 90%, an estimated population of 196 and a 50% response distribution, the recommended sample size is 114. Additional respondents would continue to increase the confidence level with a sample set of 131 corresponding to a 95% confidence level and a sample size of 152 obtaining a confidence level of 99% (Raosoft, Inc., 2004; see also Glen, n.d.). Lastly, while the primary researcher will strive to maintain objectivity throughout the study, the researcher understands that bias regarding

personal experiences and generalizations from their own military experience potentially inject bias into this research.

Significance of the Study

This study is important because it has the potential to inform institutions regarding the utilization and effectiveness of specific interventions intended to serve the veteran student population. At MATC there is currently no measure to determine how well veterans perform academically relative to the general population, and whether or not the interventions by the institution foster the intended outcomes. While some interventions such as the MESO and a veterans' lounge with support staff members have been implemented, there is little evidence to establish the level of success of those interventions. Lastly, the study could inform the budget cycle by providing gaps and possible solutions to veteran service shortfalls.

Limitations of the Study

This study is intended to provide a benchmark for institutions residing in large, urban environments and may not provide applicable results for smaller, less urban colleges in the Wisconsin Technical College System. This was primarily due to differences in organizational structure, sheer size, and the unique nature of the community which MATC serves. Although similar in student population, Madison Area Technical College has significantly differing demographics. For this reason, the study benchmarks other large, urban institutions in the Midwest.

The scope of this study is limited to technical college students who are working toward the completion of an associate degree, technical diploma, or certificate program. While other studies have focused on undergraduate and graduate programs at selective universities in various

parts of the country, the useful application of this study may be limited to applications at open enrollment, two-year institutions.

Definition of Terms

This section is intended to establish an understanding of the common terms associated with veteran academic services. The terms and their associated definitions will provide the requisite information that will serve as a foundation for topics throughout the remainder of this research.

DD Form 214

Known as the Certificate of Release or Discharge from active duty, the Department of Defense (DD) Form 214 provides information relative to an individual's time in military service that establishes eligibility for benefits, retirement, services, and membership in veteran organizations. The form provides highly specific information relative to dates of service, occupational specialties, deployments, military education, total amount of military service, etc. (National Archives, n.d.).

Global War on Terror

The Global War on Terror is a series of military campaigns and the exercise of other national-level instruments of power to defeat terrorist groups, initially al Qaeda, on an international basis to protect citizens and the vital national interests of the United States. On September 20, 2001 President George Bush announced the War on Terror and a few days later, the then Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld announced the first campaign, Operation Enduring Freedom (U.S. Department of State, 2009). The majority of the campaigns continue to the present day.

Intervention

A combination of program elements or strategies designed to produce behavior changes or improve health status among individuals or an entire population. Interventions may include “educational programs, new or stronger policies, improvements in the environment, or...a campaign” (Missouri State Government, n.d.).

Post-9/11 Era

The National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics (2018) identifies the post-9/11 Era as the period of time after September 2001 to the present day. This period originated with the terrorist attacks at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. In the context of veteran status, a Post-9/11 Era veteran is one who met the federal definition of a veteran, defined below, and served after September 11, 2001. Researchers commonly separate those who served only in the Post-9/11 Era and older veterans who served both before and after September 11, 2001.

School Certifying Official

The School Certifying Official (SCO) is a representation of an institution or training center that serves as a liaison between the student and the VA. The role of the SCO is to submit enrollment certification to the VA and other necessary paperwork for the veteran student to receive education benefits. In addition to assisting the students in receiving education benefits, the SCO monitors enrollment status, reports probationary and suspended students to the VA, and provides linkages to other resources to the veterans (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2021c).

Veteran (Federal Definition)

Staskiel (2017) defines the term from a federal perspective as someone who served in the active military forces and who was discharged under honorable or general conditions. This

definition includes people who served in the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Coast Guard in addition to those who served in the reserve components of the aforementioned services. The term also includes commissioned officers in the Public Health Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and Environmental Science Service Administration on full-time duty (Staskiel, 2017).

Veteran (Eligibility for Wisconsin State Veterans' Benefits)

In order to be classified as being eligible for Wisconsin state veterans' benefits and services, a veteran's service must have been honorable, under honorable conditions, or general under honorable conditions (Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs, 2020a). Eligibility for veterans' benefits in the State of Wisconsin is also dependent upon the time served on active duty with former service members generally qualifying after two years on active duty (Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs, 2020a).

Chapter II: Literature Review

The purpose of this study is to establish the extent to which MATC satisfactorily fulfills the needs of student veterans in helping them overcome barriers to academic program completion. Gaps will be identified regarding awareness of support programs, utilization of those programs, and what additional services might better meet the needs of the diverse group of veterans who currently undertake academic studies at MATC. Beyond the institutional level, this study is intended to inform similar institutions and the larger community about which interventions prove to be most effective with the goal of aiding the educational community in applying limited resources for the best possible outcomes.

This chapter is intended to establish a base of historical work and foundational knowledge and best practices that deal with veterans and institutional interventions that support their academic barriers. A number of studies have been conducted on topics related to the transition of veterans to post-military life, including that of entering higher education. Due to the comparably larger numbers of Post-9/11 Era veterans who have undergone challenges related to PTSD, TBI, and re-acculturation into the non-military environment, a great number of studies have been performed on these issues. Similarly, recognizing that veterans enter the post-secondary education environment with a unique set of challenges, institutions for a long time have implemented interventions with the intention of supporting veterans. Much less research has been done regarding the extent that the many interventions implemented by the institution actually assist veterans in overcoming academic barriers.

Veterans Face a Wide Variety of Challenges Entering Higher Education

The act of transitioning from military life to becoming a civilian college student has proven to be challenging for some veterans. DeCoster (2018) provided examples as the

overwhelming feeling associated with starting life over, a dominant feeling of being isolated and alone, mental and physical problems linked to military service, and a greater propensity for self-harm. Supporting these conclusions, Newport (2009) found that veterans had value conflicts in an environment surrounded by non-veteran college students. For example, his research found that 34% of veterans identify as Republicans where only about 20% of their non-veteran counterparts do the same. DeCoster (2018) suggests that college faculty have challenges dealing with veteran students largely due to unwarranted stereotypes and a lack of minimal knowledge about the needs that veterans generally possess.

Although recent studies have shown that veterans have mental health problems at roughly the same rates as other students, their likelihood for self-harm is greater. Furthermore, there is less likelihood that veterans will seek assistance for their problems (DeCoster, 2018).

Veterans face unique challenges related to reintegration into the higher education setting. Cate (2014) found that it generally takes veterans longer to earn post-secondary degrees than their non-veteran counterparts. The lack of social connections to the institution is also a problem that translates into lower retention rates. A primary reason for a lack of connection to the general student population and the campus include self-perceptions of being in a different phase in life than other students and a feeling of a lack of acceptance. Borsari et al. (2017) propose that the struggle between wanting to be accepted as a veteran and wanting to assimilate into the campus culture may be important for retention and completion.

Veteran students face challenges entering post-secondary institutions. Often unaware of veteran services and programs, Cook and Kim (2009) concluded that veterans often have to pay out-of-pocket for their education until they are able to wade through the paperwork to obtain veterans' benefits. Obtaining credit for military training was often complicated and time

consuming and some institutions did not award academic credit for military training or experience (Cook & Kim, 2009).

Even if the students were able to overcome these barriers to enrollment, Walton-Radford (2009) found that 37% of part-time and 16% of full-time students dropped out within nine months of initial enrollment. Durdella and Kim (2012) suggest that GPA is negatively impacted by additional life demands such as marriage and children. In addition, the fact that veteran students are typically older points to an erosion of basic math, writing, science, and study skills as an impact on academic success. Borsari et al. (2017) highlighted the stark differences between the world of academia and the military hierarchical structure which was manifested in an unwillingness to seek academic assistance and an inability to manage time and effort. Veterans have reported a challenge in transitioning from the military style of instruction and learning that differs significantly from the less structured, more informal learning style in civilian institutions. Durdella and Kim (2012) further report that veterans describe the academic environment as being less ordered and more chaotic.

Defined Geographic Region

The Milwaukee Metropolitan Area (MMA) serviced by Milwaukee Area Technical College is comprised of parts of the Wisconsin counties of Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Washington, and Waukesha as shown in Figure 2. The City of Milwaukee serves as the hub of this largely urban area that boasts approximately 800,000 people in its labor force with commuters coming from as far as the Chicago, Madison, and Sheboygan regions.

The MMA serves as the primary cultural center for the surrounding area with over a dozen major theater and music venues, a plethora of top-notch restaurants, and natural recreation areas provided by Lake Michigan and the well-established park system.

Figure 2*Map of the Milwaukee Metropolitan Area*

Note. This map depicts the Milwaukee Metropolitan Area. Sourced from ProximityOne.

(2018). *Situation outlook report: Milwaukee-Waukesha-West Allis, WI Metropolitan Statistical Area.* (<http://proximityone.com/metros/2013/cbsa33340.htm>).

Population Demographics

The MMA contains a population of over 1.58 million people and ranks 40th in size for metropolitan areas in the United States (Statista, 2018). As of 2015 the median age for the area was 37.7 years with a median annual household income of \$56, 247 just slightly above the state and national figures of \$55,638 and \$55,775 respectively (Data USA, n.d.-a). The racial composition for the MMA is shown in Table 1.

Table 1*Racial Composition of the Milwaukee Metropolitan Area as of 2015*

Race	Population	Population %
White	1,060,701	67.3
Black	257,063	16.3
Hispanic	164,053	10.4
Asian	54,904	3.5
Other	39,500	2.5
Total	1,576,221	100

Note. Adapted from Data USA diversity data. (<https://datausa.io/profile/geo/milwaukee-wi/#civics>).

Ninety-six percent of the population of the MMA are citizens of the United States and approximately 184,000 people in the MMA do not speak English. The most prevalent languages for non-English speaking people are Spanish, Hmong, and German respectively with Spanish speakers outnumbering all others combined (Data USA, n.d.-a).

Economic Demographics

Although the median household income for the MMA is slightly over \$56 thousand, there is a wide median income range between counties. Within the MMA, Waukesha County has the highest median income of \$76,545, followed by Ozaukee County with \$76,433, Washington County with \$69,237, and Milwaukee County with \$43,873 (Data USA, n.d.-b).

The wages earned in 2015 in the MMA by males for the five most common occupations in Wisconsin (i.e., Miscellaneous Managers, Registered Nurses, Elementary and Middle School Teachers, Drivers/Sales Workers & Truck Drivers, and Administrative Assistants) was \$59,185 while the average female salary for the same occupations was \$44,447. The salary earned by males for the same positions were 133% that of female workers (Data USA, n.d.-a).

With the greatest percent of minorities in Milwaukee County, Table 2 shows the breakdown of average salaries by race. Additionally, the number of people within the MMA by race whose annual income fell below the poverty line as established by the U.S. Census Bureau is also represented.

Table 2

Average Income by Race with Poverty Numbers for the Milwaukee Metropolitan Area (2015)

Race	Average income	Number in poverty	Percent in poverty
White	\$45,019	98,568	9.3
Black	\$40,141	83,885	32.6
Hispanic	Not calculated	43,566	26.6
Asian	46,673	7,604	13.8

Note. Adapted from Data USA diversity data. (<https://datausa.io/profile/geo/milwaukee-wi/#civics>).

Social Context of Education

The Milwaukee Public School System (MPS), the primary feeder system for Milwaukee Area Technical College, has a history of underperformance when compared to other large metropolitan areas across the United States and schools across Wisconsin. The latest evaluation of public schools provided by the state assessed 117 schools in Wisconsin as failing to meet expectations. Of those, 77 schools were in Milwaukee (Keith, 2017). The MPS Superintendent at that time, Darienne Driver, cited absenteeism and improving academics as the major challenges faced by the district (Keith, 2017).

According to the Metro Milwaukee Association of Commerce (MMAC), the percentage of people age 25 years or older with at least a high school education in the MMA was 89.9%. The same segment of the population had 32.5% with a bachelor's degree or higher. Institutions

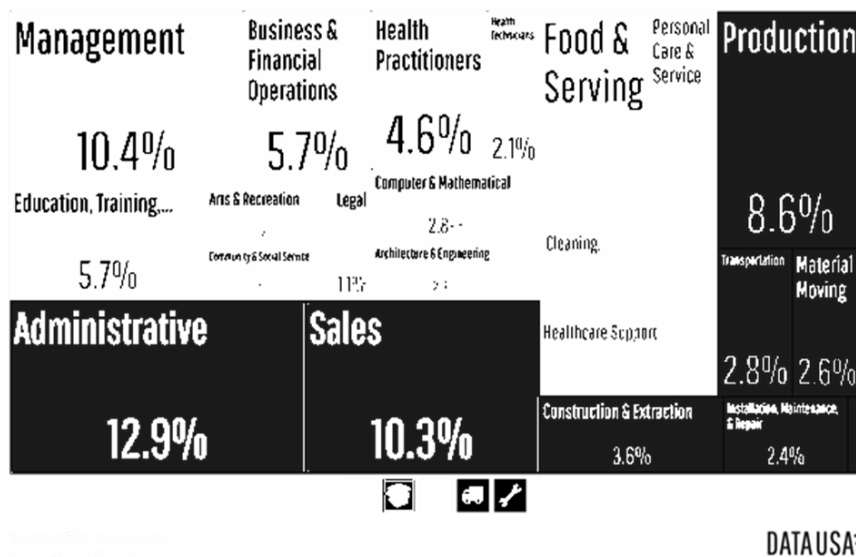
of higher education during the 2012-2013 academic year reported a total enrollment of 102,462 while conferring 18,058 degrees (MMAC, 2017). The institutions in the MMA with the largest number of graduates are the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Marquette University, and Milwaukee Area Technical College respectively (Data USA, n.d.a).

Economic Conditions

The MMA employed 794,353 as of 2015 which represented a growth of 1.89% (Data USA, n.d.-b). The major occupations by percentage of the workforce are shown in Figure 3. Administrative and management occupations provide the greatest number of employment opportunities to MMA workers. These are closely followed by sales and production jobs.

Figure 3

Employment by Occupations in the Milwaukee Metropolitan Area



Note. This figure provides the percentage of the workforce participating in the industries that are most prevalent in the Milwaukee Metropolitan Area. Reprinted from DataUSA. (<https://datausa.io/profile/geo/milwaukee-wi/#economy>).

Key Initiatives Supporting Veteran Success in Post-Secondary Education

With exceptionally large numbers of service men and women having departed the military following Post-9/11, GWOT operations, the federal government recognized the need to help transition veterans from the military and prepare them for gainful employment in the civilian sector. These mitigating actions were largely driven by higher unemployment rates among veterans than that of the general population, increases in suicides, and relatively low post-secondary education retention rates. In response, the federal government established a number of key initiatives to support transitioning veterans in their educational endeavors: 8 Keys to Success, Principles of Excellence (Executive Order 13607), VetSuccess on Campus, and the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

8 Keys to Success

In 2013, the Obama administration in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Education (DoE), the VA, and educators from across the country established a program entitled 8 Keys to Success (Baker, 2013). The 8 Keys to Success provided clear practices that post-secondary institutions could institute to help veteran students transition to the classroom and facilitate academic achievement. Beginning in 2013 with 250 institutions committing to the 8 Keys of Success, the list of higher education institutions that have signed on to adhere to the success principles now boasts approximately 2300 (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). MATC is not on the list of institutions that have committed to supporting veterans and their educational goals.

The Baker (2013), DoE (2020), Veterans Enterprise (2013), and others identify and outline the eight keys to success as shown in Table 3. Veterans Enterprise (2013) and others provided more detail to operationalize the keys to success that will not be addressed in this work.

Table 3*8 Keys to Success for Supporting Veterans, Military, and their Families on Campus*

Number	Key to success
1	Create a culture of trust and connectedness across the campus community to promote well-being and success for veterans.
2	Ensure consistent and sustained support from campus leadership.
3	Implement an early alert system to ensure all veterans receive academic, career, and financial advice before challenges become overwhelming.
4	Coordinate and centralize campus efforts for all veterans, together with the creation of a designated space for them (even if limited in size).
5	Collaborate with local communities and organizations, including government agencies, to align and coordinate various services for veterans.
6	Utilize a uniform set of data tools to collect and track information on veterans, including demographics, retention and degree completion.
7	Provide comprehensive professional development for faculty and staff on issues and challenges unique to veterans.
8	Develop systems that ensure sustainability of effective practices for veterans.

Note. This figure provides eight keys to success for providing comprehensive, quality services to military veteran students. Adapted from “8 Keys to Success: Supporting Veterans, Military and Military Families on Campus” by S. Baker, 2013, *Obama Whitehouse Archives*, (<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2013/08/13/8-keys-success-supporting-veterans-military-and-military-families-campus>).

Principles of Excellence (Executive Order 13607)

The Principles of Excellence were published by the Obama administration to ensure that veteran students and their family members received sound information and adequate protections while using federal education benefits (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2020a). This executive order was created to help curb predatory and dishonest practices by some institutions

that sought revenues through student veteran benefits without obtaining accreditation or benefiting students as advertised. Post-secondary institutions participating in the program agree to implement the practices outlined in Table 4. In summary, the principles provide guidelines for higher education institutions that receive funding from the VA (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2020a). Foreign schools, on-the-job training programs, apprenticeships, and institutions that offer tuition-free courses to veterans and their families are not required to comply (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2020a). MATC is officially listed with the VA as an institution that complies with the Principles of Excellence (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2020a).

Table 4

Principles of Excellence for Education and Training

Number	Principle of excellence
1	Provide students with a personalized form covering the total cost of an education program.
2	Provide educational plans for all military and veteran education beneficiaries.
3	End fraudulent and aggressive recruiting techniques and misrepresentations.
4	Accommodate service members and reservists absent due to service requirements.
5	Designate a point of contact to provide academic and financial advice.
6	Ensure accreditation of all new programs prior to enrolling students.
7	Align institutional refund policies with those under Title IV, which governs the administration of federal student financial aid programs.

Note. Principles of Excellence (Executive Order 1360) are intended to provide parameters for institutions receiving veteran federal financial aid. Adapted from “Education and Training: Principles of Excellence” published by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2020a, (https://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/principles_of_excellence.asp).

VetSuccess on Campus

The VetSuccess on Campus (VSOC) program strives to provide specific services to veterans and their qualified family members through counseling and benefit assistance (U.S.

Department of Veterans Affairs, 2020b). Trained, dedicated counselors provide information relative to applicable VA benefits, vocational assessment and counseling, counseling related to academic program barriers, referrals to VA health services and community resources, and assistance with applying for VA benefits (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2020b).

VSOC employees work directly for the VA and reside on designated campuses. To obtain VSOC designation and receive on-campus VSOC support from the VA, institutions need to surpass the threshold student population, be committed to supporting a VA employee, be within 25 miles of a U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs regional office and have institutional leadership support (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2020b).

There are currently 94 institutions across the United States that are designated as VSOC sites. MATC does not currently qualify to be a designated VSOC location. The current veteran population of the institution falls below the 800 or more threshold to qualify (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2020b). The VA (2020b) identified the nearest VSOC institution as the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in downtown Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Post-9/11 GI Bill

Arguably the most popular form of education benefit in the Post-9/11 era is the Post 9/11 GI Bill (Chapter 33). To be eligible for the Post-9/11 GI Bill, service personnel must have served after September 11, 2001 on active duty for a total of at least 90 nonconsecutive days or received a purple heart for any period of service and been discharged or served at least 30 continuous days (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2021a). While 90 days of total active and/or 30 days of continuous active duty represent the minimum time required to receive benefits, three years of active service are required to qualify for the maximum benefit (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2021a, 2021b).

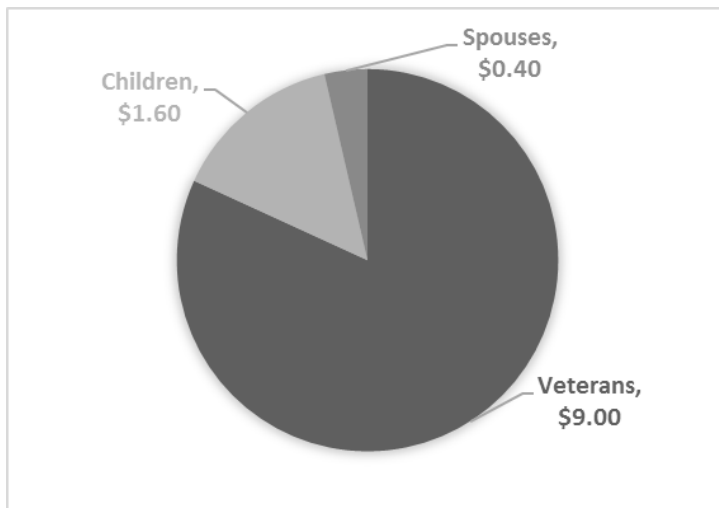
One of the greatest benefits of the Post-9/11 GI Bill is transferability. Qualifying military members and veterans may transfer some or all of the 36 months of total benefits for which they qualify to one or more of their dependent family members. Family members may use the benefits at any one of the private or public institutions approved by the federal government, the same as a service member or veteran.

The Post-9/11 GI Bill pays full tuition and fees directly to the public schools for in-state students. The maximum annual benefit at private or foreign institutions is \$24,476.79 per year (United States Army, 2020). Beyond tuition and fees, the Post-9/11 GI Bill provides a monthly housing allowance, a stipend for books and supplies of up to \$1,000 per year, and a one-time payment under certain circumstances to move from an extremely rural environment (United States Army, 2020). Current rates for various elements of the Post-9/11 GI Bill can be found at https://www.benefits.va.gov/GIBILL/resources/benefits_resources/rates/ch33/ch33rates080118.asp (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2021a, 2021b).

According to a Congressional Budget Office (2019) report from 2019, the Veterans Benefit Administration, a component of the VA, spent \$65 billion (2018 dollars) to provide educational benefits for approximately 1.6 million beneficiaries between 2009 when the law was enacted and 2016. In 2016 alone, the government spent \$11 billion, an average of \$17,400 per student (see Figure 4). Of the total spent in 2016, about 8% (i.e., \$900 million) went to support veterans and their dependents in online programs.

Figure 4

Federal Post-9/11 GI Bill Spending in Billions of Dollars (2016)



Note. Adapted from a report by the Congressional Budget Office, 2019, *The Post-9/11 GI Bill: Beneficiaries, choices, and cost.* (<https://www.cbo.gov/system/files/2019-05/55179-Post911GIBill.pdf>).

The majority of the beneficiaries in 2017 attended public institutions. Veterans and their spouses tended to pursue academic certifications at two-year colleges and graduate schools with a majority attending private institutions. Their children, on the other hand, generally attended undergraduate programs at public universities and colleges.

While highly popular among veterans and their qualifying dependents, the overall success of the bill is difficult to ascertain. First, the VA has not historically collected data on academic program completion rates or employment outcomes (Congressional Budget Office, 2019). In essence, the measurement of how well government dollars are impacting the ability of veterans to transition to civilian life is not being measured. While Congress created legislation to require the VA to begin collecting data, that information is not yet available. Second, the CBO questioned the impact of the bill regarding military recruiting and retention efforts. The

CBO determined in its 2019 report that the Post-9/11 GI Bill aided in recruiting those who would have otherwise had to choose between entering the military and working prior to seeking post-secondary education. However, it was uncertain about how well the bill supported retention efforts because service personnel must leave the military in order to take advantage of the majority of the benefits afforded by the bill (Congressional Budget Office, 2019).

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to establish a base of historical and foundational knowledge and best practices related to veterans and the interventions that ultimately support their academic success. Due to the comparably large numbers of Post-9/11 Era veterans who have experienced challenges related to PTSD, TBI, and re-acculturation into the civilian environment, a great number of studies have been conducted on these issues. In the educational environment, programs have been developed at the federal and local levels to enhance outcomes. The guidelines for which include the 8 Keys to Success, an Obama administration effort established in 2013, and the follow-on Principles of Excellence (Executive Order 13607).

Arguably the most popular form of education benefit in the Post-9/11 era is the Post 9/11 GI Bill (Chapter 33). According to a Congressional Budget Office (2019) report from 2019, the Veterans Benefit Administration, a component of the VA, spent \$65 billion (2018 dollars) to provide educational benefits for approximately 1.6 million beneficiaries between 2009 when the law was enacted and 2016. The bill represents a significant commitment on the part of the federal government to train and educate service members as they transition from their service component to the civilian work environment.

Chapter III: Method and Procedures

This chapter will provide a detailed description of the research design and methodology to address specific research questions. First, the chapter will identify the purpose of the research and provide related research questions. Next, it will address research methodologies for each of the research questions and the instruments used to collect data. Specific data collection procedures and the analysis of the data will be explored. The chapter will conclude by identifying potential limitations linked to the data collection processes and providing a summary of the research plan.

The purpose of this study is to establish the degree to which MATC satisfactorily fulfills the needs of student veterans in helping them overcome barriers to academic program completion. Gaps will be identified regarding awareness of support programs, utilization of those programs, and what additional services might better meet the needs of the diverse group of veterans who currently undertake academic studies at MATC. Beyond the institutional level, this study will inform similar institutions and the larger community about which interventions prove to be most effective with the goal of aiding the educational community.

A secondary purpose for the study is to provide MATC and similar institutions with a potential way forward in addressing some of the impending financial challenges in upcoming years. As the total population of high school seniors decreases due to shifting demographics across the nation and in the State of Wisconsin, the Post-9/11 Era veteran population continues to grow.

The research and subsequent analysis attempted to answer the following research questions, framed within the context of Milwaukee Area Technical College:

1. To what extent are veteran students aware of the support services available to them at the institutional, county, state, and federal levels?
2. With what proclivity do veteran students utilize the services and interventions that are available to them?
3. How well do the support services and interventions provided by the institution satisfy the specific needs of the veteran students?
4. What practices might the institution modify to further enhance veteran students' satisfaction and academic success?

Research Methodology

The research plan incorporates a mixed methodology. The research will be quantitative in nature through the utilization of a standard survey that captures a number of individual qualitative responses from the study participants that will be quantitatively analyzed. Two questions included in the veteran student survey will be purely qualitative with open-ended prompts. Qualitative research will be performed through the application of a case study of three veteran students. The research will also conduct purely quantitative analysis of course completion rates and retention rates from Fall to Spring and Fall to Fall for selected years with mined data from the MATC Office of Institutional Research.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) describe mixed methods research as a procedure for gathering, analyzing, and including both quantitative and qualitative research methods in a study to better understand and address a research problem. Mixed methods can be conducted when both qualitative and quantitative data and subsequent analysis provide greater clarity and understanding of the research problem than either type of methodology alone (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Vogt et al. (2012) posit that mixed methods are justified when the researcher

wants to corroborate results concluded through other methods, when the researcher wants to inform another research method, when a review of results is warranted through multiple angles, or when the research is needed to capture the full story related to the human experience. For this research, mixed methods will be used to both corroborate results determined through other methods and to gain clarity related to the human experience of the student military veteran.

Quantitative research can be described as a type that collects very narrow, measureable data from a relatively large number of subjects and where mathematical methods are used to analyze the data in an objective manner (Fischler, n.d.). Common collection methods include but are not limited to questionnaires, performance tests, personality measures, and content analysis (Fischler, n.d.). The quantitative element of this research effort consists of two separate instruments. A survey of veterans at the institution will include both quantitative and qualitative questions that will be quantitatively assessed to make assessments of Research Questions 1 through 4. Quantitative data obtained from the MATC Office of Institutional Research will provide additional fidelity as to how well the resources that are in place support veteran student outcomes.

In addition to the quantitative research, qualitative research will be conducted in the form of a number of in-depth interviews. The interview questions will blend characteristics of the “grand tour” and the “concrete example” line of questioning (Lichtman, 2013). The “grand tour” question prompts the participants to share their feelings about an experience telling what it was like to (fill in the blank). The “concrete example” question seeks specific details that will help the researcher narrow the input of the participants before post-interview analysis begins. Utilizing the in-depth interview and the aforementioned approach will enable the public to empathize more readily with the veteran student participants. While veterans are generally

respected and supported, there is often an inability on the part of the general public to understand the cause-and-effect of the veteran experience. The exercise will allow the reader to better connect with a largely misunderstood segment of the population.

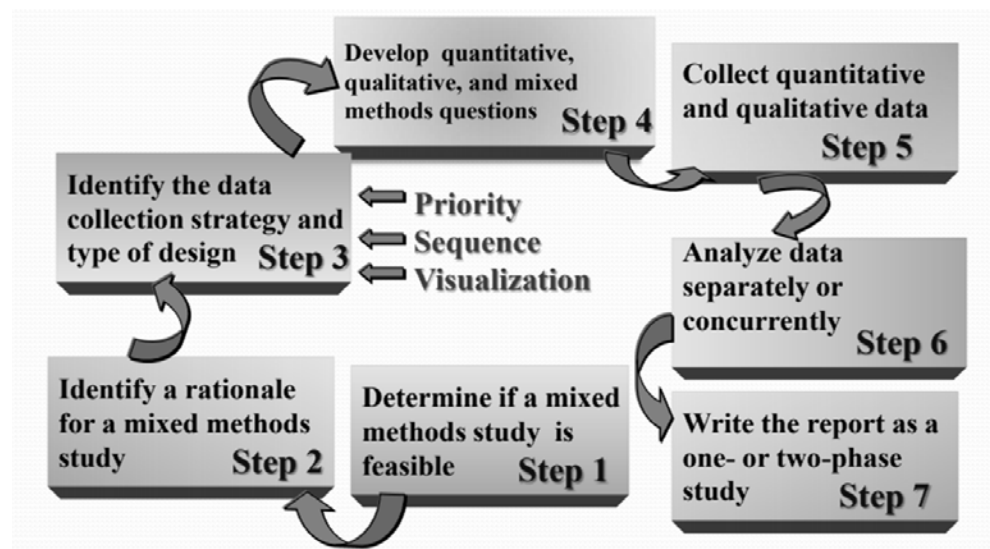
Fischler (n.d.) describes a process for conducting mixed methods studies that will be utilized in this research. As shown in Figure 5, Step 1 is to determine whether or not a mixed methods approach is feasible. The issue of feasibility addresses the question of whether or not a study can be performed producing analyzable observations within an acceptable time frame and utilizing obtainable resources. The research questions will be addressed utilizing three instruments that can be conducted within a relatively short timeframe with limited financial exposure and low-labor-intensive collection methods. The observations will include survey results submitted by the population of interest, transcripts from interviews, and the results of data mining utilizing organizational institutional research resources. Analysis of survey results will be conducted using a quantitative statistical approach.

Step 2 of the mixed methods process is to identify the rationale for a mixed methods study. A mixed methods approach is warranted in this case because the qualitative elements of the research provide additional clarity through the personal observation of the subjects much more than a purely quantitative approach could address. In this study, Research Question 1 addresses the level of awareness that veteran students have regarding the resources available at the institutional, county, state, and federal levels. The answers to this question will come from using purely quantitative methodology. However, Research Question 2 addresses the proclivity of the veteran to utilize available resources. For question 2, quantitative measures will address the likelihood of the sample in the utilization of available resources. Additional clarity will be obtained using open-ended questions as the researcher addresses related questions of “why” in an

open-ended qualitative manner. Question 3 will have elements of quantitative and qualitative research because the question of how well resources are serving the veteran students really depends on perspective. While a student might be satisfied with a particular outcome or resource, quantitative data and analysis may suggest otherwise. In addition, the particular measures for an institution are not necessarily the measures of the subject.

Figure 5

Process for Conducting Mixed Methods Research



Note. This figure provides a detailed listing of the process for conducting a mixed methods study. Adapted from “Mixed Methods” [PowerPoint slides] by A.S. Fischler, n.d., (https://education.nova.edu/Resources/uploads/app/35/files/arc_doc/mixed_methods.pdf).

Subject Selection and Description

Subject selection is part of step 3 of the mixed methods study process as outlined in Figure 5. Subjects will come from the general body of students who have self-identified as veterans during the application process for seeking educational benefits. With the main criterion of meeting the qualifications that categorize the subject as a veteran student, the survey will provide additional questions that will filter out any respondents who fail to meet the criterion.

For the in-depth interview data collection effort, the use of pre-screening questions will eliminate potentially non-qualifying respondents. Snowball sampling will provide the majority of respondents who meet the criterion. The data mining effort through the institutional research office will provide descriptive information of the student veteran population that will have utilized common database filters.

Subject selection and the necessity to engage the targeted population will dictate where, when, and how to conduct the survey. The primary plan will involve multiple locations and modalities for conducting the survey. One location for data collection will be the Veteran Resource Center located in the campus student services building. Veterans are generally the only individuals, excluding faculty and staff members, who enter the location and the center is heavily utilized by the veteran student population. Subject selection and filtering will also be conducted when the surveys are offered at the veterans' table in the hallways at four of the five campuses affiliated with the institution during regular visits by the Veteran Service Coordinator. Lastly, the population of veterans will be solicited for response through the institutional email system with correspondence being sent to only those students who meet the selection criterion. In the event that veteran students will not be able to be directly engaged due to safety precautions and social distancing requirements, email with a link to the survey will become the primary means for gathering data. Because the primary means for gathering information will be in the form of email and a link to a survey, the target for data collection will be the entire known veteran population on campus. If the desired quantity of responses is not initially achieved through the aforementioned efforts, veteran students will receive a secondary round of solicitation emails. A tertiary effort will be to physically contact specific cohorts of various academic programs known

to have large percentages of student veteran populations such as police science, fire protection, emergency medical technician, and paramedic programs.

The veteran student population is a subset of the total student population at MATC consisting of approximately 196 of the approximately 36,000 students serviced at the institution. Veteran students at MATC represent a diverse cross-section of the general American population. Obtaining the level of participation during the study to achieve a 90% confidence level is key because it will enable the research effort to make meaningful conclusions subsequent to data analysis. When the sample size of a population for any study is exceptionally small, uncertainty in the results increases. Utilizing a sample size calculator developed by Raosoft, Inc. and Cochran's sample size formula with a margin of error of 10%, confidence level of 90%, an estimated population of 780 and a 50% response distribution, the recommended sample size is 63. Additional respondents would continue to increase the confidence level with a sample set of 86 corresponding to a 95% confidence level and a sample size of 137 obtaining a confidence level of 99% (Raosoft, Inc., 2004; see also Glen, n.d.). The total population is estimated to be approximately 780 by approximating that 50% of the veterans utilize VA education benefits.

Post-9/11 veterans are markedly different from veterans of prior generations. First, the generally longer and more frequent deployments resulted in more combat and subsequently more physical and emotional battle scars than veterans of previous generations (Parker et al., 2019). A Pew Research Center study found that 36% of post-9/11 veterans felt that they had suffered from PTS-related issues regardless of whether or not they sought professional assistance (Parker et al., 2019). Second, Post-9/11 veterans report feeling alienated from the rest of the American society. Lighthall (2012) posits that the transition from military service has often resulted in veterans undergoing complete identity crises.

Described by Lighthall (2012) as one of the greatest untapped human resources on college campuses, Post-9/11 veterans can be described as mature, goal-oriented, mission-driven, experienced leaders. She further describes them as the kind of role models that are needed on college campuses. Self-reliant and willing to sacrifice to obtain their educational objectives, their focus is generally on the larger picture and not on trendy cultural fads (Lighthall, 2012). They are often interpreted as being stoic, respectful to authority figures, and introverted (Lighthall, 2012). Their behavior may often seem strange in small but meaningful ways, from the location of where they sit to the time that they arrive for class.

While generally viewed as an asset on college campuses, veterans possess their own unique sets of problems. Woods (2012) stated that many veterans tried to enter the civilian educational environment at the same time that they had to deal with emotional and psychological problems subsequent to military deployments. A 2014 Veterans Health Administration report found that military veterans account for 20% of suicides in the United States, with 60% of those having been diagnosed with a mental health condition. Danish and Antonides (2009) reported that the military culture can sometimes provide a barrier to veterans seeking assistance for problems such as PTSD, Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), and depression. This hesitancy to seek assistance extends to academia, and while services for transitioning veterans exist and are relatively robust, large numbers of veterans fail to utilize transition services due to a perceived lack of availability (Rausch, 2014). The result of the combination of social attitudes and failure to seek assistance has a negative impact on the ability of veterans to successfully adjust to post-military educational environments.

Instrumentation

Table 5 provides linkages between research questions and specific instruments. The first research tool will be a survey provided to the entire veteran student population at MATC that will address research Question 1 through Question 4. The introductory letter of participation is found in Appendix A with the survey consent form is in Appendix B. The survey will be offered to students who utilize the services at the MESO and the veteran lounge where the patrons will be offered the opportunity to participate. Due to social distancing measures and with limited access to campus buildings by students, solicitation will also take place via email delivery through the use of the College's institutional research database and will utilize Google Forms. The majority of the questions, Appendix C, will utilize a Likert scale to capture needs, relative satisfaction with services, and the likelihood that interventions and services will be utilized by individual veterans. The first four questions are designed to clarify status of the respondent as a student and military veteran. The second series of questions, Question 5 through Question 8, seeks data pertaining to respondents' knowledge of specific services available to veteran students and the likelihood that the veteran would utilize those services. Question 7 queries possible reasons for non-use of available resources. Ellison (2012) reports that veterans may be reticent to seek assistance for various needs due to residuals of the military culture that portray the act of seeking assistance as an undesirable weakness. The third series of questions, represented by Question 9 through Question 12, seeks to establish the level of satisfaction with services provided to veterans at MATC. The closing question provides an open-ended prompt for the respondent to identify any recommendations as to how the institution might better support the academic success of its veteran students.

Validity and reliability measures were put into place by first reviewing potential questions with the VS and then pilot-testing the survey. As a measure of reliability, the researcher secured three randomly selected students to take the survey to ensure that it was readable, that the questions were clearly stated for ease of response, and the time to complete the survey was not too lengthy. To achieve validity, the questions asked on the survey were aligned to the research questions.

The second instrument will be a case study of three student veterans. The intent of the case study will be to personalize the research and findings of the first instrument. It will also support Research Question 4 by establishing outcomes relative to initial goals. Participants for the case study will be selected with the assistance of the MESO and other staff members with the criterion that the veteran student be willing to discuss their transition from military to civilian life with the researcher. While the second instrument is intended to provide the human context of this research and support the survey instrument, there may be key institutional shortfalls or successes identified through the process. The case study will also identify unique challenges and needs that may not have previously been identified. The interview consent form is found in Appendix D and specific interview prompts for the case study are identified in Appendix E.

The third instrument will consist of data mining utilizing the Office of Institutional Research at MATC. This instrument will seek to compare key measures such as course completion rates and retention rates relative to the general population. It will also establish other interventions that may be useful in addressing specific shortfalls related to academic outcomes.

Several open-ended questions will capture input from the research subjects that will be used for qualitative, descriptive purposes. The survey will address Research Questions 1 through

4. The data mining effort, survey, and in-depth interviews will seek to shed light on Research Question 3.

Table 5

A Listing of Research Questions and Associated Research Instruments

Question	Research question	Methodology
1	To what extent are veteran students aware of the support services available to them at the institutional, county, state, and federal levels?	Survey Case study
2	With what proclivity do veteran students utilize the services and interventions that are available to them?	Survey Case study
3	How well do the support services and interventions provided by the institution satisfy the specific needs of the veteran students?	Survey Case study Data mining
4	What practices might the institution modify to further enhance veteran students' satisfaction and academic success?	Survey Case study

Note. This figure describes the research questions for the study and lists the instruments that will be utilized for analysis and obtaining results.

Data Collection Procedures

Prospective participants will be afforded the opportunity to participate in the in-depth interview when they enter the Veterans Resource Center. Lichtman (2006) cited the importance of trust as an important factor for a successful interview outcome. Although no informal relationships have been fostered, the researcher has frequented the Veterans Resource Center and socialized with patrons on a regular basis and is known by those who regularly utilize the facilities. So as to facilitate a situation of comfort with open dialogue, the interviews with veteran students will take place in one of the side offices adjacent to the resource center or via

phone as an alternate means if the current coronavirus pandemic precludes face-to-face contact. This is recognized as not the optimal location, even though it would be the most feasible, because it would be a relatively sterile location without providing context relative to the lives of the respondents. As an alternate method, phone interviews may provide the primary means of communication in the event that pandemic risk mitigation measures continue to be implemented. After gathering requisite signatures in the side office, the researcher would initiate small talk to draw upon potential common or similar military experience to get an understanding of who they are and the nature of their military experience. This would be in an effort to genuinely get to know the individual and to help them get to a point where they feel comfortable opening up to an interviewer about potentially personal, sensitive matters. The researcher would then pose the prompt as described above and launch into the interview. The data collection process would be repeated for a total of three separate in-depth interviews.

With the key objective of getting the respondents to tell their stories in their own terms, Lichtman (2013) identified several strategies about how to get the most out of an interview. The interview will take place as a process that includes advanced planning, the opening, getting started, the body, and the end of the interview (Lichtman, 2006). Advanced planning deals with the logistics and the selection of the respondents of the interview event. Getting started involves the opening dialogue that is critical to establish a tone, level of trust, and creation of an atmosphere of openness and reflection. Transitioning to the body of the interview is challenging and the successful transition flows naturally without significant redirects. Asking the participant to elaborate on a certain aspect of the narrative and probing with additional questions are just a few techniques. The Lessons Learned experience did not allow for this type of exchange and provided for a single prompt without the benefit of additional inquiry. Lichtman (2013)

highlighted the need to feed off the individual during the interviewing process. She also addressed the idea that the researcher should start with a plan but should not come to any preconceived outcomes. The researcher had to adapt to the narrative of the participant.

The researcher will utilize a recording device and solicit rev.com to produce detailed transcripts. After receiving the transcript, the researcher will conduct the reduction similar to the process outlined by Van Manen (1984), who describes the process as a way to filter the extraneous and unnecessary content to get down to the thematic statements. The last two columns, depending on the specific data points that appear on the transcripts, will include a combination of shortfalls and positives related to the military, state, and federal transition services. The last column will have the themes that address the good, the bad, and the ugly of the interventions that are provided at the institution.

Data Analysis

The in-depth interview process will be analyzed using the thematic analysis process is outlined in Table 6. Van Manen (1984) describes the initial process as uncovering more pertinent aspects of the lifeworld description. The process began by capturing the raw input with all the participant's words, phrases, pauses, etc., without deleting any content. The key content of the transcript was then highlighted. These key statements included any text that was significant to addressing the initial and follow-up prompts. Specific highlights were left to the determination of the researcher. The input by the participant addressed the prompt but the input was not as much of an experience as a listing of the key challenges and strategies of dealing with the task of scheduling.

Table 6*Methodology for Thematic Analysis*

Part	Description	Action
1	Raw excerpts, intact with all of the participant's words, grammar, misspellings, etc. intact.	No words are deleted. Key content is highlighted as a means to initiate a reduction in Part 2 of Thematic Analysis.
2	Strike through and modify	Reduce the chatter. In the process you move statements that have meaning while leaving the seemingly non-essential words or phrases behind.
3	Isolation of thematic statements	Uncovering thematic aspects of the response to the prompt and follow up questions.
4	Determination of essential themes. Identification of thematic statements that uncover the nature of the personal experience as they relate to a larger context success?	Final product is then placed into a literary form.

Note. This figure depicts the methodology for thematic analysis as described by Van Manen, 1984, *Phenomenology + Pedagogy*, 2(1), 36-69. (<https://doi.org/10.29173/pandp14931>).

Van Manen (1984) describes the initial process, Part 1, as uncovering more pertinent aspects of the lifeworld description. The process began by capturing the raw input with all the participant's words, phrases, pauses, etc. without deleting any content. The key content of the transcript was then highlighted. These key content items included any text that was significant to addressing the initial and follow-up prompts. Specific highlights were left to the determination of the researcher. The input by the participant addressed the prompt, but the input was not as much of an experience as a listing of the key challenges and strategies of dealing with the task of scheduling.

Part 2 began with the transfer of all of the highlighted words and phrases to the next column. The words were left intact, but the extraneous words were eliminated, and the most essential words were retained and highlighted. Non-essential words were struck through and additional words were added in brackets to add meaning to phrases. A series of three dots was used to connect two related concepts that were separated by words that had not been highlighted in Part 1.

Part 3 was intended to capture a number of key themes as stand-alone phrases. It is intended to group and refine concepts and the output is in the voice of the researcher and not that of the participant. Due to the nature of the discussion, the identification and isolation of thematic statements became a relatively long list. Van Manen (1984) describes this part of the thematic analysis as capturing the essence of the phenomenological experience. The thematic statements were not numbered and were separated by a blank row.

Step 4 captures the essential themes that emerge through analysis from the output of Step 3. The researcher utilizes grouping techniques and literary tools to make sense of the numerous thematic statements that arose from Step 3 to identify universal statements that can be applied to the context of a larger world.

Analysis of the veteran survey data includes statistical analysis related to frequency and central tendency, which is intended to be both descriptive and inferential. Charts will be created to provide descriptive statistics for the sample. The number of responses will ultimately determine the viability of inferential analysis, but the intent is to be able to draw conclusions related to the entire student veteran body at MATC and draw comparisons to national data. The first category of questions for the student veteran survey, Student and Military Status, establishes whether or not the experience of the student fits the legal definition of veteran and the category

of veteran in which the student might reside. The primary purpose of the section is to ensure the integrity of the sample and will provide descriptive statistics that might be compared to that of the national student veteran population. The second category of questions, Knowledge of Available Services and Likelihood of Use, is intended to provide insight to Research Questions 1 and 2. The questions are represented by closed yes/no binary, list selection, and Likert scale approaches. The intent is to establish binary data addressing whether or not veterans are aware of and utilizing available resources. Percentages of respondents will be analyzed for inferential utilization. The third and last category of questions in the veteran student survey establishes the level of satisfaction with existing services. Likert scale analysis and the listing of answers to open-ended questions will provide data for inferential and descriptive application.

The data mining effort will consist of requests for information from the MATC Office of Institutional Research. Descriptive, comparative data including course completion rates and retention rates will be used in a comparative manner against the general student population and other subgroups at MATC.

Limitations

The nature, design, and implementation of the study possess built-in limitations that may impact the collection of data and subsequent analysis. For this study, the use of incentives, the lack of an ability to accurately define the population of interest, and differences in the application of similar services may impact results and conclusions.

Use of Incentives to Increase Response Rates

The use of incentives to increase the response rate with the goal of increasing confidence in the data set may negatively impact participation bias. In a 2017 study, Marken and Auter of Gallup found that greater response rates were realized and equally improved by using either pre-

paid or post-paid incentives. Their study with a sample set of 10,000 potential respondents found that the response rate was 6% greater when a small, \$5 incentive was implemented as part of the survey procedure (Marken & Auter, 2017). However, Hsieh and Kocielnik (2016) found that while incentives generally increased survey participation, the choice of incentives may introduce bias by modifying the demographics of attracted participants. They concluded that offering any single incentive may skew the sample set toward a more homogenous solution (Hsieh & Kocielnik, 2016). Not offering any incentive will also potentially limit responses to those who place an intrinsic value on the act of participation. Either case limits participation by appealing only to certain types of people. A small monetary incentive for a survey longer than a few minutes may introduce bias associated with participation more heavily weighted towards those of a lower socioeconomic status. Conversely, offering a relatively large incentive may incite bias by encouraging participation and false reporting from subjects outside the target population.

The Known Veteran Student Population Is Not Accurately Defined

The number of veteran students in the target population may not be accurately reflected in the data, thereby reflecting a more homogenous population than what actually exists. Those who have been positively identified represent a component of the veteran population who are using educational benefits established by the federal government specifically intended for that population. The Office of Institutional Research at MATC has identified roughly 196 veterans and 138 spouses and/or veteran family members who utilized veteran-targeted education benefits (Y. Wang, personal communication, December 22, 2020). The number of actual veterans on campus is not tracked for veteran support or decision-making purposes. Both the MESO and the VS report that the number of veterans on campus who do not utilize veteran education benefits is not a number that is tracked or used in any manner (W. Walker, personal communication,

February 26, 2020). Furthermore, data obtained from the Office of Institutional Research may not accurately reflect the number of veterans on campus for two reasons. First, the veteran may not be aware of personal status. Second, there is a distinct possibility that veterans do not wish to identify as such. Those who do not want to be identified as veterans are much less likely to use veteran services. Dan Zimmerman, former Wisconsin Department of Veteran Affairs Secretary and retired Army lieutenant colonel, has stated that one of the greatest challenges of providing services to veterans is that they tend not to self-identify (Jones, 2017). This is especially true for veterans of the Post-9/11 Era.

Difference in Services Offered Between Institutions

The sometimes-subtle differences in organization, personnel, and the application of various services intended to support veterans may result in findings which may limit application to other institutions. While specific services are prescribed and almost universally applied, the application and overall quality of services will not be uniform across educational institutions. For instance, while academic advising of veteran students is obviously taking place at every institution, factors exist which may or may not impact the overall success of the average veteran student.

Summary

The purpose of this study is to establish the degree to which MATC satisfactorily fulfills the needs of student veterans in helping them overcome barriers to academic program completion. Gaps will be identified regarding awareness of support programs, utilization of those programs, and what additional services might better meet the needs of the diverse group of veterans who currently undertake academic studies at MATC. Beyond the institutional level, this study will inform similar institutions and the larger community about which interventions prove

to be most effective with the goal of aiding the educational community. A secondary purpose for the study is to provide MATC and similar institutions with a potential way forward in addressing some of the impending financial challenges in upcoming years. As the total population of high school seniors decreases due to shifting demographics across the nation and in the State of Wisconsin, the Post-9/11 Era veteran population continues to grow.

The research and subsequent analysis attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent are veteran students generally aware of the support services available to them at the institutional, county, state, and federal levels?
2. With what proclivity do veteran students utilize the services and interventions that are available to them?
3. How well do the support services and interventions provided by the institution satisfy the specific needs of the veteran students?
4. What practices might the institution modify to further enhance veteran students' satisfaction and academic success?

The research plan incorporates a mixed methodology. The research will be quantitative in nature through the utilization of a standard survey that captures a number of individual qualitative answers from respondents that will be quantitatively analyzed. One or more questions of the veteran student survey will be purely qualitative with an open-ended prompt. The research will also conduct purely quantitative analysis of grade point averages, program completion rates, and average time to completion for veterans at the institution with mined data from the MATC Office of Institutional Research. Qualitative research will also be performed through the

application of an in-depth interview of a number of student veterans to further enhance finding determined through quantitative means.

The limitations of the methodology of the study include the possibility that incentivizing subjects to respond, the inability to realize the size of the target population, and inconsistencies related to the application of veteran services may impact overall findings and recommendations of the study. Each limitation poses a different challenge in collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data for use in the education community.

Chapter IV: Presentation of the Findings

This chapter provides detailed findings from multiple instruments about the knowledge, use, and satisfaction related to specific interventions aimed at veteran student success. First, the chapter will address demographic data of the respondents who participated in the student veteran survey and an in-depth interview. Second, it will detail the findings of each of the research questions presented in Chapter III utilizing data gleaned from a traditional survey, a series of in-depth interviews, and data mined from the MATC Office of Institutional Research.

The purpose of this study was to establish the degree to which MATC satisfactorily fulfilled the needs of student veterans in helping them overcome barriers to academic program completion. Gaps were identified regarding knowledge of available veteran support resources, their likelihood of use, and veteran overall satisfaction with specific interventions. The research also identified additional services and/or modifications to existing services that might better meet the needs of the diverse group of veterans who currently undertake academic studies at MATC. Beyond the institutional level and with the goal of aiding the educational community, this study was intended to inform similar institutions and the larger community about which interventions proved to be most helpful from a veteran's perspective. A secondary purpose for the study was to provide MATC and similar institutions with a potential way forward in addressing some of the impending financial challenges in upcoming years by providing improved services to a growing subgroup of the larger student population. As the total population of high school seniors decreases due to shifting demographics across the nation and in the State of Wisconsin, the Post-9/11 Era veteran population continues to grow.

Demographics

A total of 44 respondents participated in the veteran student survey with four respondents completing the survey physically, in person and 40 completing the survey electronically utilizing a Google Forms survey found in Appendix C. With a total population of 196 veteran students at MATC as of September 8, 2020 (Y. Wang, personal communication, December 22, 2020), the total response rate for the survey was 22.45%. The first four questions of the survey were intended to provide demographic data, and responses provided information about current military status, time period of military service, current academic standing, and the amount of time that the student had been taking classes at the institution.

Three military veteran students participated via in-depth interviews and were not respondents for the veteran student survey. They provided different, more highly personalized demographic information that will be addressed in the following paragraphs. Interview participants were selected through solicitation by the MESO and Veteran Resource Center staff. The staff was used as an intermediary and provided the contact information of students who were potentially interested in participation. Subsequent interviews were conducted individually via phone call and were recorded and transcribed as described in Chapter III.

Current Military Status

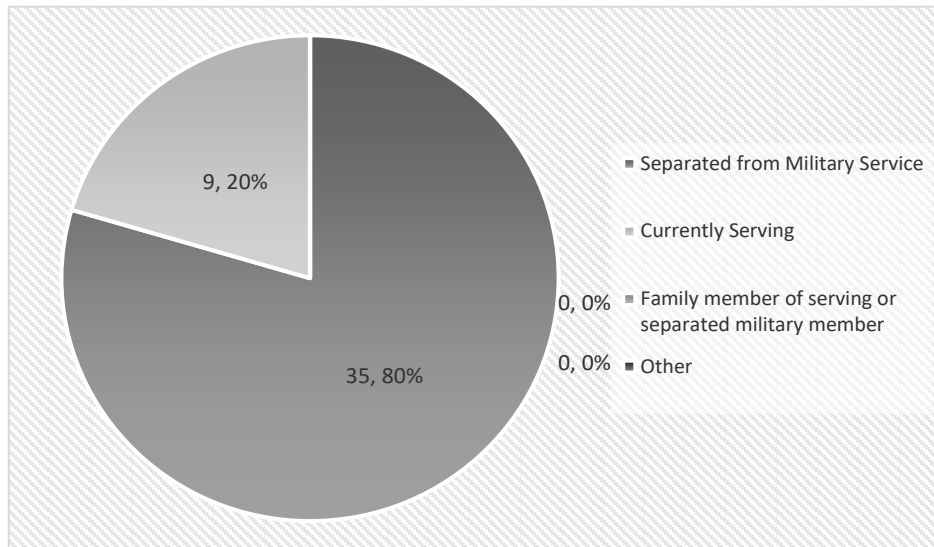
Classification of current military status had significance because it separated those who were no longer serving from those who are currently serving in the military on active duty, in a part-time capacity in the reserves or National Guard, or in the individual ready reserve. First, the question regarding current military status provided a filter to ensure that family members of veterans and those who had never served in the military were excluded from the respondent pool. Urbina (2009) reported numerous cases regarding military experiences, awards, and injuries

claimed by those who never served or who greatly exaggerated the extent and the characterization of their military service. And, while veterans must provide proof of service to obtain education benefits, MATC did not collect veteran status data on those who were simply applying for admission and enrolling in courses. The only burden of proof on the individual veteran student came with the use of federal and state educational benefits. Second, those who are currently serving at the time of the study will have had access to information about available educational resources through their military organizations. Reserve and National Guard units traditionally provide robust resources such as personnel who are trained to assist military members and their families in seeking federally funded educational opportunities. In contrast, those who separated from military service generally did not have that exposure to that information and expertise, except through resources offered at the institution and through county, state, and federal veteran support offices.

Thirty-five (80%) of the 44 respondents were currently separated from military service as shown in Figure 6. Two respondents also identified themselves as being “retired military” and they were categorized with others who were no longer serving in the military. Nine (20%) of the 44 respondents identified themselves as currently serving on active duty, in the reserves or National Guard, or in the individual ready reserve. Currently serving respondents represented 64.29% of the 14 total students who were identified by the MATC Institutional Research Department as currently serving students (Y. Wang, personal communication, December 22, 2020). No respondents identified themselves as family members of veterans or military dependents. Neither were there any respondents who were ultimately classified as “other.”

Figure 6

Survey Question 1 Results



Note. Which category pertaining to military service best describes you? Respondents were to select only one of the four options presented.

Period of Service

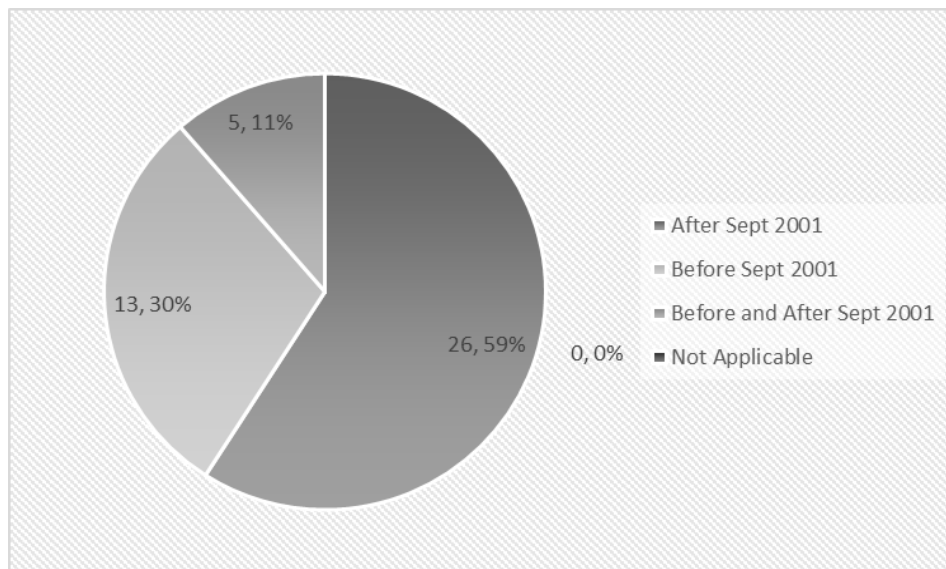
Lighthall (2012), Parker (2019), and Woods (2012) differentiated the various generations of those who served in the military, citing different experiences and subsequent needs related to education, employment, and readjusting to the civilian environment. The demographic measure related to military service sought to identify the ratio of latter and earlier generations of veterans to better isolate needs and related assessments.

Twenty-six (59%) of the 44 respondents as shown in Figure 7 identified themselves as serving in the military in the period of After September 2001. This date was identified as the start of a new generation of military service personnel, Post-9/11 Era veterans, who underwent more frequent, longer deployments than those of previous generations (Woods, 2012). This value represented those veterans who generally felt less connected to the military after departure from

the services, connected less with fellow veterans, and who underwent greater percentages of PTSD (Ochinko & Payea, 2018).

Figure 7

Survey Question 2 Results



Note. What time period best describes your military service?

Thirteen (30%) of the 44 respondents identified themselves as only serving in the military Prior to September 2001 and five (11%) served in the military Before and After September 2001. These earlier generations of veterans have shown to be generally more connected to their communities and other veterans and have lower rates of PTSD and prolonged addiction challenges (Ellison et al., 2012).

Current Academic Status

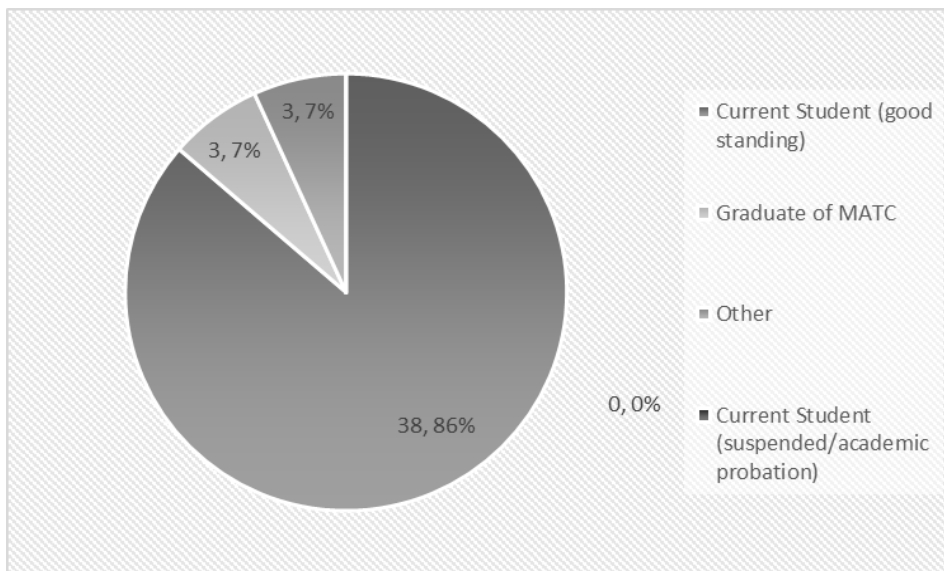
Academic standing as a demographic measure was intended to establish a potential correlation between those who were in good academic standing versus on academic probation and the knowledge of academic support resources and the likelihood of utilizing those resources. Cooper (2010) found that students who frequented campus tutoring centers were 10 times or

more likely to be in good standing at their institutions of higher learning and persist at the institution from one term to another.

Question 3 on the Veteran Student Survey asked about Current Academic Status and provided five options: prospective student, current student (good academic standing), current student (suspended or on academic probation), graduate of a MATC program, or other. As shown in Figure 8, thirty-eight (86%) of the 44 respondents identified themselves as a current student in good standing and three (7%) identified as a graduate of a MATC academic program. No respondents identified themselves as being suspended or on academic probation. The three “other” responses stated that they were taking a temporary break from classes or were planning on taking classes to count toward a bachelor’s degree but didn’t have the financial resources to do so.

Figure 8

Survey Question 3 Results

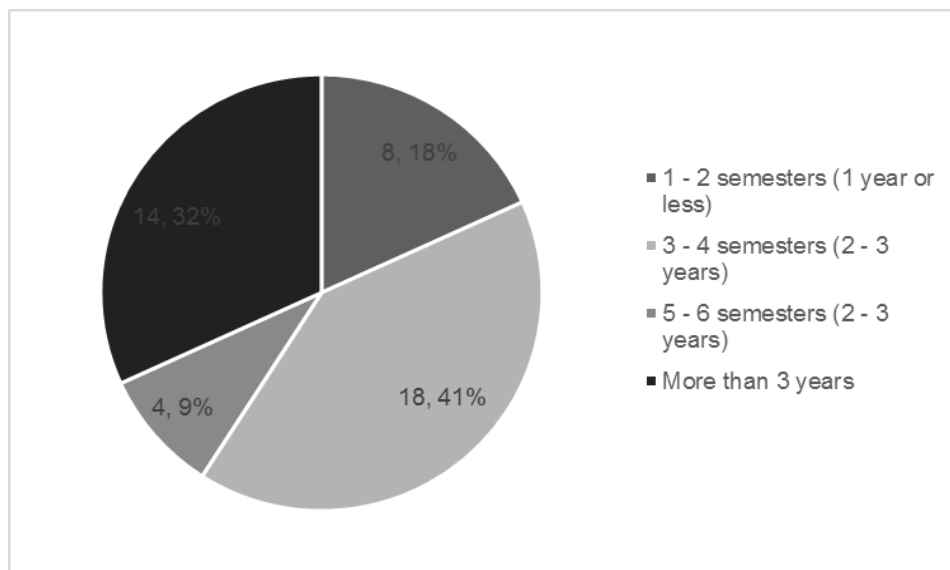


Note. What is your current academic status? Select only one.

Amount of Time Taking Classes at the Institution

This demographic measure distinguished between students who were relatively new to the institution and veteran students who may have been at the institution for a specific, longer period of time. Those with longer tenure at the institution would theoretically have been more knowledgeable of the resources available to veteran students. The measure also determined how many of the respondents were taking classes beyond the two-year period traditionally associated with full-time associate degree programs.

The prompt for Question 4 provided four options: 1 - 2 semesters (1 year or less), 3 - 4 semesters (1 - 2 years), 5 - 6 semesters (2 - 3 years), and More than 3 years. As shown in Figure 9, the largest category of respondents had taken classes at the institution for 2 – 3 years with 18 (41%) of the 44 total respondents. The second largest category of veteran students with 14 respondents had been taking classes at MATC for More than 3 years. Eight (18%) of respondents had been taking classes at MATC for 1 – 2 semesters and 4 (9%) had taken classes for 5 – 6 semesters.

Figure 9*Survey Question 4 Results*

Note. How long have you been taking classes at the institution? Select only one.

Demographics for In-Depth Interview Respondents

Three respondents served as subjects for in-depth interviews. Rather than using names, they were identified as Veteran Student (VS) 1 through 3. Demographic data is provided in Table 7. These respondents did not complete the online survey but were identified by MESO and Veteran Resource Center staff members as students with whom they were familiar and who might be interested in participation.

Table 7*Demographic Data Associated with In-Depth Interview Respondents*

Respondent	Gender	Ethnicity	Period of service	Service
VS 1	Male	White/Not-Hisp	After Sep 2001	Marine Corps
VS 2	Female	Black/African American	Before Sep 2001	Army
VS 3	Female	Black/African American	Before & after Sep 2001	Army

Item Analysis

The purpose of this study was to establish the degree to which MATC satisfactorily fulfilled the needs of student veterans in assisting them in overcoming barriers to academic program completion. Data was collected utilizing a survey, a case study providing a number of in-depth interviews and subsequent thematic analysis, and institutional data collected from the MATC Institutional Research Office. These instruments provided insight into the research questions listed in Table 8.

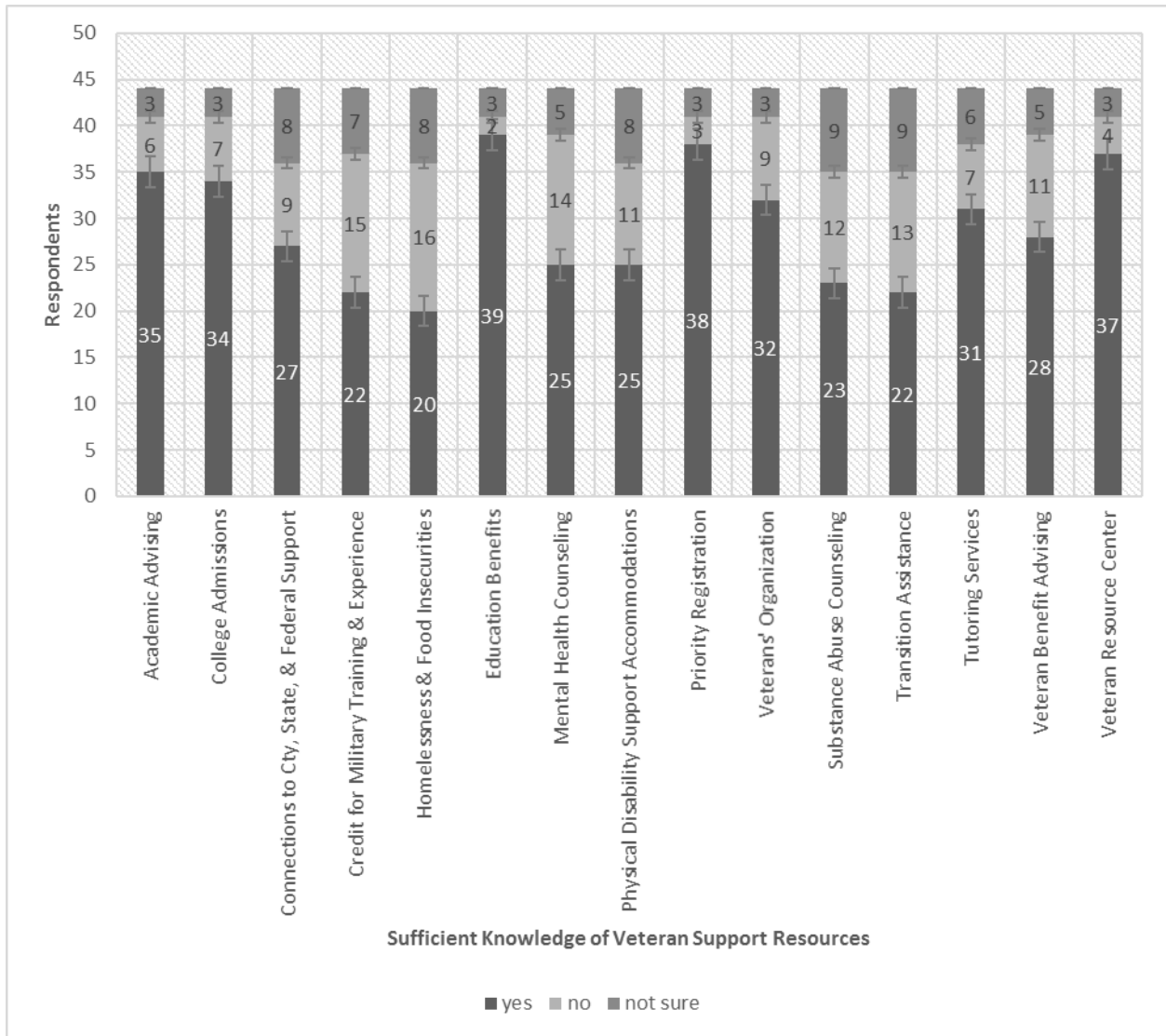
Table 8

Research Questions

Number	Question
1	To what extent are veteran students aware of the support services available to them at the institutional, county, state, and federal levels?
2	With what proclivity do veteran students utilize the services and interventions that are available to them?
3	How well do the support services and interventions provided by the institution satisfy the specific needs of the veteran students?
4	What practices might the institution modify to further enhance veteran students' satisfaction and academic success?

Research Question 1: To what extent are veteran students aware of the support services available to them at the institutional, county, state, and federal levels?

When asked about whether or not they had sufficient knowledge of available services, veteran study participants were provided a list of 15 institution-related services for which they were queried for comment. Respondents experienced a check-box table in which they were afforded the options of yes, no, and not sure. The services and responses were annotated in Figure 10.

Figure 10*Survey Question 5 Results*

Note. Each bar in the figure provides the number of responses related to whether or not a veteran student has sufficient knowledge for their needs about specific services at MATC.

Pertaining to the data provided in Figure 10, the mean number of “yes” responses per question was 29.2 with a sample standard deviation (s) of 6.38. The number of “yes” answers ranged from 20 to 38 with the lowest number of veteran students with sufficient knowledge of the services in the categories of Credit for Military Training & Experience, Homelessness &

Food Insecurities, and Transition Assistance. The category of Education Benefits had the greatest number of respondents with sufficient knowledge of resources with 38 (86%). The veteran service categories of Priority Registration, Veteran Resource Center, and Academic Advising had the greatest percentages of those with satisfactory knowledge. Table 9 provides relevant data pertaining to the mean number of responses per student by type. The mean number of “yes” responses per student was 9.95 for 66.33% of the total possible responses. “No” and “Not Sure” combined to comprise the remainder of the responses at approximately 33%.

Table 9

Analysis of Question 5: Veteran Student Knowledge of Available Resources

Respondent data	Mean	Percent	St dev	St error	Error margin (95%)
Mean number of “Yes” responses per respondent	9.95	66.33	4.06	0.61	1.22
Mean number of “No” responses per respondent	3.16	21.07	3.75	0.56	1.23
Mean number of “Not Sure” responses per respondent	1.89	12.60	2.99	0.45	0.90

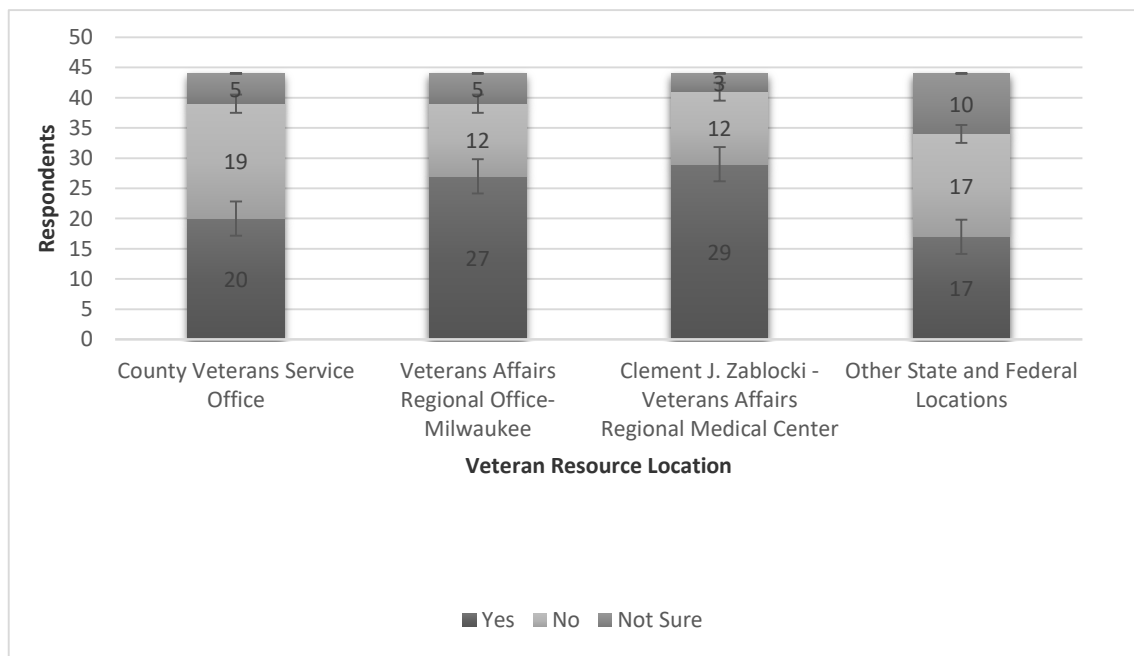
Because resources available to veteran students at the institution are often redundant with services offered by county, state, and federal entities, the knowledge of available resources outside of the institution was also measured. Given the close geographic proximity of resources from the institution, an assumption is that students who are able to commute to the institution would also be able to commute to the external resource location if they had sufficient knowledge.

Respondents were asked if they had sufficient knowledge of their County Veteran Service Office, the federal Veterans Affairs Regional Office – Milwaukee, the federal Clement J.

Zablocki Veterans Affairs Regional Medical Center, and other state and federal locations. Tabulated responses are shown in Figure 11.

Figure 11

Survey Question 8 Results



Note. This figure provides a graphical representation of responses regarding the knowledge that veteran students had regarding resources in the local vicinity.

The mean number of “yes” responses per question was 23.25 with a standard deviation (SD) of 5.68. The number of affirmative answers ranged from 17 to 29 with the lowest number of affirmative responses relating to knowledge of Other State and Federal Locations. The majority of veteran students were familiar with the VA Regional Office-Milwaukee and the Clement J. Zablocki – VA Regional Medical Center with 27 (61.36%) and 29 (65.91%) respectively answering to the affirmative with regard to their sufficient level of knowledge. The County Veteran Service Office location varies according to the county of residence of the respondent. Only 20 (45%) of the 44 respondents felt that they had sufficient knowledge of their

County Veterans Service Office (CVSO). The CVSO has been identified by the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs as the office with the primary responsibility to work with the federal and state VA departments and other veteran service organizations to ensure that veterans receive all the benefits to which they are entitled (Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.-b, n.d.-c). More than half of veteran students either were certain that they did not have enough knowledge about this office or were unsure, with 24 (55%) reporting as such. Table 10 addresses data relevant to Question 8 as it relates to responses per student.

Table 10

Analysis of Question 8: Veteran Student Knowledge of County, State, and Federal Resources

Respondent data	Mean	Percent	St dev	St error	Error margin (95%)
Mean number of “Yes” responses per respondent	2.12	53.00	1.53	0.23	0.46
Mean number of “No” responses per respondent	1.35	33.75	1.49	.023	0.45
Mean number of “Not Sure” responses per respondent	0.53	13.25	0.95	0.14	0.29

In-depth interview respondents ranged from expressing a great deal of knowledge about resources available to veterans to admitting that they had almost no knowledge at all. Veteran Student (VS) 1 and VS2 had very limited knowledge of available resources. VS1 expressed a disappointment with the quality of the mandatory transition classes administered by their branch of service just prior to separation, claiming that the only knowledge with which they left the service was a vague understanding of educational benefits. VS1 shared that their unit prior to separation was less than helpful, almost belligerent to those who were known to be leaving military service. VS1 articulated that their greatest challenge when entering higher education was

in the area of career counseling. They knew that they were entitled to utilize federal education benefits, but they simply had no idea what academic program that they should pursue. After conducting a great deal of online research, VS1 began taking general education classes. Later, based on their desire to help people, they decided to enter an area in the health field. VS2 expressed that they had no knowledge of what resources were available to them or what to expect. Furthermore, they expressed that they had no idea how to navigate the process for obtaining their military education benefits. They didn't have any questions initially because they didn't know what questions to ask. VS2 stated that there was a great deal of information available to veterans at the regional VA center but that there was nobody to help them sort it out to obtain the information that they needed. Both VS1 and VS2 gave great credit to the MESO at MATC and the staff in the Veteran Resource Center for providing outstanding service and assisting them with navigating resource challenges.

VS3 possessed greater knowledge with regard to services available to veteran students at MATC as well as resources residing with external entities. The respondent detailed resources and locations at MATC, highlighting the MESO and the Veteran Resource Center. They also possessed a great deal of knowledge with regard to the mental health resources, drug addiction recovery assistance, temporary housing, food, clothing, etc., available at county, state, and federal locations. VS3 identified academic advisors, the staff at the Veteran Resource Center, and the MESO as being primary sources of information regarding veteran resources at MATC.

Research Question 2: With what proclivity do veteran students utilize the services and interventions that are available to them?

When asked about the likelihood of using the resources available to them, survey respondents were provided the same list of veteran-focused resources for which knowledge was assessed for the prior research question. Respondents were provided a five-variable Likert scale

that ranged from “Definite Yes” to “Definite No.” The responses were captured in Table 11 as the percentages of the 44 respondents who responded in each category for specific resources.

Table 11

Analysis of Question 7: Likelihood that Veteran Students Will Utilize the Resources Intended to Support Their Academic Success

Student veteran support response	Definite yes	Very likely	Somewhat likely	Not likely	Definite no
Academic advising	9.09%	29.55%	36.36%	20.45%	4.55%
College admissions	20.45%	15.91%	34.09%	22.73%	6.82%
Connections to county, state, & federal support	18.18%	22.73%	36.36%	15.91%	6.82%
Credit for military training & experience	27.27%	18.18%	31.82%	13.64%	9.09%
Dealing with homelessness & food insecurities	9.09%	6.82%	15.91%	40.91%	27.27%
Education benefits	36.64%	27.27%	20.45%	6.82%	6.82%
Mental health counseling	4.55%	13.64%	15.91%	43.18%	22.73%
Physical disability support accommodations	9.09%	11.36%	13.64%	36.36%	29.55%
Priority registration	43.18%	20.45%	20.45%	6.82%	9.09%
Campus veteran student organization	15.91%	13.64%	34.09%	25.00%	11.36%
Substance abuse counseling	4.55%	9.09%	13.64%	43.18%	29.55%
Transition assistance	9.09%	15.91%	27.27%	29.55%	18.18%
Tutoring services	18.18%	9.09%	27.27%	34.09%	11.36%
Veterans benefit advising	15.91%	34.09%	18.18%	20.45%	11.36%
Veteran Resource Center	27.73%	34.09%	20.45%	11.36%	11.36%

Note. This table represents the percent of 44 respondents and related likelihood of utilizing various resources listed.

Of the 44 respondents, four answered all “Definite Yes” or “Very Likely.” Four answered all “Not Likely” or “Definite No.” The results of combining “Definite Yes” and “Very Likely” responses yielded data for the following table, Table 12, which provides those resources for which 40% or more of the respondents answered to the affirmative regarding their likelihood that they would utilize the named resources.

The named resources which respondents stated that they were most likely to utilize were education benefits and priority registration. Respondents for the in-depth interview spoke in detail about utilization of education benefits and the opportunity to participate in early registration. Related to likelihood of use, VS1 stated that education benefits were the only resource about which they knew when leaving the service and was the one resource that they definitely knew that they would use. All in-depth interview respondents were utilizing federal education benefits and the MESO at MATC to complete the requisite paperwork. All in-depth interview respondents utilized priority registration opportunities. However, VS1 stated that since they were in a limited cohort program, they were less likely to utilize priority registration due to the fact that there was a seat reserved for them in their advanced coursework.

Table 12

Resources for which 40% or More of Respondents Stated that they Definitely Will or Were Very

Likely to Utilize the Named Resource

Named resource	Respondents	Percent
Education benefits	29	65.91
Priority registration	28	63.64
Veteran Resource Center	25	56.82
Veteran benefit advising	22	50.00
Credit for military training & experience	20	40.91
Connections to county, state, & federal support	28	40.91

Note. This table represents the resources and services that veteran student respondents stated that they would be most likely to use.

Table 13 provides a list of those services and resources for which 40% or more of the respondents articulated either “Not Likely” or “Definite No” in their responses for the likelihood of utilizing the named resources. At the top of the list for potential non-utilization were substance abuse counseling, resources focused on homelessness and food insecurities, mental health counseling, and support for physical disabilities. When asked about their experiences related to the aforementioned services, VS2 stated that while they were aware of the services mentioned that they had not utilized them for their benefit. VS3 expressed likelihood of using the resources and stated that they had an appointment to utilize mental health resources at the regional VA center that very afternoon.

Table 13

Resources for which 40% or More of Respondents Answered Definite No or Not Likely regarding Their Likelihood to Utilize the Named Resource

Named resource	Respondents	Percent
Substance abuse counseling	32	73.73
Dealing with homelessness % food insecurities	30	68.18
Mental health counseling	29	65.91
Physical disability support accommodations	29	65.91
Transition assistance	21	47.73
Tutoring services	20	45.45

Note. This table represents the resources and services that veteran student respondents stated that they would be most likely to use.

Respondents were queried about their reasoning for answering “Definite No” or “Not Likely” and were provided a list of common responses from which to select and were allowed to

select multiple reasons. They were provided an opportunity to input a unique response under the category of “Other.”

The most prevalent response was “I do not need the specific resource(s)” with 35 overall responses under that category and with 24 respondents who utilized that single selection.

Thirteen respondents chose to select multiple reasons for likely non-usage ranging from two to five reasons. Only one respondent provided five reasons. Responses for reasons of reduced likelihood of usage are provided in Table 14.

Table 14

Reasons Provided by Respondents for “Definite No” and “Not Likely” Answers Related to Likelihood of Utilizing Veteran-Intended Resources

Response	Frequency	Percent of respondents (n = 40)
I do not need the specific resource	35	87.50
I was not aware of the specific resource	8	20.00
I do not want to be identified as needing the specific resource	6	15.00
I don’t know where the resource is located or can’t go get it	5	12.50
Embarrassment	4	10.00
The resource isn’t available when I need it	2	5.00
Wait times	0	0.00
Other:		
I don’t need it but I might need to help someone else	1	2.50

Note. Veteran Student Survey Question 7. If you selected “Definite No” or “Not Likely” for one or more of the veteran support resources in Question 6, why did you select that option? Table 14 provides the frequency that a response was selected from a possible list of responses with an opportunity for the respondents to enter unique answers under the “Other” category.

Research Question 3: How well do the support services and interventions provided by the institution satisfy the specific needs of the veteran students?

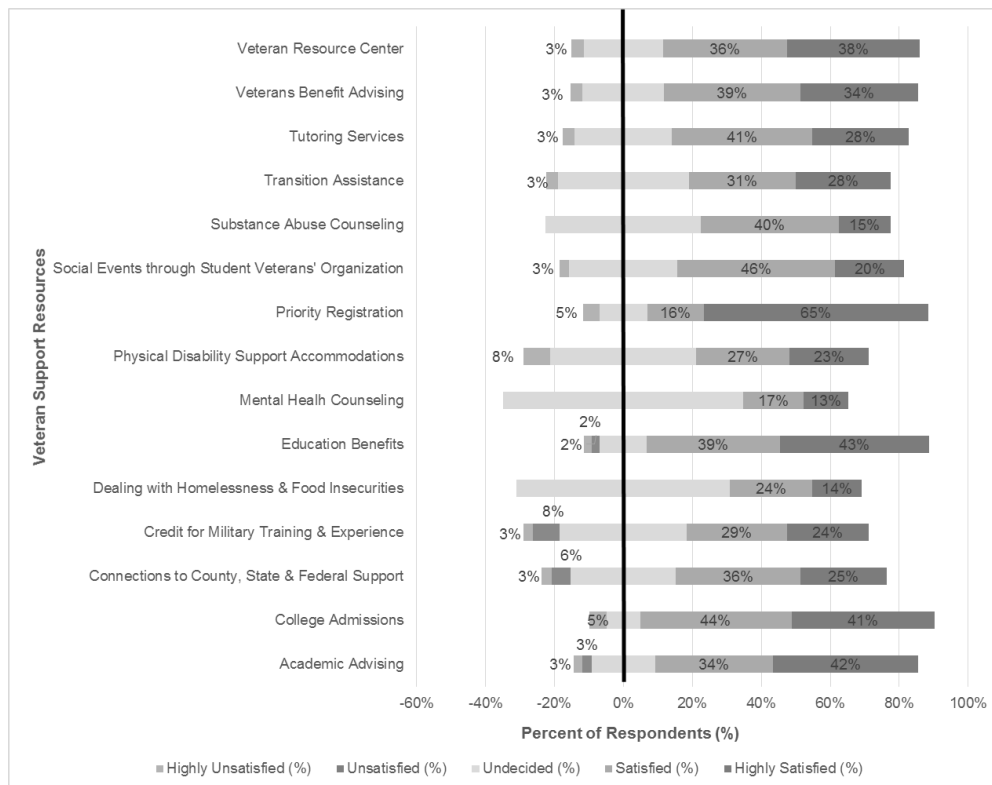
The measure of the how well the veteran support services provided by the institution satisfactorily met the needs of the veteran students was determined using three instruments. First, two Likert scale questions were incorporated as part of the Veteran Student Survey. One question assessed levels of veteran student satisfaction with MATC-related services and the other assessed those offered at county, state, and federal locations. Second, a case study was performed which incorporated in-depth interviews of three current MATC veteran students with subsequent thematic analysis as described in Chapter III. Lastly, data was collected from the MATC Institutional Research Office that provided some comparative data relative to the general student population: retention rates and course completion rates. The institutional data was gathered and analyzed during the 2018 academic year, the most recent available.

The Veteran Student Survey requested input from respondents concerning their levels of satisfaction with the same categories of resources which have been previously assessed for knowledge and likelihood of use. Results of survey Question 9 are provided in Figure 12. Of the 503 total responses, 335 were either “Highly Satisfied” or “Satisfied.” A total of 22 were either “Unsatisfied” or “Highly Unsatisfied” with 12 of the “Highly Unsatisfied” responses coming from a single individual. One-Hundred forty-six (29%) were “Undecided.” The highest levels of satisfaction, a comparison of the summation of “Highly Satisfied” and “Satisfied” responses, were in the areas of College Admissions (85.37%), Education Benefits (81.82%), Priority Registration (81.40%), Academic Advising (76.32%), and Veterans Resource Center (74.36%). Those with the lowest percentages of overall “Highly Satisfied” or “Satisfied” responses on an increasing basis included Mental Health Counseling (30.43%), Dealing with Homelessness &

Food Insecurities (38.10%), Physical Disability Support Accommodations (50.00%), and Credit for Prior Military Training & Experience (52.63%).

Figure 12

Survey Question 11 Results



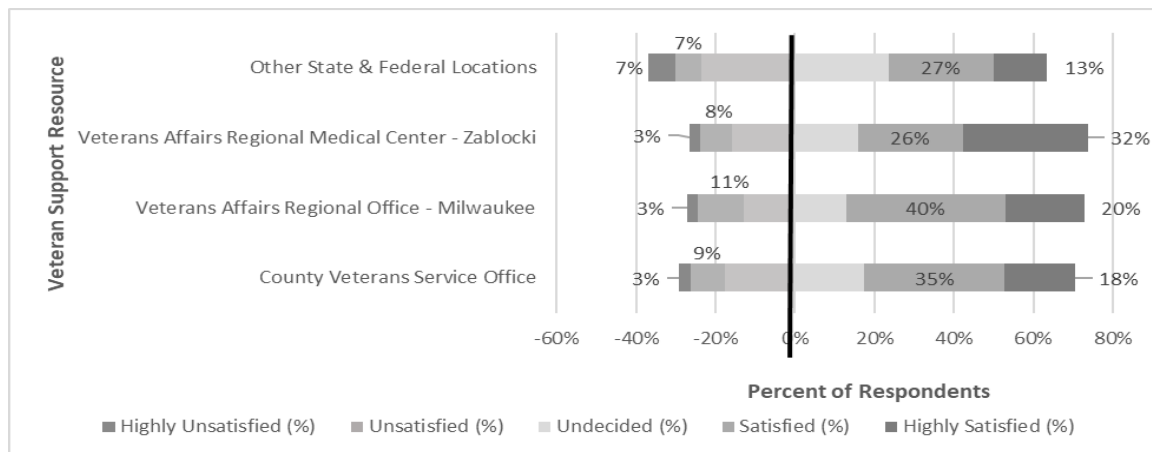
Note. What is your level of satisfaction with the veteran services at the institution in meeting your academic support needs in the following areas? The shaded region around the 0% vertical line represents the percentage of respondents who had registered an “Undecided” for the associated resource. Those in the positive on the horizontal axis are those percentages that were either “Satisfied” or “Highly Satisfied.” Those to the left of the 0% vertical were those who responded as either “Unsatisfied” or “Highly Unsatisfied” with a particular resource.

Research also included an assessment of the level of satisfaction with veteran support services at county, state, and federal locations. Responses for Veteran Student Survey Question 11 were provided in Figure 13. Respondents were provided a Likert scale to assess their level of

satisfaction from “Highly Satisfied” to “Highly Unsatisfied” with an option to select “Not Applicable” in the event that they did not have experience with the named resource.

Figure 13

Survey Question 11 Results



Note. What is your level of satisfaction with the following veteran support locations at the county, state, and federal levels? The shaded region around the 0% vertical line represents the percentage of respondents who had registered an “Undecided” for the associated resource. Those in the positive on the horizontal axis are those percentages that were either “Satisfied” or “Highly Satisfied.” Those to the left of the 0% vertical were those who responded as either “Unsatisfied” or “Highly Unsatisfied” with a particular resource.

Of the 44 survey respondents, two (4.55%) answered “Not Applicable” for every resource. Seven (15.91%) of total respondents answered “Undecided” for every resource and three (6.82%) answered either “Highly Unsatisfied” or “Unsatisfied” for every resource. The Regional VA Office – Milwaukee and the Clement J. Zablocki Regional Medical Center had the highest number of respondents who answered either “Satisfied” or “Highly Satisfied.”

In-depth interviews also provided insight regarding how well the services intended to support veterans impacted their academic success. Table 15 provided statements and themes for which students expressed their level of satisfaction with various services.

Table 15

Common Thematic Statements Linked to In-Depth Interviews

Respondent(s)	Thematic statement
VS1, VS3	Veteran students experienced little difficulty going through the college admissions process. (Admissions Process Support)
VS1, VS3	The MESO at MATC took care of the entire process of applying for GI Bill benefits. Once the respondent provided their DD-214, the MESO took care of the rest. (Education Benefits)
VS1, VS2, VS3	The Veterans Resource Center provided an array of resources that were valued by veteran students for varying reasons. Major resources provided included food, computers, printing capability, television, place to study, place to meet and interact with other veterans, and a knowledgeable staff to answer other resource questions. (Veterans Resource Center)
VS1, VS2, VS3	Priority Registration was a highly valued resource. This is especially when getting into high-demand classes can be challenging. The respondents saw it as a valuable benefit provided by the college. (Priority Registration)
VS1	While service-provided mandatory transition classes took place, the classes were of poor quality and of little utility. (Transition Assistance)
VS1, VS3	The COVID-19 environment has impacted the ability of MATC to provide the face-to-face resources that veterans have identified as being important to them. (General Support)

Respondents to the in-depth interviews highly regarded the MATC staff who served in the MESO and the Veterans Resource Center. VS3 shared that the staff in the Veterans Resource Center served as their primary source of information for veteran-related benefits and that the staff had even arranged for veterans to have dental work performed at the Marquette Dental School. Multiple respondents stated that they had no idea about how to go about applying for their education benefits but that the MESO staff at MATC made sure that they received the benefits to which they were entitled. Two of the three respondents stated that once the College

instituted COVID-19 measures, that the lack of in-person resources affected their ability to connect with fellow veterans and utilize the highly valued resources associated with the Veterans Resource Center.

Cook and Kim (2009), DeCoster (2018), Newport (2009) and others cited the challenges specific to Post-9/11 era veterans in the areas of mental health, substance abuse, and culture shock experienced when leaving the military. Having faced challenges of these types themselves, VS2 and VS3 provided a great deal of insight regarding the magnitude and the quality of the resources available. VS3 felt that the resources to deal with these challenges are available to all veterans if they know where to connect with the appropriate resources and are motivated to reach out to the particular resource. VS3 further reported that when they left the military that they began to abuse alcohol and credited the VA substance abuse counseling classes that they took for their recovery. VS3 was also actively utilizing the mental health counseling services at the VA Regional Center – Milwaukee and praised their ready access to the resource.

Culture shock was also brought up in an unsolicited fashion by both VS2 and VS3. Leaving the military environment, where there was a great deal of camaraderie, for the civilian environment proved to be a challenge for these respondents. They credited their association with other veterans through the student veteran organization on campus and the ability to connect with other veterans at the Veteran Resource Center as a mitigating factor that helped them cope with the differences.

Academic and Career advising were discussed by the interview and in-depth respondents as services which were greatly needed. VS1 stated that when they first left military service and started taking classes that they had no idea what academic program they wanted to pursue. VS1 further felt that although it was relatively easy entering the college that there wasn't anybody

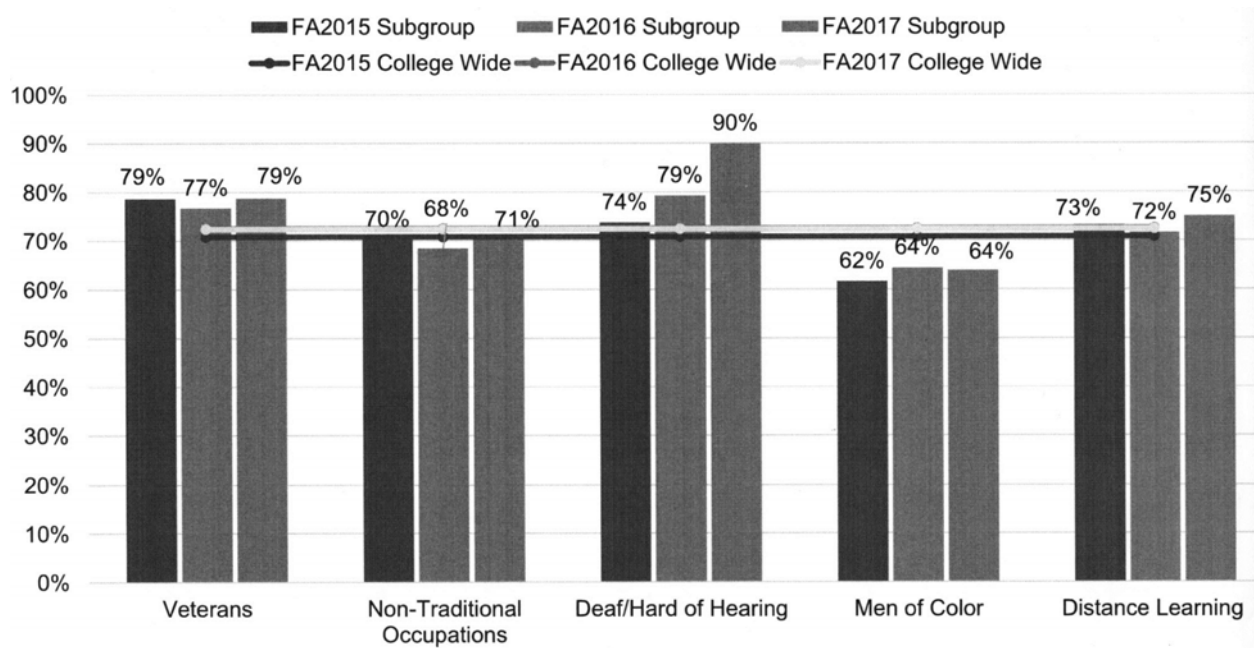
assisting to steer them in a particular career direction. They discovered their academic path on their own. VS2 and VS3 spoke highly of academic advising by the faculty and the pathway advising teams. They sighted a difference in the level of knowledge and focus of the two entities. VS3 cited the MATC pathway advisors as having an ability to be realistic about how many credits and which classes to take in a given term.

Knowledge of and access to county, state, and federal resources seemed to be a key factor for determining overall level of satisfaction. VS1 had very little knowledge about available resources outside the category of Education Benefits. VS1 stated that when they first departed the military that they asked a few questions from employees at the institution who they felt were not able to answer their questions effectively, so they gave up pursuing resources. VS2 and VS3 praised the efforts of the MESO and the staff at the Veteran Resource Center for providing knowledge and a connection to resources outside the college. VS3 was highly knowledgeable about the resources available off campus. They stated that the resources were there for everything from housing, food, clothing, and medical treatment to mental health and substance abuse counseling. They also cited ease of access to those resources and stated that those veterans who didn't utilize those resources when needed were simply lazy.

Data mining utilizing the MATC Office of Institutional Research also provided some comparative data for determining how well veteran-related services were in assisting veterans in overcoming academic barriers. The two measures where data was available regarded course completion percentages and retention from Fall-to-Fall and from Fall-to-Spring terms. Comparative data for course completion rates of MATC veteran students to other subgroups and program students for the years 2015 through 2017 were highlighted in Figure 14.

Figure 14

Course Completion Rates for MATC



	Veterans		NTO		Deaf		Men of Color		Distance Learning	
	ENR	Pass	ENR	Pass	ENR	Pass	ENR	Pass	ENR	Pass
FA2015	1245	979	3423	2406	137	101	11445	7053	9473	6933
FA2016	1085	833	2726	1867	111	88	10225	6588	10805	7738
FA2017	1130	890	1680	1186	40	36	9576	6118	7644	5734

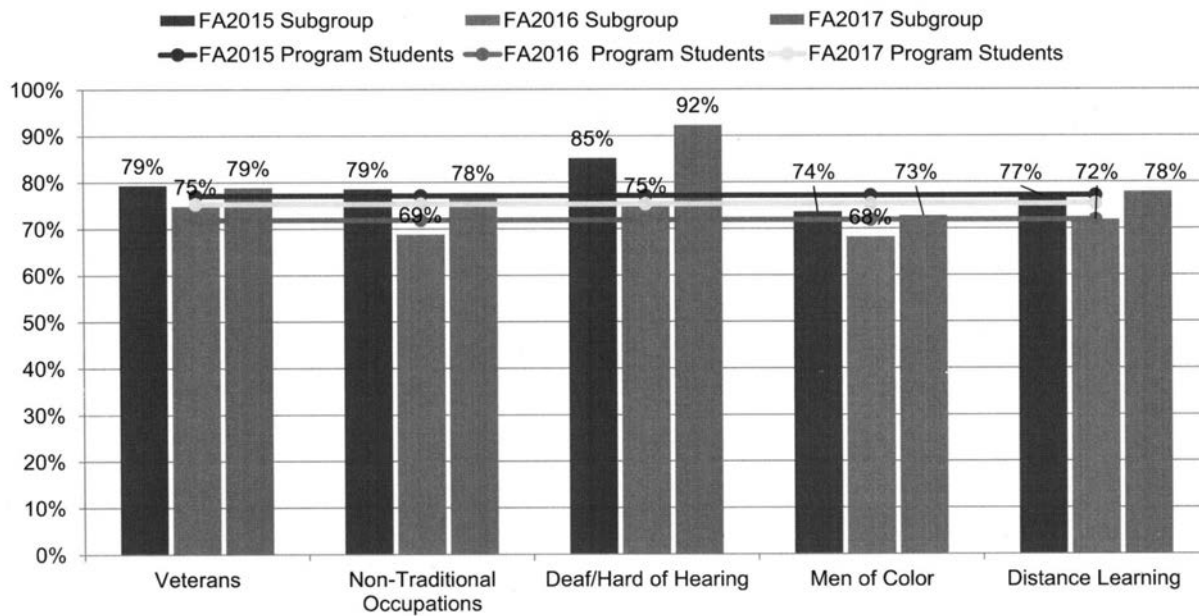
Note. Data provided is for Subgroup vs. College-Wide for 2015 – 2017. The college-wide base comparison is to students who have declared a program of study. Source: MATC Office of Institutional Research, 2020, personal communication.

During the years for which data was provided from 2015 through 2017, veterans completed courses at a rate slightly higher than the college-wide rates at approximately 72% as well as other assessed subgroups. The subgroup Deaf/Hard of Hearing outperformed Veterans in the measure of course completion rates in both 2016 and 2017. It is noteworthy to mention that the subgroup population for Deaf/Hard of Hearing was 12 and 13 respectively and that the Veteran subgroup population was 151 and 223 in those same years.

Retention rates were a key factor in assessing how well veteran-focused services were assisting veterans in overcoming academic barriers. Fall to Spring Term and Fall to Fall Term retention rates for years 2015 through 2017 for comparing rates linked to veteran students to other subgroups and MATC program students were provided in Figures 15 and 16, respectively.

Figure 15

Fall to Spring Retention Rates for MATC

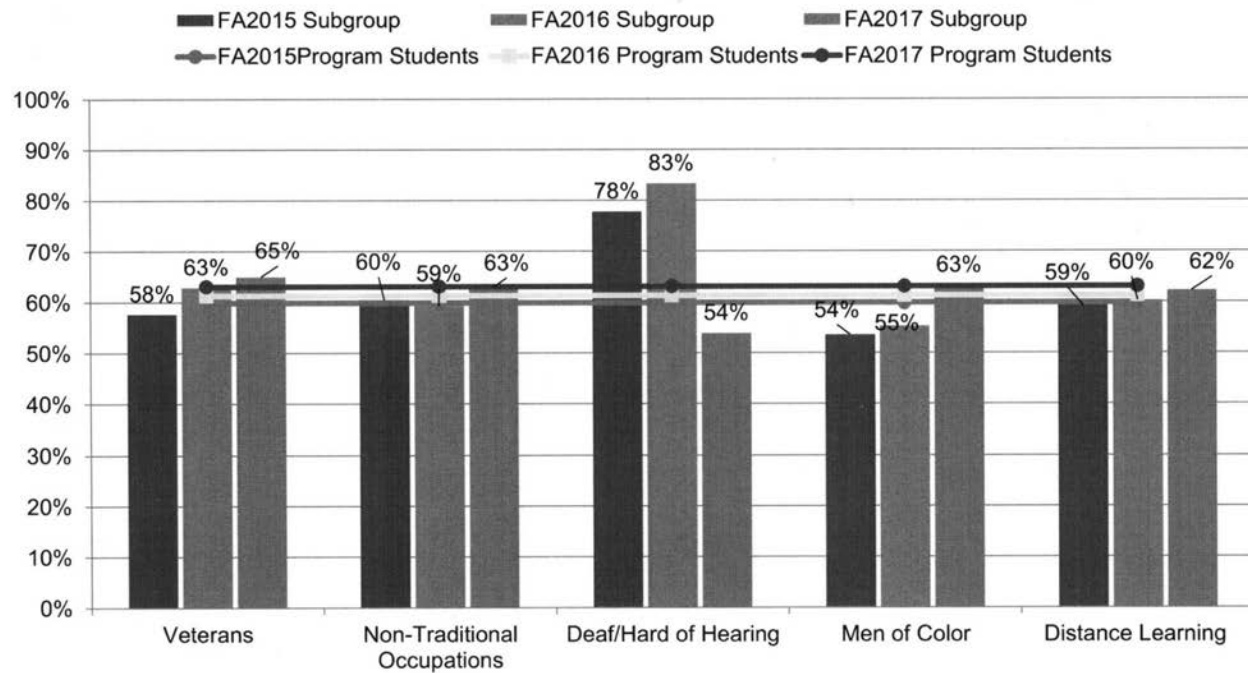


	Veterans		NTO		Deaf		Men of Color		Distance Learning	
	FA Enr	SP Ret	FA Enr	SP Ret	FA Enr	SP Ret	FA Enr	SP Ret	FA Enr	SP Ret
FA2015	295	234	1188	933	27	23	2571	1893	3899	3013
FA2016	151	113	1034	711	12	9	2133	1455	3391	2434
FA2017	223	166	944	706	13	9	2001	1524	2663	1987

Note. Fall-to-Spring Retention Rates for MATC: Subgroup vs College-Wide. Data was provided for years 2015 through 2017. The college-wide base comparison is to students who have declared a program of study. Source: MATC Office of Institutional Research, 2020, personal communication.

Figure 16

Fall to Fall Retention Rates for MATC



	Veterans		NTO		Deaf		Men of Color		Distance Learning	
	FA Enr	FA-FA Ret	FA Enr	FA-FA Ret	FA Enr	FA-FA Ret	FA Enr	FA-FA Ret	FA Enr	FA-FA Ret
FA2015	295	170	1188	718	27	21	2571	1377	3899	2312
FA2016	151	95	1034	613	12	10	2133	1178	3391	2043
FA2017	223	145	944	594	13	7	2001	1265	2663	1657

Note. Fall to Fall Retention Rates for MATC: Subgroup vs College-Wide. Data was provided for years 2015 through 2017. The college-wide base comparison is to students who have declared a program of study. Source: MATC Office of Institutional Research, 2020, personal communication.

Veteran Fall-to-Spring Term retention rates as shown in Figure 15 were on par or slightly higher than program students and other subgroups for all years with the exception of the Deaf/Hard of Hearing Subgroup, which was significantly smaller in size. The next smallest subgroup, Veterans, was larger by a factor of 10. Retention rates dipped for all subgroups in 2016 and in that year the college Fall-to-Spring Term retention was at 72%. The Veteran

subgroup outperformed the general program student population by 4%, 3%, and 4% respectively, albeit with a much smaller population.

Fall-to-Fall Term retention rates as shown in Figure 16 for the Veteran subgroup slightly underperformed other subgroups and the general population in 2015 by 5% with a retention rate of 58%. The Men of Color was the only subgroup to experience a lower retention rate with 54%. For 2016 and 2017, the Veteran subgroup retained students on par or at slightly higher rates than other subgroups and the general population with the exception of the Deaf/Hard of Hearing subgroup.

Research Question 4: What practices might the institution modify to further enhance veteran students' satisfaction and academic success?

The last question of the Veteran Student Survey, Question 12, provided an open-ended opportunity for respondents to provide input regarding actions that the institution might take to better support veteran academic success. Of the 44 respondents who participated in the survey, 21 provided input. Six respondents were complimentary with no additional input or stated that they had no input. Fourteen provided unique answers which are provided and categorized in Table 16.

Table 16*Survey Question 12 Responses*

Verbatim statement	Summary
Easier access to using veteran benefits.	Improve access
Make these services more visible.	Improve access
Better advertising to military and former military.	Increase/improve communication
Better communication.	Increase/improve communication
Continue with email notifications about services available.	Increase/improve communication
Become more known on campus. It is hard with COVID, so maybe email and host events.	Increase/improve communication
Inform the students of the availability of these resources and how to utilize them.	Increase/improve communication
If a course I am registered for cannot be covered by the GI Bill, more notice than the first week of class would be beneficial.	Increase/improve communication (student finance)
Make these things more public. Of no one advocates it then how are students supposed to know. Especially since things are all online now [sic].	Increase/improve communication
I wasn't told that I need to submit a form each year and my registration was dropped. I was able to reenroll, but I wish I would have known to avoid that.	Increase/improve communication
Maybe promote the veteran office and services more during the school seasons to create awareness and attract veterans and current members of the armed forces.	Improve access.
I think that having a veteran services hangout area like they have at every campus would be beneficial. I don't go to the downtown campus because of my program and parking sucks. Therefore, I haven't been to the veteran hangout center downtown.	Add Veteran Resource Centers at other campuses
Easier access to information on a very simple list of pages with minimal links. Having a confusing web page that sends you all over the place, lightly touching on information, isn't helpful. it's confusing. Having similar information on many pages, many different VA related pages, is stupid. No one finds out the right information when it's handled the way it is.	Increase/improve communication (website)
I am okay with my academic success; however, I help a lot of veterans obtain information about their benefits and who to contact. I wish this information was more visible to veterans as soon as they view/visit MATC. The veterans I talk to, many of them are unaware of, or do not know, how to start to retrieve their benefits for education.	Improve access

Note. Verbatim responses to Question 12 of the Veteran Student Survey, an open-ended

question. What actions might the institution take in the area of veteran service to better support your academic success?

In-depth interviews also proved to be a source of recommendations for improving programmatic support to student veterans. Paraphrased, summarized recommendations were captured in Table 17.

Table 17

In-Depth Interview Recommendations

Summarized response recommendations for improved services to veterans
Provide veteran-focused academic advisors.
Improve communication of veteran-specific information.
Provide a point-of-contact that links veteran students to services that they can use. Reduce the runaround by staff members who don't know answers to veteran-related questions.
Provide veteran-focused career counseling.
Have the VA provide tutors on location at MATC for supporting veteran students.
Move priority registration earlier relative to regular registration dates.
Improve knowledge of resources through better communication to veteran students.

Note. Recommendations provided during three in-depth interviews of MATC veteran students as part of a case study.

Although respondents were highly complimentary of the staff in the MESO and the Veteran Resource Center, they had a number of recommendations. The recommendations were not filtered for feasibility but were summarized to provide brevity and clarity based on conversational context.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to establish the degree to which MATC satisfactorily fulfills the needs of student veterans in helping them overcome barriers to academic program completion. Gaps were identified regarding knowledge of available veteran support resources. The likelihood of use and overall satisfaction with the set of 15 various services or programs was assessed. The research also identified additional services and/or modifications to existing

services that might better meet the needs of the diverse group of veterans who currently undertake academic studies at MATC. Beyond the institutional level and with the goal of aiding the educational community, this study was intended to inform similar institutions and the larger community about which interventions proved to be most helpful from a veteran perspective.

A secondary purpose for the study was to provide MATC and similar institutions with a potential way forward in addressing some of the impending financial challenges in upcoming years by providing improved services to a growing subgroup of the larger student population. As the total population of high school seniors decreases due to shifting demographics across the nation and in the State of Wisconsin, the Post-9/11 Era veteran population continues to grow.

To achieve the intended purposes of this study, the study addressed the following research questions:

1. To what extent are veteran students aware of the support services available to them at the institutional, county, state, and federal levels?
2. With what proclivity do veteran students utilize the services and interventions that are available to them?
3. How well do the support services and interventions provided by the institution satisfy the specific needs of the veteran students?
4. What practices might the institution modify to further enhance veteran students' satisfaction and academic success?

Regarding Research Question 1 and knowledge of available resources, respondents had the lowest degree of sufficient knowledge of veteran-related resources in the areas of Credit for Military Training & Experience, Homelessness & Food Insecurities, and Transition Assistance. The category of Education Benefits had the greatest number of respondents with sufficient

knowledge of resources with 38 (86%). The veteran service categories of Priority Registration, Veteran Resource Center, and Academic Advising had the greatest percentages of those with satisfactory knowledge respectively behind Education Benefits. The average respondent had sufficient knowledge for 10 or the 15 veteran support categories for a positive response rate of 66% overall.

Research Question 2 addressed the likelihood of use by respondents regarding the same 15 veteran-related services assessed in Research Question 1. The named resources which respondents stated that they were most likely to utilize were education benefits and priority registration. Respondents for the in-depth interview spoke in detail about utilization of education benefits and the opportunity to participate in early registration. The resources with the greatest likelihood of use were Education Benefits, Priority Registration, Veteran Resource Center, Veteran Benefit Advising, and Credit for Military Training and Experience (see Table 9). The veteran-related resources with the least likelihood of use were Substance Abuse Counseling, Dealing with Homelessness & Food Insecurities, Physical Disability Support Accommodations, Transition Assistance, and Tutoring Services (see Table 10).

Research Question 3 addressed how well the support services addressed veteran needs in overcoming academic barriers. Data addressing this question was both qualitative and quantitative. Information provided by the MATC Office of Institutional Research suggests that retention rates and course completion rates were generally higher among the veteran student population than general program students as well as the majority of subgroups of interest. Respondents to the MATC Veteran Student Survey suggest that the highest levels of satisfaction, a comparison of the summation of “Highly Satisfied” and “Satisfied” responses, were in the areas of College Admissions (85.37%), Education Benefits (81.82%), Priority Registration

(81.40%), Academic Advising (76.32%), and Veterans Resource Center (74.36%). Those with the lowest percentages of overall “Highly Satisfied” or “Satisfied” responses on an increasing basis included Mental Health Counseling (30.43%), Dealing with Homelessness & Food Insecurities (38.10%), Physical Disability Support Accommodations (50.00%), and Credit for Prior Military Training & Experience (52.63%).

Research Question 4 sought to identify ways in which the institution might better support veteran students. Common themes among respondents included better communication, easier access, and improved facilities. Specific recommendations were provided in Figures 18 and 19.

Chapter V: Summary, Conclusion and Recommendation

The number of veterans who served in the Armed Forces of the U.S. is large and growing. The VA reported that as of 2016 there were just under 4.4 million living veterans who served in the United States Armed Forces as part of the GWOT campaigns that began in October 2001 and became known as the Post-9/11 Era. The National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics (2018) projected that the number of Post-9/11 veterans will grow to approximately 5.1 million by the end of 2021. Of the current 4.4 million living veterans, 2.77 million service members have completed 5.4 million deployments and the number continues to grow (McCarthy, 2018).

Veterans who transitioned from military service tended to utilize federal education benefits but experienced challenges in doing so. Parker et al. (2019) reported that more than half of Post-9/11 Era veterans enrolled in school after leaving the military, a higher rate than veterans from any previous generation. As large numbers of veterans separated from the military and began to utilize their Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits, they faced challenges related to transitioning from military service and entering higher education. Reports by Parker et al. (2019), Coll et al. (2011), and others have determined that veterans generally experienced difficulties entering and succeeding in academia and/or transitioning from military service.

As a result of academic barriers, veteran academic program completion rates were lower than the general student population and veterans generally took longer to earn post-secondary degrees than their non-veteran counterparts (Cate, 2014). Ochinko and Payea (2018) reported that 20% of veterans who entered a higher education program in the 2011-2012 academic year left their academic institution without completing their academic objectives after three years. The

same report found that 20% of the enrolled veteran population had left and returned to complete their academic studies at least once during their academic experience (Ochinko & Payea, 2018).

Recognizing the challenges that many service members faced as they transitioned to academia, higher education institutions have responded by providing comprehensive services to existing and prospective veteran students. Many of these interventions went beyond general counseling and advising services offered to the general student populations and aimed to assist veterans with overcoming academic completion barriers (Ellison et al., 2012). Interventions included the establishment of a supportive, influential administrative leadership team; providing on-site transition services; peer-to-peer counseling; offering college-level, credit-bearing transition classes; and providing licensed mental health counselors in addition to traditional veteran support centers and associated administrative support personnel (Ellison et al., 2012).

While MATC offers some services to veteran students, it is unknown whether or not these interventions provide veteran students with the tools to overcome academic program barriers. First, while the MESO possessed a high degree of fidelity regarding the number of veterans and family members who were receiving federal and state educational assistance, the institution did not use the total number of veterans who attended the institution as any kind of measure (B. Baerbock, personal communication, February 3, 2020). Second, the extent to which interventions provided by the institution actually aided veteran students in overcoming barriers was largely not understood. Of central importance was the fact that MATC leadership lacks sufficient information about whether or not institutional policies and practices satisfactorily support the needs of the student veteran population.

The purpose of this study was to establish the degree to which MATC satisfactorily fulfilled the needs of student veterans in helping them overcome barriers to academic program

completion. Gaps were identified regarding their knowledge of available veteran support resources, their likelihood of use, and their overall satisfaction with specific interventions. The research also identified additional services and/or modifications to existing services that might better meet the needs of the diverse group of veterans who currently undertake academic studies at MATC. Beyond the institutional level and with the goal of aiding the educational community, this study was intended to inform similar institutions and the larger community about which interventions proved to be most helpful from a veteran perspective.

A secondary purpose for the study was to provide MATC and similar institutions with a potential way forward in addressing some of the impending financial challenges in upcoming years by providing improved services to a growing subgroup of the larger student population. As the total population of high school seniors decreases due to shifting demographics across the nation and in the State of Wisconsin, the Post-9/11 Era veteran population continues to grow.

This chapter will summarize the research study and draw conclusions based on data outlined in Chapter IV and in the context of previous research efforts discussed in Chapter II. Confidence in the research data and the associated broader applicability will then be addressed. The chapter will conclude with a summary and recommendations for follow-on efforts.

Summary

The research study utilized three instruments to address the research questions below:

1. To what extent are veteran students aware of the support services available to them at the institutional, county, state, and federal levels?
2. With what proclivity do veteran students utilize the services and interventions that are available to them?

3. How well do the support services and interventions provided by the institution satisfy the specific needs of the veteran students?
4. What practices might the institution modify to further enhance veteran students' satisfaction and academic success?

First, the study conducted a survey of veteran students at the institution that included 44 respondents from a population where $N=196$ with a response rate of 22%. Second, a case study consisting of three in-depth interviews of current veteran students provided first-hand supporting and thematic insight. Lastly, the research gleaned relevant data from the MATC Office of Institutional Research to draw performance comparisons between the student veteran subgroup, other subgroups, and the general student population.

Research Question 1 sought to gain an understanding of the veteran student knowledge of relevant and available resources. Respondents had the lowest degree of sufficient knowledge of veteran-related resources in the areas of Credit for Military Training & Experience, Homelessness & Food Insecurities, and Transition Assistance. The category of Education Benefits had the greatest number of respondents with sufficient knowledge of resources with 38 (86%). The veteran service categories of Priority Registration, Veteran Resource Center, and Academic Advising had the greatest percentages of those with satisfactory knowledge respectively behind Education Benefits. The average respondent had sufficient knowledge for 10 or the 15 veteran support categories for a positive response rate of 66% overall.

Research Question 2 addressed the likelihood of use by respondents regarding the same 15 veteran-related services assessed in Research Question 1. The named interventions which respondents stated that they were most likely to utilize were education benefits and priority registration. Respondents linked to the in-depth interview spoke in detail about the utilization of

education benefits and the opportunity to participate in early registration. The resources with the greatest likelihood of use were Education Benefits, Priority Registration, Veteran Resource Center, Veteran Benefit Advising, and Credit for Military Training & Experience. The veteran-related resources with the least likelihood of use were Substance Abuse Counseling, Dealing with Homelessness & Food Insecurities, Physical Disability Support Accommodations, Transition Assistance, and Tutoring Services.

Research Question 3 addressed how well the support services addressed veteran needs in overcoming academic barriers. Data addressing this question was discovered using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Information provided by the MATC Office of Institutional Research suggests that retention rates and course completion rates were generally higher among the veteran student population than general program students as well as the majority of subgroups of interest. Respondents to the MATC Veteran Student Survey suggested that the highest levels of satisfaction, a comparison of the summation of “Highly Satisfied” and “Satisfied” responses, were in the areas of College Admissions (85.37%), Education Benefits (81.82%), Priority Registration (81.40%), Academic Advising (76.32%), and Veterans Resource Center (74.36%). Those with the lowest percentages of overall “Highly Satisfied” or “Satisfied” responses on an increasing basis included Mental Health Counseling (30.43%), Dealing with Homelessness & Food Insecurities (38.10%), Physical Disability Support Accommodations (50.00%), and Credit for Prior Military Training & Experience (52.63%).

Research Question 4 sought to identify ways in which the institution might better support veteran students. Common themes among respondents included better communication, easier access, and improved facilities. Specific recommendations were provided in Figures 18 and 19.

Conclusions

Conclusions were drawn from analysis of qualitative and quantitative data from a mixed methods study. Research instruments included a survey, case study utilizing a number of in-depth interviews and subsequent thematic analysis, and data mining utilizing institutional research resources.

Research Question 1: To what extent are veteran students aware of the support services available to them at the institutional, county, state, and federal levels?

Analysis concluded that respondents were generally aware of the services and/or interventions available to veteran students at the institution but that there were gaps in that knowledge. Sixty-six percent (Var = 16.50, SD = 4.06) of the 660 total responses pertaining to knowledge of the available interventions at the institution were to the affirmative with the remaining being negative or uncertain. The mean number of interventions for which respondents stated that they had sufficient knowledge was 10 of 15 (Var = 16.88, SD = 4.11).

Strong correlation existed between need and the likelihood of use and the number of those who felt that they had sufficient knowledge of the specific intervention. Analysis of those who had sufficient knowledge as well as a strong likelihood of utilization established a correlation coefficient of +0.74 that strongly linked the need and likelihood of use to knowledge.

There were, however, interventions of which respondents were less aware. Respondents had the least amount of knowledge regarding interventions for Homelessness and Food Insecurities, Transition Assistance, Credit for Military Training and Experience, and Substance Abuse Counseling. Again, there was a correlation between need/likelihood of use and sufficient knowledge. Additionally, one of the major themes resulting from analysis of in-depth interviews

was a lack of knowledge about career counseling and other basic resources outside of the educational institution.

Because resources available to veteran students at the institution were potentially interpreted as being redundant with services offered by county, state, and federal entities, the knowledge of available resources outside of the institution was also measured. The majority of the respondents were aware of the major, county, state, and federal offices that had the responsibility of serving veterans. The greatest level of awareness was linked to health care. Sixty-six percent of the respondents were aware of the services at the federal regional medical center located 4.3 miles from the MATC downtown campus. Respondents were slightly less aware of the county veteran service office which ranked above only the “other” category for available resources. This is even in light of the fact that the county veteran service office is intended to be the front-line support for veterans to secure earned benefits. More than half of veteran students either were certain that they did not have enough knowledge about this office or were unsure with 24 (55%) actually reporting as such.

Research Question 2: With what proclivity do veteran students utilize the services and interventions that are available to them?

Respondents were most likely to utilize the most visibly dedicated to providing services to veterans. More than 50% of respondents stated that they would utilize or were very likely to utilize education benefits, priority registration, the Veteran Resource Center, and veteran benefit advising. While 15 resources were assessed, only the four interventions listed achieved a 50% likely use selection or better. Three of the four resources have specific office locations with the MESO handling all education benefits processing and the Veteran Resource Center providing numerous services including veteran benefit advising. At the top of the list for potential non-

utilization were substance abuse counseling, resources focused on homelessness and food insecurities, mental health counseling, and support for physical disabilities. While these services were available on campus, participants of the case study were more likely to utilize off-campus resources, specifically those linked to the county veteran service office, and the regional VA center in Milwaukee. Participants in the case study pointed to the quality staff, also a veteran, in the Veteran Resource Center as a primary reason why it was generally highly utilized by veteran students. Not only did knowledge on the part of the staff member of available resources and veterans' issues make a significant difference in facility usage, having a place where veterans could express and build a level of camaraderie among other veteran students was highly important. Participants also highlighted the availability of computers and printers, food, entertainment, and furniture as major draws for the Veteran Resource Center. Furthermore, ease of use was a key theme describing the MESO office.

Analysis concluded that veterans were concerned about perceptions. The most frequent response for why respondents were not likely to seek a particular resource was due to the lack of need. However, 25% of survey respondents stated that one of the reasons for which they would not seek a particular intervention was either not wanting to be identified as needing the resource or embarrassment. This conclusion would support prior research performed by Danish and Antonides (2009) and others who reported that the military culture sometimes provided barriers to veterans seeking assistance for problems. The act of seeking assistance was perceived as a weakness. This hesitancy to seek assistance extended to academia, and while services for transitioning veterans existed and were relatively robust, large numbers of veterans failed to utilize transition services due to a perceived lack of availability (Rausch, 2014).

Research Question 3: How well do the support services and interventions provided by the institution satisfy the specific needs of the veteran students?

Respondents were highly satisfied with the level of service provided by the institution and off-campus entities focused at fostering veteran student success. While 29% of the responses were undecided about the level of service for multiple entities on the five-point Likert scale, 66% of the responses expressed a positive level of satisfaction with named veteran-supporting interventions. Only 4% of the responses were negative in nature.

Respondents were also satisfied with the interventions provided at the county, state, and federal levels. Thirty-two percent of the responses expressed satisfaction with off-campus interventions while only 7% expressed a level of dissatisfaction. That stated, a relatively large percentage of the responses, 20%, were undecided in their assessment of off-campus resources. There was only a slight correlation between those who expressed a lack of knowledge of a particular resource and an undecided determination about the level of satisfaction. Furthermore, two-thirds of the participants in the case study expressed a high level of satisfaction with county, state, and federal interventions and entities.

The data suggested that for some standard measures, veterans performed on-par or better than the general program student population and other subgroups. Compared to the general program student population, the veteran subgroup achieved course completion rates of five to six percentage points better across the three-year period of assessment from 2015 through 2017. During that period, the veteran subgroup performed better than other identified subgroups with the exception of the Deaf/Hard of Hearing subgroup. For the measure of retention from Fall to Spring and Fall to Fall and with the exception of 2015, veteran subgroup retention rates were on

par or better than the general program student population. This suggests that veteran-focused interventions were positively impacting veteran student performance.

Research Question 4: What practices might the institution modify to further enhance veteran students' satisfaction and academic success?

Prevalent themes regarding potential areas of improvement for delivering veteran-focused interventions included communication, access, and level of service. Several facets of communication drew scrutiny from respondents. First, recommendations focused on increased frequency and content related to general veteran benefits and information. Second, there was an expressed need for improved timeliness of communication to veterans involving education benefit deadlines and requirements and student account timelines. Third, there was a noted shortfall regarding the web presence for veteran-related information on the institutional webpage.

Another category for improvement centered on access. While there was a Veteran Resource Center located at the main campus, respondents cited the need for veteran resource locations at the smaller satellite campuses. Academic program locations precluded a large number of veterans from utilizing the Veteran Resource Center at the main campus. Another access-related recommendation resulted from closures of the Veteran Resource Center and other locations due to COVID-19. Because of campus closures related to the COVID-19 pandemic, veterans lacked the facilitation of camaraderie among their peers. They also lacked various support instruments to which they had become accustomed and academic outcomes were impacted. The recommendation for the Veteran Resource Center staff was to create a virtual environment in which veterans could meet and support one another. Lastly, there was a recommendation to improve access to veteran services by creating and implementing a

marketing plan to better capture the market share of personnel currently serving in the military and veterans.

There were also recommendations regarding the quality and availability of specific services. Recommendations included the acquisition of VA tutors on campus to provide access to face-to-face tutors in the Veteran Resource Center or virtually, earlier registration dates for Priority Registration opportunities, veteran-focused academic advising and career counseling, and process improvement for dealing with veteran-related questions.

Statistical Confidence and Broader Applicability

Although the survey instrument resulted in a relatively large margin of error, the aggregate of mixed methods research mitigated the lack of statistical significance of the quantitative elements of the study. The triangulation of the survey findings with case study themes resulted in conclusions that may be generalized across a broader population attending urban veteran-serving technical and community colleges.

The response rate did not meet initial expectations. With a sample size of $n=44$ and a population of $N=196$, a 90% confidence interval resulted in a margin of error of $\pm 11\%$ for the survey. The ability to obtain a larger sample was impacted by COVID-19 response measures in which the majority of the students and staff members were unable to enter academic buildings. This limited the study to solicitation via email. The response rate was also likely impacted by the inability of the researcher to use their institutional email address as a condition of approval by the MATC Institutional Research Board.

While analysis recognized that the imprecision associated with the margin of error may have impacted generalizability of study findings, the quantitative elements of the mixed methods study did not stand alone. Thematic analysis of the qualitative elements of the study greatly

corroborated the quantitative findings. Major themes supported conclusions associated with knowledge and likelihood of use of resources, satisfaction, and recommendations for improvements.

Limitations of the Study

This study was intended to provide a benchmark for institutions residing in large, urban environments and may not provide applicable results for smaller, less urban colleges in the Wisconsin Technical College System. This was primarily due to differences in organizational structure, sheer size, and the unique nature of the community which MATC serves. Although similar in student population, Madison Area Technical College had significantly differing demographics. For this reason, the study will benchmark other large, urban institutions in the Midwest.

The scope of this study was limited to technical college students who were working toward the completion of an associate degree, technical diploma, or certificate program. While other studies have focused on undergraduate and graduate programs at selective universities in various parts of the country, the useful application of this study may be limited to those applications at open enrollment, two-year institutions.

Recommendations

Upon completion of the study, several recommendations have emerged. They include:

1. The number of veterans on campus is not tracked for veteran support, analysis, or decision-making purposes. Further progress regarding the support of veteran students can be made by identifying veteran students during the application process. This practice would enable veteran-serving institutions to further analyze and improve student outcomes.

2. More quantitative comparisons of veteran student performance measures to the general student population and other subgroups should be performed. This practice would allow veteran-serving institutions to gain a better understanding of veteran student needs.
3. Further analysis should be performed regarding duplication of efforts and services between veteran-serving institutions and county, state, and federal organizations in the geographic proximity of the institution. A clear understanding of what resources are available to veterans locally will allow institutions to focus on services that would most greatly impact academic outcomes and build community partnerships.
4. The COVID-19 pandemic has generally negatively impacted student headcounts at institutions of higher learning. In addition, the trend of fewer high school graduates continues into the near future while the veteran student population continues to grow. Individual institutions and systems should research and implement marketing plans to attract current service members and veterans.
5. Financial analysis regarding what interventions provide the greatest impact per dollar spent would inform decisions about which interventions to provide and which to refer to local entities.

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Appendix A

Introductory Letter of Participation

Dear Veteran Student,

My name is Brian Stout and I'm a 25-year Army veteran and doctoral candidate at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. I am also an employee at Milwaukee Area Technical College and have a passion for serving veterans and helping them achieve their academic goals. I am very interested in understanding your knowledge of the services that are offered at our local, state, and federal levels and your perceptions of how well the services that are offered at our institution help you in achieving your academic goals.

To help me gain an understanding of your perspective, I am utilizing a brief survey that will take between three and five minutes to complete. As an incentive, every veteran student who participates will receive a \$5 Amazon gift card and be entered in a drawing for a \$100 pre-paid Visa gift card.

The Institutional Review Boards at Milwaukee Area Technical College and the University of Wisconsin-Stout have approved this study.

Thank you in advance for your participation and your open, candid remarks.

Sincerely,

Brian M. Stout

Appendix B

Survey Consent Form

Consent to Participate In UW-Stout Approved Research

Project Title:

The Impact of Post-Secondary Interventions Aimed at Veteran Academic Success:
An Urban Technical College Study in Middle America

Description:

The purpose of this study is to examine how well veteran support services at the institution support student veteran academic needs. You were selected as a possible participant because you have been identified as a veteran student at the College. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the survey. This survey is being conducted by Brian Stout, an employee at MATC and a doctoral candidate at the University of Wisconsin–Stout. The survey will be used to support the completion of a doctoral dissertation in the field of Career and Technical Education.

Risks:

The study has a risk. You might recall some unpleasant memories that might make you feel badly. In the event that this occurs, you have the option of skipping a question or ceasing your participation in the study altogether.

Benefits:

The benefit to participation is that you might enjoy remembering and relaying your positive experiences. As an incentive, every veteran student who completes the survey will receive a \$5.00 Amazon gift card and be entered in a drawing for a \$100 pre-paid Visa gift card. You must provide an email address so that your participation incentive can be emailed to you directly from Amazon.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept confidential. In the report I write for this dissertation, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only the researcher will have access to the records.

Future Use:

This dissertation may be published in part or in its entirety at some future date but neither your name nor any personally identifiable information will be utilized. Any information gathered for this research will be stripped of identifiers and you will not be contacted for future research by the researcher regarding this subject.

Time Commitment:

The survey will likely take between 3 and 5 minutes to complete.

Right to Withdraw:

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the researcher, the University of Wisconsin-Stout, or Milwaukee Area Technical College. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

IRB Approval: This study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) at Milwaukee Area Technical College and the University of Wisconsin-Stout. The IRBs have determined that this study meets the ethical obligations required by federal law and University policies. While approved, this study is not being conducted on behalf of MATC. If you have questions or concerns regarding this study, please contact the Investigator or Advisor. If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a research subject, please contact the IRB Administrator.

Investigator: Brian Stout
715-864-3854 | VeteranStudy3@gmail.com

IRB Administrator (UW-Stout)
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Dr. Yan Wang
Office of Institutional Research
Milwaukee Area Technical College
Milwaukee , WI 53233
414.297.8509
wangy@matc.edu

Statement of Consent:

By checking the consent box and completing this survey, you agree to participate in the research entitled, The Impact of Post-Secondary Interventions Aimed at Veteran Academic Success: An Urban Technical College Study in Middle America.

Consent Box

Appendix C

Veteran Student Survey

Student and Military Status

This section establishes your classification as a student and military veteran or family member.

1. Which category pertaining to military service best describes you? *Select only one.*
 - Currently serving (active duty, reserve/national guard, individual ready reserve)
 - Separated from military service (no longer serving)
 - Family member of serving or separated military member
 - Other: _____

2. What time period best describes your military service? *Select only one.*
 - Prior to September 2001
 - After September 2001
 - Before and After September 2001
 - Not applicable. I did not serve in the military.

3. What is your current academic status? *Select only one.*
 - Prospective student
 - Current student (good academic standing)
 - Current student (suspended or on academic probation)
 - Graduate of MATC academic program
 - Other: _____

4. How long have you been taking classes at the institution? *Select only one.*
 - 1 – 2 semesters (1 year or less)
 - 3 – 4 semesters (1 - 2 years)
 - 5 – 6 semesters (2 - 3 years)
 - More than 3 years

Knowledge of Available Services and Likelihood of Use

This series of questions helps us understand your knowledge of resources available to veterans and the likelihood that veterans will utilize available resources.

5. Do you have sufficient knowledge of the following veteran support resources available at the institution? *Mark only one in each row.*

Academic advising	Yes	No	Not sure
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College Admissions Process Support	Yes	No	Not sure
Connections to county, state and federal support	Yes	No	Not sure
Credit for military training & experience	Yes	No	Not sure
Dealing with homelessness or food insecurities	Yes	No	Not sure
Education benefits	Yes	No	Not sure
Mental health counseling	Yes	No	Not sure
Physical disability support accommodations	Yes	No	Not sure
Priority registration	Yes	No	Not sure
Social events through the veterans' organization	Yes	No	Not sure
Substance abuse counseling	Yes	No	Not sure
Transition assistance	Yes	No	Not sure
Tutoring services	Yes	No	Not sure
Veterans benefit advising	Yes	No	Not sure
Veteran Resource Center	Yes	No	Not sure

6. How likely are you to use the following veteran support resources at the institution?

Circle only one option in each row.

Academic advising	Definite No	Not Likely	Somewhat Likely	Very Likely	Definite Yes
College Admissions Process	Definite No	Not Likely	Somewhat Likely	Very Likely	Definite Yes
Connections to county, state and federal support	Definite No	Not Likely	Somewhat Likely	Very Likely	Definite Yes
Credit for Military Training & Experience	Definite No	Not Likely	Somewhat Likely	Very Likely	Definite Yes
Dealing with Homelessness or Food Insecurities	Definite No	Not Likely	Somewhat Likely	Very Likely	Definite Yes
Education benefits	Definite No	Not Likely	Somewhat Likely	Very Likely	Definite Yes
Mental health counseling (for PTSD, Anxiety, Depression, Family Issues)	Definite No	Not Likely	Somewhat Likely	Very Likely	Definite Yes
Physical Disability Support Accommodations	Definite No	Not Likely	Somewhat Likely	Very Likely	Definite Yes
Priority registration	Definite No	Not Likely	Somewhat Likely	Very Likely	Definite Yes
Social events through the veterans' organization	Definite No	Not Likely	Somewhat Likely	Very Likely	Definite Yes
Substance abuse counseling	Definite No	Not Likely	Somewhat Likely	Very Likely	Definite Yes
Transition assistance	Definite No	Not Likely	Somewhat Likely	Very Likely	Definite Yes

Tutoring services	Definite No	Not Likely	Somewhat Likely	Very Likely	Definite Yes
Veterans Benefit Advising	Definite No	Not Likely	Somewhat Likely	Very Likely	Definite Yes
Veteran Resource Center	Definite No	Not Likely	Somewhat Likely	Very Likely	Definite Yes

7. If you selected “Definite No” or “Not Likely” for one or more of the veteran support resources in Question 6, why did you select that option? *Select all that apply.*

- I do not need the specific resource.
- I was not aware of the specific resource.
- I do not want to be identified as having need of the specific resource.
- The resource is not available when I need it.
- I don’t know where the resource is located and/or I can’t get to it.
- Embarrassment.
- Wait times.
- Other: _____

8. Do you have sufficient knowledge of the services offered at the following veteran support locations at the county, state, and federal levels? Circle only one in each row.

County Veterans Service Office	Yes	No	Not sure
Veterans Affairs Regional Office – Milwaukee	Yes	No	Not sure
Veterans Affairs Regional Medical Center – Zablocki	Yes	No	Not sure
Other state and federal locations	Yes	No	Not sure

Satisfaction with Existing Veteran Student Services

This section is intended to capture student veteran satisfaction with the services that are intended to support their academic achievement.

9. What is your level of satisfaction with the veteran services at the institution in meeting your academic support needs in the following areas? *Circle only one in each row.*

Academic Advising	N/A – Highly Satisfied – Satisfied – Undecided – Unsatisfied – Highly Unsatisfied
College Admissions Process	N/A – Highly Satisfied – Satisfied – Undecided – Unsatisfied – Highly Unsatisfied
Connections to county, state and federal support	N/A – Highly Satisfied – Satisfied – Undecided – Unsatisfied – Highly Unsatisfied
Credit for Military Training	N/A – Highly Satisfied – Satisfied – Undecided – Unsatisfied – Highly Unsatisfied

& Experience

Dealing with Homelessness or Food Insecurities	N/A – Highly Satisfied – Satisfied – Undecided – Unsatisfied – Highly Unsatisfied
Education Benefits	N/A – Highly Satisfied – Satisfied – Undecided – Unsatisfied – Highly Unsatisfied
Mental Health Counseling (for PTSD, Anxiety, Depression, Family Issues)	N/A – Highly Satisfied – Satisfied – Undecided – Unsatisfied – Highly Unsatisfied
Physical Disability Support Accommodations	N/A – Highly Satisfied – Satisfied – Undecided – Unsatisfied – Highly Unsatisfied
Priority Registration	N/A – Highly Satisfied – Satisfied – Undecided – Unsatisfied – Highly Unsatisfied
Social Events through the Veterans' Organization	N/A – Highly Satisfied – Satisfied – Undecided – Unsatisfied – Highly Unsatisfied
Substance Abuse Counseling	N/A – Highly Satisfied – Satisfied – Undecided – Unsatisfied – Highly Unsatisfied
Transition Assistance	N/A – Highly Satisfied – Satisfied – Undecided – Unsatisfied – Highly Unsatisfied
Tutoring Services	N/A – Highly Satisfied – Satisfied – Undecided – Unsatisfied – Highly Unsatisfied
Veterans Benefit Advising	N/A – Highly Satisfied – Satisfied – Undecided – Unsatisfied – Highly Unsatisfied
Veteran Resource Center	N/A – Highly Satisfied – Satisfied – Undecided – Unsatisfied – Highly Unsatisfied

10. If you selected “Unsatisfied” or “Highly Unsatisfied” for one or more of the veteran support resources in Question 9, why did you select that option?

11. What is your level of satisfaction with the following veteran support locations at the county, state, and federal levels? Circle only one in each row.

County Veterans Service Office	N/A – Highly Satisfied – Satisfied – Undecided – Unsatisfied – Highly Unsatisfied
Veterans Affairs Regional Office – Milwaukee	N/A – Highly Satisfied – Satisfied – Undecided – Unsatisfied – Highly Unsatisfied

Veterans Affairs Regional	N/A – Highly Satisfied – Satisfied – Undecided – Unsatisfied – Highly Unsatisfied
Medical Center – Zablocki	N/A – Highly Satisfied – Satisfied – Undecided – Unsatisfied – Highly Unsatisfied
Other State and Federal Locations	N/A – Highly Satisfied – Satisfied – Undecided – Unsatisfied – Highly Unsatisfied

12. What actions might the institution take in the area of veteran service to better support your academic success?

Survey Concluded -----

Please provide an email address below so that you can receive a \$5.00 Amazon Card and be eligible for a drawing to win a \$100 Visa Gift Card.

Email Address: _____

Appendix D

Interview Consent Form

Project Title:

The Impact of Post-Secondary Interventions Aimed at Veteran Academic Success:
An Urban Technical College Study in Middle America

Description:

The purpose of this study is to examine how well veteran support services at the institution support student veteran academic needs. You were selected as a possible participant because you have been identified as a veteran student at the College. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be interviewed. This interview is being conducted by Brian Stout, an employee at MATC and a doctoral candidate at the University of Wisconsin–Stout. The interview will be used to support the completion of a doctoral dissertation in the field of Career and Technical Education.

Risks:

The study has a risk. You might recall some unpleasant memories that might make you feel badly. In the event that this occurs, you have the option of skipping a question or ceasing your participation in the study altogether.

Benefits:

The benefit to participation is that you might enjoy remembering and relaying your positive experiences. As an incentive, every veteran student who participates in the interview will receive a \$5.00 Amazon gift card and be entered in a drawing for a \$100 pre-paid Visa gift card. You must provide an email address so that your participation incentive can be emailed to you directly from Amazon.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept confidential. In the report I write for this dissertation, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only the researcher will have access to the records. I will likely receive help from a disinterested transcription service to transcribe the recording of the interview. That service will be instructed to keep the information confidential. As soon as the recording has been transcribed, the recording will be erased.

Future Use:

This dissertation may be published in part or in its entirety at some future date but neither your name nor any personally identifiable information will be utilized. Any information gathered for this research will be stripped of identifiers and you will not be contacted for future research by the researcher regarding this subject.

Time Commitment:

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following: be interviewed one time. The interview will take about 40 to 60 minutes and will be audio recorded.

Right to Withdraw:

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the researcher, the University of Wisconsin-Stout, or Milwaukee Area Technical College. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

IRB Approval: This study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) at Milwaukee Area Technical College and the University of Wisconsin-Stout. The IRBs have determined that this study meets the ethical obligations required by federal law and University policies. If you have questions or concerns regarding this study, please contact the Investigator or Advisor. If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a research subject, please contact the IRB Administrator.

Investigator: Brian Stout
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wangy@matc.edu

Statement of Consent:

By signing below, you agree to participate in the research entitled, The Impact of Post-Secondary Interventions Aimed at Veteran Academic Success: An Urban Technical College Study in Middle America.

_____ Date _____
Signature: Participant

_____ Date _____
Signature: Interviewer

Appendix E

Interview Prompts

Prompt: The participant has read and signed the consent to participate in an in-depth interview related to the participant's experiences utilizing resources focused at supporting veteran academic success. As veterans we recognize some of the unique challenges leaving the military and returning to a non-military environment. Some veterans have challenges related to Post-Traumatic Stress issues, challenges with family relationships, possibly substance abuse, or simply finding meaningful employment. Just accomplishing the task of using veteran benefits to get into a college can be a challenge. The institution that you are attending has been identified as a veteran friendly institution. Tell me about your experience as a veteran entering the institution and utilizing resources intended to support veteran academic success.

Potential Follow-Up Prompts:

- What were some of the personal challenges that you experienced when you left the military and entered college?
- Were you aware of some of the resources that were available to you?
- How did you find out about some of the resources that were available to veterans at the institution?
- Tell me about some of the resources available at the institution that were most beneficial to you. This might include different offices or individual people.
- Tell me about your positive or negative experience with each of the following veteran service functions supported your academic achievement:
 - Academic advising
 - Connections to county, state, and federal support
 - Education benefits
 - Mental health counseling
 - Priority registration
 - Social events through the veterans' club
 - Substance abuse counseling
 - Transition assistance
 - Tutoring services
 - Veteran Support Center
- Tell me about your experience as it relates to areas in which the institution is supporting veterans very well.
- Tell me about your experience as it relates to areas in which the institution can add resources or modify practices to better support veterans.