

ABSTRACT

Reintegration in the university environment for retuning combat veterans prove to be a challenging endeavor, as their military experiences and wounds of war impact concentration and communication with non-war participants. According to the National Survey for Student Engagement, 60 percent of student veterans first-generation: lack study skills, academic preparedness, come from low socio-economic statuses, are members of subgroups, and are far less likely to participate in university experiences. The purpose of this research was to measure the level of connectiveness among military connected students in the university environment. The current study included participants (N=160) who were adult prior service veterans. The veterans completed surveys from the Veterans Resource Center in order to collect data on the quantification of social connectiveness in the university environment. Results of data analysis indicated that there was a statistically significant relationship between veterans feeling supported by the campus administration. The result of the study provides implications for future research focusing on programs that promote community engagement among student veterans.

INTRODUCTION

Significance of the Study

- The Veterans Resource Center based out of California State University of Fullerton (CSUF), provides comprehensive services to over 971 military connected students that support personal, academic, and professional growth.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this outcome evaluation was to measure the level of connectiveness among student veterans in the university environment.

Research Questions

What is the Level of Social Interaction to Campus Community Among 911 Era Veterans in Higher Education?

Hypothesis

Campus engagement among military connected students positively affects their overall wellbeing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Adlerian Theory

- States that for self-actualization to occur, basic needs must be satisfied: Physiological needs, safety needs, sense of love and belonging, and esteem needs.
- In regards to student veterans, self-actualization can consist of endeavors that includes milestones such as successful reintegration into society, academic success in higher institutions (graduation), and the attainment of gainful employment in the civilian sector.

Review of Past Research

- Student veterans have disclosed that their educational benefits such as the Post 9/11 GI Bill as a positive and motivating factor in their pursuit of higher education.
- Other university based VRCs have found that military connected students were appreciative of staff members who supported them navigate processes to attain military educational benefits, advocacy for the application of military school credits, and faculty that fosters an inclusive environment for his/her students.
- Research has shown that student veterans' connection to the university impacted their academic success.

METHODS

Research Design

- The original study was conducted by the Veterans Resource Center (VRC) based out of California State University of Fullerton (CSUF), a division of Student Affairs.
- The VRC has served 971 military connected dependents and a total of 443 veterans/active military students during the academic year of 2020
- The survey was utilized to identify significant trends in service delivery, activities, and all other engagement endeavors that military connected students showed favor towards; data collected are considered to make improvements or alter program development.
- The current study is a secondary data analysis utilizing the data that was collected via Qualtrics survey conducted 2019-2020.

Sample and Sampling Method

- The sampling strategy was non-probability, convenient sampling; surveys were sent to every student that was registered with the VRC office or participated in a VRC sponsored event and participation in the study was voluntary.
- The current study was comprised of adult individual participants who were identified as GWOT (n = 70) or Non-GWOT (n = 96) veterans. Only 166 respondents were used for the current study.

Measures

Instrumentation

- The instrument for the original study of the VRC was a web-based survey tool (Qualtrics) that was sent to military connected participants via email. The survey consisted of nine sections with a total of 68 questions.

Dependent Variables

- The dependent variables for the current study were nominal in nature that addressed the level of social interaction to campus community; values consisted of completely agree, somewhat agree, neutral, completely disagree, and somewhat disagree.
- There were six variables used to measure connectiveness:
 - I feel connected to the CSUF campus community
 - I feel a sense of belonging on the Cal State Fullerton Campus
 - My transition into California State University, Fullerton was easy and smooth
 - I feel/felt supported by the administration/staff at California State University, Fullerton
 - I feel that I have a solid foundation to be academically successful at Cal State Fullerton
 - I am confident about my professional future post-graduation from CSUF

Independent Variables

- The variable consists of prior service members that are comprised of GWOT and non-GWOT participants.

RESULTS

Figure 1. Percentages of level of connectiveness to CSUF Campus among GWOT and Non-GWOT participants.

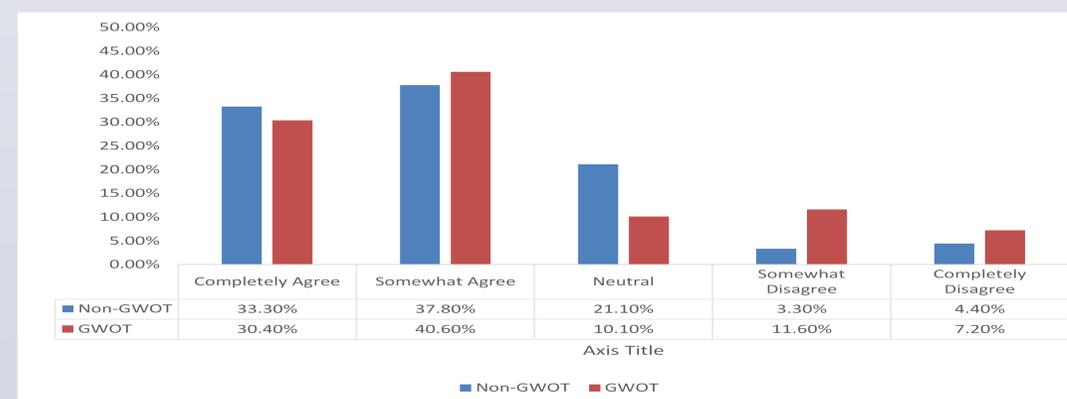


Table 1

MILITARY WHOLE (MW) * I Feel/Felt Supported by the Administration/Staff at California State University, Fullerton (N= 160)

Participant Group	I Feel Supported by the Administration/Staff at CSUF					Total n (%)
	Completely Agree n (%)	Somewhat Agree n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Somewhat Disagree n (%)	Completely Disagree n (%)	
Non-GWOT	45 (65.2)	27 (47.4)	12 (50.0)	7 (87.5)	0 (0.0)	91 (56.9)
GWOT	24 (34.8)	30 (52.6)	12 (50.0)	1 (12.5)	2 (100.0)	69 (43.1)

*p < .05

Summary and Major Findings

- Hispanic/Latinx represented around 30 percent of both GWOT and non-GWOT era veterans.
- Most prior service veterans are transfer students from community college, and both population groups reported similar responses expressing that they have felt connected to the campus community and supported by CSUF administration.
- Over 95 percent of veterans were transfer students from community colleges.
- There was statistical significance in the relationship found between GWOT and Non-GWOT participants in feeling supported by the administration and staff members at CSUF.
- Non-GWOT participants reported the highest percentage (65.2 percent) of completely agreeing to feeling supported by CSUF personnel.

Implications for Future Research Practice and Policy

- The findings of this research highlight the need for continuing investigation on veteran specific programs in the university environment to have measurable and attainable outcomes to ensure proper resources are being allocated efficiently.
- Future analysis of measurable and attainable outcomes could be potentially utilized as an effective model of service delivery for universities where veterans are challenged with barriers pertaining to community engagement and receiving administrative support.
- The results indicated significant trending in the predicted direction where veterans feel connected to their campus community and supported by their university administration

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

Limitations

- Participants had the option to skip and not fully answer survey questions which led to complications during data interpretation and cleaning.
- Survey questions did not measure effectiveness of the intervention that the center offered.
- Survey questions did not specifically address program satisfaction but overall center and university satisfaction.

Strengths

- The VRC has access to data systems that provides profiles of a large diverse group of military connected students with various demographic qualities on those who utilize its services; and can conduct further research on program services and trends.
- The center also has staff members that are knowledgeable of VA benefits and veteran culture which are protective factors that support student veteran academic success.