

OPERATION COLLEGE CHOICE:  
A STUDY OF VETERAN STUDENTS AT TWO SOUTHEASTERN LAND GRANT  
INSTITUTIONS

by

DAVID RAYMOND SNOW

(Under the Direction of Erik Ness)

ABSTRACT

The 2008 passage of the Post 9/11 GI Bill provided both enhanced educational opportunities for military veterans but also introduced potential challenges for higher education administrators. In order to prepare for and effectively manage anticipated enrollment growth, institutions may benefit from a greater understanding of the veteran student college choice process and the unique needs of this student population. Fortunately, extensive literature exists in regard to earlier veteran's education programs and analysis of this literature provides valuable insight. However, in order to attract, retain, and graduate veteran students, institutions must understand the critical factors affecting veterans. This qualitative study, built upon data collected from university administrators and veteran students, provides a new level of granularity in terms of veteran student college choice decision factors and their institutional impact.

INDEX WORDS: veterans, institutional initiatives, GI Bill, college choice

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UNIVERSITIES

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all those who have supported and encouraged me in this endeavor. First and foremost, I want to thank my wife and daughter for their patience, love, and unwavering support. They are my greatest accomplishment in life and of what I am most proud. I love you both more than words can express. I also owe my parents a debt of gratitude as they, early in life, instilled in me a sense of hard work, academic inquiry, and the belief one can achieve anything with firm resolve and dedication. Lastly, I would like to thank all military veterans who are pursuing their academic dreams. These warrior scholars, who inspire me and fuel my passion for advancing veteran's higher education initiatives, epitomize the dedicated and hard charging members of our military.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Federal educational benefits for veteran students varied greatly during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 served as a benchmark and set the standard by which all subsequent programs are compared. This World War II era program (GI Bill) provided extensive benefits that included education assistance, home loans, and unemployment compensation. In contrast, the Post 9/11 Veterans Education Assistance Act of 2008 (Post 9/11 GI Bill) is strictly an education assistance program. Though the monetary amount, duration and eligible courses of study differed, both Bills vastly increased veteran educational access.

In regard to the Post 9/11 GI Bill, significant implications for higher education exist. Universities and colleges nationwide are expending resources to attract and service veteran students. Whether building a veteran student center, hiring additional staff or implementing support programs, little is known concerning the effectiveness of these initiatives to meet the needs of the veteran student or their influence on college choice. Understanding how initiatives are valued by veteran students and what effect, if any, they have on college choice allows institutions to better allocate limited resources on the initiatives deemed most important by veterans.

The Post 9/11 GI Bill was crafted by Senator James Webb, a former Secretary of the Navy, as a benefit for the all-volunteer fighting force that, in 2008, was engaged in two wars: Iraq and Afghanistan. The Bill is also tiered so the educational benefit eligibility of a service member increases in conjunction with increased time in the military service. In order to be

eligible for the program, a service member must serve at least 3 months. The benefit subsequently increases at various service obligation levels and after three years of service the service member is entitled to 100 percent of the benefit – 36 months of educational assistance.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to analyze institutional veteran student initiatives and identify factors deemed most important to the veteran student college choice experience. Examining veteran initiatives at two sample institutions provided a baseline to better understand efforts taken to attract and serve this segment of the student population. The views of administrators and students were analyzed to determine if implemented initiatives align with college choice factors identified by the students.

### **Problem Statement**

Numerous factors influence access and achievement of veteran students on campus. Perhaps no other is more important and understudied than college choice. What factors do veteran students identify as critical consideration elements during school selection? Improved understanding of veteran college choice criteria and the effectiveness of institutional initiatives is vital to attracting and retaining students.

This study posits that lacking a sound understanding of veteran college choice criteria, institutions may be expending resources without a solid understanding of the most important factors to veterans. While the construction of veteran resource centers and addition of staff specifically focused on veteran students may prove beneficial, there are no concrete measures indicating whether these actions influence college choice. Focusing on institutional initiatives designed to serve the veteran population and their perceived impact on academic success and student college choice, this study provides insight into student perceptions and better informs

administrator decisions. Institutions prepared to meet veteran student demand may leverage the opportunity to build the alumni base, increase enrollment and revenue, and most importantly, provide an invaluable service to those who have served - our veterans.

Given the current economic environment, defense spending and military manpower, as mandated by Congressional service End Strength figures, are both expected to decline. In this context, the continued growth of veteran enrollment at our nation's universities, colleges, and vocational schools is expected to continue for the foreseeable future. Each year, via normal career progression, roughly a quarter of a million military personnel separate or retire from military service. This figure is "normal operations" and does not reflect the impact of any future, and anticipated, downsizing initiatives or budget reductions.

Examining institutional initiatives and college choice criteria that influence veteran students facilitates a greater understanding of veteran students and their needs. The relationship between the higher education institutions, military installations, service members, Veterans Administration (VA) benefits, state veteran educational benefits, and institutional initiatives all potentially influence college choice. Identifying the extent of these influences is a primary objective of this study. It is hoped this research may better allow administrators to address the needs of veteran students and set conditions to facilitate the continued veteran student contributions on their campuses.

Two land grant universities in the southeastern region served as the sample institutions: Auburn University and the University of Georgia. Sample selection methodology is further defined in Chapter 3. However, in the aggregate it may be stated that the institutions possess many similar institutional characteristics and relatively close proximity to Major Military Installations (MMI) and veteran populations. Appendix A depicts proximity to MMIs.

After careful comparison of institutional profile data, military population proximity and student veteran initiatives, the following research questions were developed to guide the study. The ultimate objective is to identify the most pressing influences on veteran student college choice and the extent to which these align with institutions' efforts to recruit veteran students:

*Research Questions:*

1. How have institutions of higher education responded to attract and retain veteran students?
2. What do veteran students perceive as the strongest influences on their college choice decision?
3. To what extent, do institutional initiatives align with veteran students' primary influences?

### **Background**

In order to prepare for and effectively manage anticipated enrollment growth, institutions may benefit from a greater understanding of the alignment between institutional initiatives and the veteran student college choice process. The understanding and application of lessons learned from previous versions of the GI Bill may also prove very beneficial. Fortunately, extensive literature exists in regard to earlier veteran's education programs. A summary of the main challenges and issues of previous eras is presented in Chapter 2.

The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (GI Bill) set the standard for veterans benefits. The GI Bill provided three critical benefits that not only assisted veteran transition into the civilian sector but also influenced society for much of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These broad and generous benefits impacted and influenced not only higher education but virtually every economic sector. It must be remembered, this original GI Bill was much more than an educational benefit. Analysis of the three benefits outlined in the Bill illuminates the true aggregate value and its significant impact on America.

First, benefits for college, sub-college, or vocational training provided educational opportunity and prepared veterans for workforce reintegration. In the end, 2.2 million veterans utilized the educational benefit and by 1947 military veterans comprised half of the nation's student population. Second, federal veteran home loans made home ownership a reality for millions of Americans. Subsequently, over 5,500,000 veteran home loans were issued in the years immediately following WWII (History of the VA). While providing much needed housing, this benefit simultaneously functioned as an economic engine and jobs creation program. Though changes were made over the decades, the VA Home Loan still exists today and is truly a lasting legacy of the original GI Bill. Third, twelve months of unemployment benefits were provided to cover basic needs. This benefit also ensured millions of veterans did not end up homeless while they searched for post-war employment.

Of historic significance, it is also important to note all three of the GI Bill benefits were available to all veterans; regardless of race, gender, or ethnic background. The simplified eligibility criteria also fueled high benefit utilization rates. In simplistic terms, eligibility criteria required a minimal period of service, 90 days, and discharge from military service under honorable conditions.

While the original GI Bill has decades of research and publication documenting its impact, the Post 9/11 GI Bill remains a dynamic work in progress. The passage of the Post 9/11 Veterans Education Assistance Act of 2008, significantly contributed to increased 21<sup>st</sup> century educational access for veterans. Though stipulations exist in terms of maximum monetary benefit allowable, the benefits are still considered quite extensive and utilization rates have steadily increased.

In the first two weeks of the Post 9/11 program, more than 25,000 service members signed up for program eligibility (VA News Release of May 15, 2009). However, currently more than one-million service members have enrolled in the program and on November 8, 2013 the VA identified an Army veteran, currently studying communications at a community college in New Jersey, as the 1-millionth beneficiary of VA educational assistance (VA News Release of November 8, 2013). The original version of the Post 9/11 GI Bill provided in-state tuition and fees, book stipend, and housing allowance. While already a success, subsequent amendments in recent years further strengthened the program and increased its appeal as veterans (i.e., members of the National Guard and the Reserves) became eligible and institution eligibility criteria expanded to include many additional educational programs.

These expanded program benefits and eligibility have been significant. For example, on January 5, 2011, modifications to the original Bill expanded the program to many non-college programs. Examples of this type of education include a wide array on non-degree granting academic programs. Additionally, as mentioned earlier, the benefits, with some stipulations of Reserve Mobilization or active service, were extended to many Reservists and National Guard members (VA New Release of January 5, 2011). Subsequently, in addition to college education; benefits now apply to programs such as flight training, certification programs, and vocational/trade school. The popularity of the program has been widely covered in the literature and various media outlets. Two very informative resources are especially useful. The “Out of Uniform” series in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and ACEs *Military Service Members and Veterans in Higher Education* report are consistently timely and routinely document both the challenges and successes of the program. Each of these provides the requisite facts, figures and analysis to clearly capture and depict the programs growth and impact.

Though the bookend bills remain the focus of this synopsis, other versions of the GI Bill over the last sixty years should not be discounted and warrant mention. Chapter 2 briefly addresses some of the literature on the four veteran's education programs enacted between 1952 and 2008 and bracketed by the two bookends bills: namely Korean GI Bill, Vietnam Era GI Bill, VEAP, and the Montgomery GI Bill.

Main points of consideration emerge when studying these four variations of veteran's education benefits. First, utilization rates, as further detailed in Chapter 2, were substantial. Though the rate for VEAP was low, the rate for some of the other programs, namely the Vietnam was extremely high – exceeding that of the original GI Bill. The primary VA educational program of my study, the Post 9/11 GI Bill, continues to reflect enrollment growth though the full utilization rate will not be known for some time. A second common characteristic was the variations in length of benefit eligibility and the amounts available for higher education. While the months of benefit eligibility diminished over the years; more often than not, the benefit as provided under these programs was paid directly to the veteran vice the institution. This was a major deviation from the established procedures of the original GI Bill. The current Post 9/11 GI Bill once again pays the benefit directly to the institution.

### **Veteran College Choice**

On the surface the process of choosing where to attend college may seem straight forward and self-explanatory. However, as reflected in the responses of participants in my study, it is a multi-faceted and oftentimes grueling process. Vast literature and numerous models exist that detail the stages and complexities of this critical decision process. While some models are discussed in Chapter 2, none of them are veteran specific. That is not to say they do not offer value. To the contrary, many of the same issues weighing on the minds of high school seniors or



non-traditional students entering higher education are valid concerns for veteran students as well. For example, a 2011 College Decision Impact Survey conducted by Maguire Associates and Fastweb.com, a scholarship search website, found 68% of high school students college preferences were “somewhat influenced” or “greatly influenced” by economic concerns (Maguire, 2011). In this context, the ability to pay for higher education is a major factor affecting college choice and the same concerns are certainly applicable to potential veteran students. That said, thanks to the Post 9/11 GI Bill, the veteran student essentially has a full, in-state, three-year scholarship, with housing allowance and a book stipend, to help alleviate the financial burden.

There is very little research pertaining directly to veteran college choice. Whether studying the WWII GI Bill or the Post 9/11 GI Bill, the focus predominantly remained on transition issues, institutional challenges, societal impact, for-profit proliferation, or, more recently, completion rates. Of these, attainment and completion rates have especially come under scrutiny as Congress and the VA seek to better track the return on investment of the billions of dollars expended on veteran education. Institutions are now, after significant pressure from the federal government, beginning to track not only enrollments but perhaps more importantly progress and completions rates of veteran students. This requirement was facilitated by increased Congressional leadership scrutiny concerning the significant expenditures for veteran education with no measurement tool to track academic progress and attainment. The sample institutions in this study also have recently added a “military service” question to applications so they can more easily identify veterans upon enrollment; regardless of if the student is utilizing VA educational benefits or not.

As an example, the Pat Tillman Foundation and Operation College Promise conducted a pilot study of degree attainment of veteran students that, among other things, detailed the challenges colleges face tracking this veteran specific data. However, the participating schools also reported some very promising indicators; such as retention rates over 20 percentage points above national average as reported by ACT (Lang & Powers, 2011). Inside Higher Ed (2012) also reported similar tracking issues and found 68 percent of institutions reported they did track retention and completion rates specifically for veteran students.

Numerous studies and articles detail “where veterans are enrolling.” However, the question of “why are veterans enrolling where they are” received significantly less scrutiny. This study attempts to fill this void in order to facilitate improved understanding veteran college choice and provide insight to support institutional resource utilization decisions.

### **Overview of Dissertation**

In this first chapter, I introduced the purpose of the study and presented the research questions. Additionally, I provided an overview of the history of the GI Bill and addressed some common veteran college choice issues. In Chapter 2, I present a synopsis of the literature pertaining to the past and current versions of the GI Bill. The intent of this chapter is the identification of common themes and perceived challenges affecting veteran’s education over the last sixty-plus years. The research methodology and design discussed in Chapter 3 details the structure of the study and the process employed for participant selection and data collection. Further, the rationale for sample school selection is defined and the two institutions, similar in many respects, are presented. In the subsequent two chapters the data for each institution is presented. Chapter 4 examines the veteran student initiatives in place at the first sample institution, Auburn University. The views of administrators and veteran students were examined

to identify the most important initiatives, as perceived by the students, affecting college choice and quality of the academic experience. The second sample institution, the University of Georgia, is similarly presented in Chapter 5. I examined current and planned initiatives and analyzed the participant's responses to identify critical factors. In the final chapter, I identify institutional commonalities and differences and provide a list of recommendations, as informed by the study findings, for consideration by schools dealing with veteran populations.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review examines the various iterations of the GI Bill and identifies some problems and perceptions associated with both implementation and execution. Though four additional GI Bill variations existed in the years between the first and the most recent, the primary focus of this review is on the two “Bookend Bills” – the original GI Bill and most recent version (Post 9/11 GI Bill). Due to vast quantity of studies on the subject, it is impossible to present an all inclusive review; however, analysis of the literature yields some consistent themes, challenges and focus areas relevant to the Post 9/11 version. The second part of the chapter reviews a sampling of literature related to college choice.

#### **World War II GI Bill**

The educational aspect of the GI Bill is well documented and widely praised for its significant and lasting impact on the nation; however, the non-educational benefits must be fully considered when assessing the overall influence. To this day, the GI Bill is often considered a key enabler that promoted and institutionalized significant societal change. These changes included growth of the middle class as well as improved higher education access for both minorities and women. The literature indicates these benefits have long been considered a catalyst for the movement of many African Americans and Hispanics into the middle class (Altbach, Gumport & Berdahl, 2011).

Contrary to popular perception, this legislation was not simply a grateful nations “thank you” gesture. Rather, the GI Bill was in many ways an economic imperative. Facing the

prospect of millions of unemployed returning veterans, the GI Bill more importantly served as an economic “anti-depression measure” (Olson, 1973). The economic impact element of the GI Bill was documented by many notable scholars. It is also evident that the personal experiences and historical context was fully recognized by the nation’s leaders. For example, the violence marred Bonus Marches of 1932, weighed heavily on the minds of both the President and Congress and thus ensured the economic ramifications of large scale unemployment were fully understood (Thelin, 2011).

The Bonus Marches brought turmoil and violence to Washington D.C. At the time, and facing an economic depression, veterans of World War I protested to secure governmental promissory payments early. Unfortunately, these protests turned violent as military forces were employed to expel the protesters. The end of WWII presented a potentially similar scenario. A National Resources Planning Board report of 1943 portrayed a dire picture with an estimation of “8 or 9 million” unemployed at the conclusion of the war (Olson, 1973). Obviously, mechanisms were required to avert this potential economic minefield; the next year the GI Bill was signed into law.

### **Perception vs. Reality**

Clark (1998) detailed perceptions of veterans and students in the post-WWII era. Clark analyzed not only depictions in the media and art (specifically Norman Rockwell prints) but also perceptions concerning the GI Bill itself. A common Rockwell depiction showed the veteran student studying in a classic college setting overlooking a campus lawn with majestic trees. However, in the mid-1940’s, the central question concerning the value of a college education for the masses remained unanswered. Clark addressed attitudes of veterans and further expounded upon this by including public perceptions and comparisons against societal norms.

By 1947 over a million veterans were attending a college or university (Altschuler & Blumin, 2009). This rapid growth is well documented throughout the literature, VA records and government reports. Veteran enrollment in both college and “sub-college” training programs continued to grow and ultimately the number of veteran students exceeded two million in higher education and 5.6 million in “sub-college” programs (Altschuler & Blumin, 2009). Though much has been written concerning the impact of the GI Bill on higher education during this period, a review of the literature reveals many recurring challenges and highlights the following primary issues: overcrowding, housing, and a looming sense of urgency to make up for “lost time”.

### **Overcrowding or When is Too Many, Too Much?**

The end of WWII and the introduction of the GI Bill raised immediate concerns in relation to potential campus overcrowding. At institutions, both large and small, facilities management and classroom scheduling proved a nearly impossible task. The following sampling of literature provides both an aggregate representation of the extent of the problem and also provides a few specific examples.

Carpenter and Glick (1945) found 66 percent of participants in an Army educational program at Biarritz American University had “definite or probable” plans for returning to school once discharged from the service (p.,470). This survey of over 2,000 military members stationed in France, post armistice but awaiting separation from military service, provided clear indication of future tendencies. Once the armed forces redeployed and returned home, many found their way to college; either as a first time student or, in many cases, as a returning student. Numerous other articles also address this trend as post war veteran inclinations were a major research area during the mid 1940s. For example, Shaw (1947) found that “80 percent of soldiers say they will go to school if there is little else to do” (p., 19). He further described how colleges resorted to

forming Postwar Planning Committees in an attempt to effectively plan for the increased demand. Despite the best intentions and exhaustive planning efforts, many schools constantly struggled to meet enrollment demands.

The situation faced by higher education administrators at Princeton University personified the mid-late 1940s enrollment management challenges. Root (1944) presented a thorough overview of the challenges, as well as possible solutions, in his article concerning the situation at Princeton. Significant enrollment increases were expected as former students granted “leave of absence” for military service returned. In this case, assuming only 60 percent of those students returned; they alone would constitute over half of total enrollment (p., 456). Facing this predicament, Princeton established The Princeton Program for Servicemen to mitigate much of this anticipated onrush and offered two different Associate in Arts programs; one of which was made available only to veteran students. The Princeton experience was not an aberration as many institutions nationwide experienced similar enrollment growth. For example, matriculation at Purdue University and Syracuse University doubled and tripled respectively in a one year period (Altschuler & Blumin, 2009).

Expected to absorb much of the new demand, state universities were particularly vulnerable. Despite valiant efforts, and some creative solutions, states oftentimes found themselves in an untenable position. The state of Ohio provided a dramatic example of the potential overcrowding crisis. According to Ohio law; “all graduates of the twelfth grade shall be entitled to admission without examination to any college or university which is supported wholly or in part by the state” (Franklin, 1946, p.311). Franklin (1946) detailed an anticipated state of Ohio enrollment increase of approximately 150,000 – in one year. The magnitude of the

challenge clearly emerges when one considers the entire college enrollment at Ohio state colleges during the previous year totaled less than 18,000.

### **Housing Demands and Changing Demographics**

Enrollment increases also fueled student housing shortages. According to a 1945 poll conducted by the American Council on Education (ACE), 87 percent of institutions reported housing shortages. To quantify this shortage, it was estimated that over 45,000 additional individual rooms and 22,000 apartments (for married students) were required. Various other pieces of literature support these findings. For example, Howard (1945) stated that 60 percent of returning veteran students to the University of Illinois desired family housing (Howard, p.11). He further found that in many cases availability of adequate, affordable housing informed the decision to resume studies. In *The Veterans As I See Them*, Simmons (1946) also described the challenges of married veteran students “unable to find satisfactory quarters.” Further, he posits, even when housing was obtained; the government allowance often did not cover both education and living expenses.

Colleges and universities developed many creative methods to address the increased housing demand. In the Altschuler and Blumin (2009) book, *The G.I. Bill: A New Deal for Veterans*, the oftentimes very creative housing shortfall solutions of many schools are presented. Examples of mitigation measures presented in the book included the utilization of previous Prisoner of War barracks (Notre Dame), military facilities (University of New Mexico and many others), naval ships (RPI) and vacant resort hotels (Cornell). Amendments to the Lanham Act of 1940 proved to be the “silver bullet” as excess military materials and facilities proved critical to addressing the student housing need.



The Lanham Act of 1940 originally facilitated the government's construction of housing in support of the war effort. It was subsequently later amended to include construction of public schools. Harry Porter's (1951) article on the Lanham Act provided a clear and concise synopsis of the Act and also addressed the role of the Federal Works Agency. However, in the post-WWII environment the Act was further amended to help meet the housing needs of veteran students. Keith Olson, a noted historian who has written extensively on the GI Bill, estimates "perhaps 300,000 veteran students lived in facilities acquired under the Lanham Act amendments" (Altschuler & Blumin, 2009, p.88).

### **Making up for Lost Time**

A myriad of scholarly articles addressed the issue of "making up for lost time." After five years at war, veterans returned to society and were anxious get on with their lives. Hanscom (1947), Franklin (1946), Shaw (1947), Simmons (1946), and Justice (1946) all addressed this issue and others to include institutional capacity, veteran life on campus and/or potential curriculum revisions. However, Justice (1946) offered two especially compelling elements. First, he surveyed veterans at ten colleges and formulated a clear picture of current campus issues and perceptions. Second, Justice himself was a disabled WWII veteran so he contributed a highly valuable personal perspective to his analysis and writing. While this proved to be a consistent theme in the mid-1940's, my research found the same argument still resonates today as many veterans in 2013 are focused on moving forward after their military service.

The literature indicates much consternation concerning the veteran students need to "catch up"; both socially and academically. While many articles discussed offering special programs for veterans or modifying curriculum to accommodate the veteran student, other authors, such as Shaw (1947), argued against this. The literature almost universally recognized

and acknowledged the differences of the veteran student. Veterans were repeatedly referred to as more mature, older, oftentimes married, focused, and serious about making up for lost time. Ironically, this is also consistent with the current Post 9/11 veteran students of 2013 as current data from CVAS reflects higher GPAs and graduation rates than non-veteran students. The views of my study participants, both administrators and students, presented in Chapters 4 and 5 also describe the 2013 veteran student as highly motivated and extremely focused. A November 2013 article in The Chronicle of Higher Education referenced a report conducted at 23 campuses that found veterans persisted, earned satisfactory GPAs, and completed nearly all credit hours attempted (Sander, 2013). These findings are also similar to the findings of my study derived from administrator interviews.

### **Between the Bookend Bills**

Large numbers of military members utilized various forms of veteran educational benefits following the Korean Conflict, the Vietnam War, and during the 1980's and 1990s. The statistical study published by MacLean in 2005 provides a good starting point as it examined veteran education attainment in the period between 1955 and 1965. This era is compelling as it was essentially post WWII era and before the next large scale educational program, the Vietnam Era GI Bill.

### **The Korean GI Bill**

The Korean GI Bill, officially the Veteran's Readjustment and Assistance Act of 1952, provided educational benefits to many veterans in the years leading up to Vietnam. Though the months of benefits dropped from the 48 months associated with the WWII GI Bill to 36 months for the Korean era; 43 percent of Korean veterans utilized the benefit (History of the VA). A

second significant change entailed payment of funds directly to the veteran versus the school (Altschuler & Blumin, 2009).

A subsistence allowance, intended to cover living expenses and assist with educational costs, also was provided. Further insight is available in Sharp and Krasnesor's data analysis of a 1958 graduation cohort. This detailed study, published in 1968, recorded many critical factors to include: military status, reason for military service, fields of study, graduation status, marital status, GPA, 1963 median income, and attitudes concerning military service and career. While there is undoubtedly other literature covering veteran's education during this period, this study adds value by quantifying factors affecting academic achievement and career progression of Korean era veterans.

### **The Vietnam Era GI Bill**

The Veteran Readjustment Benefit Act of 1966, the Vietnam GI Bill, deserves more attention and credit than it is often afforded. Educational entitlements were directly linked to months of military service and the VA reports ultimately 76 percent of eligible veterans utilized this benefit in some form or another. When compared to the utilization rates of the GI Bill, the educational benefit utilization rate of Vietnam veterans was almost 50 percent higher when compared to the much lauded WWII veteran – 76 percent to 50.5 percent respectively (History of the VA). The literature also reveals another innovative initiative that emerged during this period and proved vital to post-graduation employment. In the early 1970s, the Department of Labor introduced a “computerized listing of available jobs” and this information was freely exchanged with state agencies and the VA (Stephens & Stenger, 1972). This “new” employment assistance technology provided both veterans and non-veterans timely employment opportunity visibility.

## **Other GI Bills**

The next two iterations of veteran's education programs differed greatly from previous versions in two very important aspects. First, the elimination of the military draft meant the U.S. armed forces were now an all-volunteer force. Second, these two versions also required a monetary contribution by the service member to "buy into" the program.

### **V.E.A.P.**

The Post-Vietnam Era Veterans Education Assistance Program of 1977 (VEAP) required the service member to contribute amounts up to \$2,700 and the federal government subsequently matched the contribution 2:1 (Altschuler & Blumin, 2009). VEAP was not well received and, according to VA figures, participation rates in the military were low. The marginal success of VEAP and a need to further incentivize recruiting led to the next version of the GI Bill.

### **Montgomery GI Bill**

Introduced less than a decade later, the Veterans Education Assistance Act of 1984, the Montgomery GI Bill, provided \$300 a month for up to 36 months. The buy-in, \$100 a month veteran contribution for twelve months, proved much more palatable and for over twenty years the Montgomery GI Bill facilitated the trend of "joining the military to get money for college".

### **The Post 9/11 GI Bill**

Despite the large influx of veteran students, the primary focus of much of the recent literature focuses almost extensively on four areas: finances/affordability, veteran transition issues, perceived for-profit sector exploitation of veteran students, and higher education institutional initiatives. Libby Sander's running series, *Out of Uniform*, regularly appears in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and highlights many of these emerging issues to include trends

involving veteran access and campus initiatives. A closer look at the pertinent literature helps “frame the problem” each veteran student must consider when making college choice decisions.

While the amount provided under the benefit is linked to the most expensive in-state tuition of a public institution in the state, many schools, to include for-profit and private, have signed on to be “Yellow Ribbon Schools.” This initiative has been widely publicized and promoted by the VA and numerous pieces of literature tout the benefits of “Yellow Ribbon” status.

Under the Yellow Ribbon program, schools cover 25 percent of the differential between the cost of tuition/fees and the max allowable rate for the state; the VA covers the remaining 25 percent. The literature also reflects a general agreement that the program helps facilitate enrollment at higher priced or more exclusive institutions. In the program’s first year, more than 700 schools signed up for Yellow Ribbon status and by academic year 2010-11 the number of agreements grew to 1,200 (VA News Releases, June 5, 2009 and March 10, 2011).

The literature also clearly depicts the number of veterans applying for and utilizing Post 9/11 GI Bill benefits steadily increased since program inception. For example, according to the Veterans Administration, benefit applicants and/or recipients in 2008 numbered roughly 30,000 and this number grew to over 270,000 in one year. By 2010, more than 800,000 service members were enrolled in the program though benefits may not have yet been utilized. As might be expected, institutions have taken steps to ensure they are prepared to meet the growing demand. To illustrate the growing demand, between May 2012 and late summer 2013, over 130 “veteran service” related positions were advertised on a higher education employment website (Appendix B). All these positions all had either “veteran” or “military” in the job title. This demand is expected to continue. Elizabeth O’Herrin (2011), former Assistant Director at ACE, also

indicates continued opportunity for growth as demonstrated by the large number of veterans, over two million, who have served since September 11, 2001.

The enrollment predictions provided in the literature are also supported by official government testimony by VA administrators. Under Secretary Curtis Coy clearly articulated the programs rapid growth in his Congressional testimony of September 2011. Secretary Coy stated that “through the end of August 2011, the VA has issued over \$12.7 billion in Post 9/11 GI Bill benefit payments to approximately 582,000 individuals” (HLS and Governmental Affairs Committee).

The current economic climate and availability of benefits clearly projects continued growth. The literature also supports this position. For example, Sean Collins, who heads “GI Jobs” and surveys 7,000 schools annually to produce a “Military Friendly Schools” ranking, estimates 25 percent of the 250-400,000 service members now leaving the military will be in school within two years” (Hughes, 2011). The article further supports this position by utilizing the University of South Florida (USF) as an example. At USF, the first college to receive a VA funded “VetSuccess” representative, veteran enrollment has grown 10-15 percent annually since the program’s introduction. It should be noted that enrollment rates could increase even more given current fiscal pressures in Washington D.C. to further reduce military manpower.

Due to the relatively short existence of the Post 9/11 GI Bill, the literature pales in comparison to the aforementioned WWII GI Bill. However, given its meteoric utilization rate, it has quickly become a leading topic of interest within academe and on Capitol Hill. However, despite of the renewed focus on veteran education almost no literature deals with veteran’s college choice criteria. For example, extensive reports and articles, with graphics depicting GI Bill utilization data and veteran enrollment figures, are routinely published by entities such as the

VA, Congressional Research Service, ACE, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, and the Lumina Foundation. The general tone of the literature is positive and the topics often fall within one of four emerging trends: veteran student support services, access and affordability, utilization rates, and enrollment/academic progress specifically at two- year schools and for-profit institutions.

My initial research also revealed two recent 2011 dissertations pertaining to veteran students. In the first, Pattillo (2011) examined the demographics and attitudes in regard to veteran students and of veteran students at Auburn University. Utilizing the same questions as a post-WWII veteran student perceptions study, Pattillo found generally positive perceptions of and attitudes by veteran students on campus. Again, the study focused more on campus integration, perceptions and attitudes - but not college choice. Cate's (2011) dissertation also did not specifically address veteran student college choice. Rather, this dissertation addressed the veteran student experiences on campus, student services, and issues relating to college completion. Because student services utilization was the focus of Cate's study, it proved useful as a point of comparison for my sample institution findings.

### **Veteran Student Support**

Veteran student support is depicted as a catalyst to attracting and retaining veteran students. The literature provides many examples of initiatives and programs created for this specific purpose. In addition to the VetSuccess program previously mentioned, other programs such as the Student Veterans of America (SVA), Combat2College (C2C) and Soldiers 2 Scholars (S2S) are touted as potential models to serve veteran student populations. While the foundation of these initiatives is the veteran student, the focus of each is slightly different.

The veteran student advocacy group, SVA, seeks to bring together veteran students in a recognized student organization to help facilitate camaraderie and sense of community. As such,

establishing an environment of mutual peer support is envisioned as a critical element to address veteran student transition issues. The student veteran organizations at Auburn and Georgia are affiliated chapters of SVA. In contrast, S2S focuses on “eliciting discussion between veterans and students on campus, this effort encourages candid conversations about reasons for service, military life, wartime experience, transitioning the Armed Forces to the college campus and veteran’s issues” (S2S, 2012). S2S also provides training for faculty and staff to better address veteran specific issues. Many institutions, and even systems, have embraced such efforts. For example, in order to better serve the veteran student population; in January 2010 the University System of Georgia (USG) introduced S2S at twelve institutions across the state and added additional schools in the subsequent years (USG, 2010).

Journalists play an important role in creating public awareness. Media coverage has helped disseminate information concerning these organizations and raise student awareness. For example, Sally Holland, of CNN.com, reported on veteran student initiatives at San Diego State University and Kathryn Ingall, of the University of Georgia’s newspaper, *Red and Black*, reported on the creation of the Veterans Military Association of UGA. These are just a few examples and various reports in regard to veteran transition issues on campus may be found in media reports from virtually every state. My study identified commonalities between these established nationwide veteran student programs and initiatives at my sample institutions. If significant differences existed, perhaps the “lessons learned” from these programs may inform other institutional initiatives to better serve students and affect college choice.

### **Enrollment Trends by Types of Institutions**

The rapid rate of enrollment growth and Post 9/11 GI Bill utilization rates is not a matter of debate as these facts are well documented in literature and various government reports.



However, a major debate has emerged in relation to the types of institutions that are potentially benefitting from GI Bill funding. According to a 2010 article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* by Michael Sewall, 12 of the top 15 institution enrolling greater than 1,000 Post 9/11 veteran students from October 2009 thru May 2010 were either for-profit or community colleges (Sewall, 2010). This trend continues in 2013 as a majority of the top ten institutions enrolling veteran students remain in the for-profit sector. Congress seems less interested in the community colleges as those in question are generally in close proximity to a military installation. For example, Tidewater Community College is located in the Hampton Roads region of Virginia. Given the large military population in the region, in excess of 150,000, an obvious large military enrollment would be expected. However, the increase in for-profit utilization, given perceived aggressive recruitment of veterans and reported low graduation rates, continues to cause concern in the VA and within Congress.

On April 5, 2012, a national advocacy group, Student Veterans of America, revoked the membership of 40 schools, all for-profit institutions (Maze, 2012). The central issue of the revocations was the listing of staff members, vice actual veterans, on group membership rolls. Sander (2012) reports the organizations Executive Director, Michael Dakduk, states this practice “completely defeats the purpose of our peer support.” However, five years into the Post 9/11 GI Bill problems persist in the for-profit sector and Congressional hearings were once again convened in June 2013 (Weinberg, 2013).

The flexibility provided by these institutions, often relying predominantly on distance education, is very appealing to students who demand flexibility in their educational endeavors. This description in many ways personifies veteran students who desire to continue education while also often working and providing for a family. However, flexibility comes at a cost.

VA enrollment and expenditure figures, widely reported in the literature, indicate a disproportionate correlation between enrollment and cost. Essentially, though roughly 25 percent of Post 9/11 veteran students enrolled at for-profit institutions, a significantly larger percentage of benefit entitlements are being paid to these schools. In March 2012, fourteen Congressmen introduced a Bill, to protect the term “GI Bill”, from what is perceived exploitation of veteran students. In this case, internet search engines directed potential students to the website [www.gibill.com](http://www.gibill.com) – which only listed for-profit schools. In the late summer 2012, Congress achieved victory on this issue as the domain name was relinquished and a fine imposed.

The utilization of distance education is not specific to the for-profit sector as many established, and reputable, schools are allocating resources to extend campus boundaries into the electronic realm and improve student access. The sample institutions of my study reflect this trend. While not all courses are available on-line, the number of courses offered via distance education continues to slowly and methodically grow. For example, at UGA three different Masters of Education programs are now available on-line and a myriad of other courses and certificates are also available in the fields of education, pharmacy, and animal health sciences (UGA, 2012). At Auburn University, distance education continues to grow especially in the fields of engineering, education and business. The Auburn Learning Technologies Division leads the campus wide initiative and has already facilitated over three dozen new start-up programs across multiple academic departments. Whether or not offerings such as these are currently significant in scope to influence college choice remains to be seen; however, this study captured data concerning this growing trend as it pertained to college choice, academic access, and recruiting.

## **A Repeat of History: The For-Profit Issue**

As previously mentioned, a preponderance of the literature seemingly is focused on the “for-profit issue.” The literature indicates these same concerns existed in the mid-late 1940s. In the post WW II era, some 5.6 mill veterans participated in “sub-college” education and training programs (Altschuler & Blumin, 2009). The rapid emergence of for-profit institutions in the post-WWII era was a significant concern as over 5,500 “sub-college” institutions formed and the total number of for-profits reached almost 9,000 by 1949 (Altschuler & Blumin, 2009). The Restaurant Institute of Connecticut (RIC) provides a good example of this trend. RIC originated in 1946 to train veterans for culinary careers. However, its growth and subsequent accusations of overcharging and malpractice forced RIC to testify before Congress in December 1950 (Altschuler and Blumin, 2009). Clearly, despite the rhetoric and posturing, the battle between Congress and for-profit institutions is nothing new.

Today, many for-profit institutions continue to fight for credibility and have faced near continuous scrutiny by academe and members of Congress. The spotlight on for-profits seemingly grows hotter with each new negative report. For example, the television news show, *Frontline* (2012), reported a 2,000 percent growth at Ashford University, a for-profit institution, since the introduction of the Post 9/11 GI Bill.

In the last few years, the practices and contributions of for-profit institutions remained a matter of great debate not only in academe but within the halls of Congress. While many of these institutions perform superbly, are accredited, and provide valuable services; persistent questions linger in regards to value, graduation rates, transferability of credits, and student loan default rates. Many in Congress and those associated with veterans organizations and agencies (VFW, VA) express concern that veterans, with their guaranteed educational benefit, are specifically

targeted by these institutions. To highlight these continuing concerns, on April 27, 2012 President Obama issued an Executive Order designed to “protect veterans, service members, and their families from deceptive marketing practices by educational institutions that target them for their federal benefit” (Stratford, 2012). However, almost a year and a half later, work remains to be done. In August 2013, President Obama again addressed the issue when he stated veterans had been “preyed upon very badly by some of these for-profit institutions” (Blumenstyk, 2013).

### **College Choice and the Veteran**

The existing literature pertaining to veteran student college choice is scarce. As previously mentioned, literature pertaining to transition issues, college veteran student initiatives and financial ramifications abound; however, they focus primarily on the institutions and the ramifications of increased veteran enrollment. Very few studies seem focused on “what college choice factors most influence veteran students.” The data collected in this study identified criteria affecting veteran college choice and they are presented in Chapters 4 and 5 in three broad areas collectively categorized: academic factors, affordability factors, and personal factors.

To date, I have found very few journalistic accounts that specifically address veteran student college choice. As previously mentioned, cost and convenience are, at the time, seemingly primary criteria for veteran students. This veteran enrollment tendency is reflected in the fact that of the top “500 institutions enrolling veterans in 2011, over 200 were community colleges” (Field, 2012). Katy Hopkins (2012), detailed efforts to help veterans make the best enrollment decision and “find the right college” for their particular circumstances. She also described an initiative at Drexel University that provides more robust advising to veteran students (Hopkins, 2012). In the last two years, the VA and ACE have both introduced on-line tools to better support the veteran student higher education decision.

There is a wealth of information in terms of veteran student enrollment preferences (2-year versus 4-year) and instructional delivery method. The continued emergence of distance education in all academic sectors has proven very attractive to veteran students. Many veteran students, including some study participants, desire at least the option to take some courses via distance education. As non-traditional students, oftentimes working part-time, the flexibility of distance education is very appealing. These national trends are widely covered in literature and media and numerous reports offer insight into educational trends. Examples include reports by: American Council on Education (ACE), The College Board Advocacy and Policy Center, United States Congressional Research Service and Veterans Administration.

A July 2013 report by the US Government Accountability Office (GAO-13-567) further projects enrollment increases and found participation in VA education programs will grow to over 5 million by 2020 (GAO, 2013). Utilizing Fiscal Year 2011 data, this study, prepared for the US Congress, also found the percentage of total VA Post 9/11 GI Bill expenditures was similar between public schools (38 percent) and for-profit schools (37 percent). However, while the total expenditures were similar between public and for-profit, the cost per student was nearly double at the for-profit schools. This disparity explains the previously mentioned issues many members of Congress, and the President himself, have with some elements of the for-profit sector of higher education.

An abundance of literature addresses veteran enrollment trends at for-profit schools. According to the Veterans Administration (VA), over sixty percent of VA educational benefits in 2010 were paid to just ten institutions – seven of which are characterized as for-profit. For example, in 2010, eight for-profit institutions alone took in over one billion in veteran's educational benefits – a 159% percent increase from the previous academic year (Eaton, 2011).

As numerous studies describe, the veteran student is in many ways an ideal student as they are oftentimes older, more mature and extremely focused. Additionally, according to the U. S. Census Bureau, 92 percent of veterans hold a high school diploma, larger than the 86 percent of the American population (US Department of Commerce, 2011). The veteran student penchant for distance education and/or hybrid delivery methods continues to grow as veteran students often balance work, family, and educational responsibilities. My research helps identify the critical college choice factors to help institutions entice the veteran student back to the “brick and mortar” institutions which may be better suited to assist them in attaining their educational goals.

### **Various College Choice Models**

Numerous researchers and scholars have written in regard to college choice. Perna (2006) detailed various models pertaining to the college choice process. Her review highlights the linkages between college choice and the phases identified by previous researchers. For example, Perna (2006) cites the stages of the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) model as a typical process structure. The stages of this college choice include: predisposition, search, and choice.

In regard to predisposition, Perna (2006) finds many models place variables such as aspirations, expectations, and plans for college in this initial college choice model phase. While greater variation exists in the second phase, search, generally speaking this phase includes school consideration, types of institutions, and the application processes of candidate institutions. The last phase of all the models is ultimately “choice.” Perna finds this phase typically includes decisions in relation to public versus private, 2-year versus 4-year, and the determination of “first choice” institutions. She does a very good job of explaining the multitude of options students face in this final college choice phase. While the focus of my study was on “choice,” the influences of the other stages were also readily apparent in the data collection process.

The utilization of a three-stage model is common when assessing college choice. In addition to Perna's review of Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) model, others have formulated models that, while often labeled slightly different, are similar in nature. For example, Kim (2004) studied the relationship of financial aid and college choice amongst various racial groups.

Kim (2004) found linkages between preferred institution access of some, but not all, underrepresented groups and the availability of financial aid. In conducting this study of aid availability on college choice, numerous models were referenced and several followed the previously described three-phase approach. Kim's statistical model revealed some compelling findings in regard to "first choice institution" admittance. In this case, college choice was a function of four areas: personal background, college preferences, institutional characteristics, and financial aid. Further, Kim found that when personal background factors were utilized as variables all racial groups (African American, Asian, and Hispanic) were less likely to attend their "first choice institution" than were White students. When variables pertaining to financial aid were introduced, Asian and White students improved their odds yet Hispanics and African Americans showed no benefit. These findings may inform future veteran student studies as many minority groups, especially African Americans, are represented in the military at higher rates than in general society.

The three phases described by Chapman and Jackson (1987) are: perception formation, preference formation, and choice. Though the verbiage of the model varies slightly from that of Hossler and Gallagher, the similar functions of each phase are evident. The last two phases of the Hossler and Gallagher three-step model were the primary focus of my study. These three steps of the model are: predisposition to attend college, search for potential institutions, and choice among competing institutions. As many participants in my study focused exclusively on

institutions within a particular state, the search for potential institutions was ultimately limited. The primary reason for this limited search dealt with affordability and the ability to gain in-state tuition classification. As such, this limited search also aligns well with Perna's conceptual model of student college choice. In Perna's model, policy and institutional characteristics are central considerations in both layer four (social, economic, and policy context) and layer three (higher education context).

Elements of the various human capital and social capital models presented in literature also emerged in my study. For example, in the previously mentioned Perna (2006) conceptual college choice model, expected costs and future earnings are embedded within four contextual layers: individual habitus, school and community context, higher education, and broad social, economic, and policy. These four layers represent a collection of elements from various models including the human capital model. All students ultimately must conduct their own cost-benefit analysis when making an enrollment decision. In Perna's model this cost-benefit analysis is most closely replicated in the elements labeled as expected costs and expected benefits.

The four layers of the Perna model were quite useful in conducting my study. Of particular importance is the issue of habitus as presented in the Perna model. The college choice decision of the potential student is closely linked to the habitus which is comprised of demographics, cultural and social capital (Perna, 2006). These elements are reflected in studies presented later in this chapter. Clearly, this model demonstrates the complexity and intricate structure of the college choice process. Societal norms/expectations, individual habitus, and the promise of economic prosperity also almost certainly influences, to some extent, veteran students. Similar to Perna's review, my focus is on enrollment and college choice in four-year



public institutions. Heller ([2004] as cited in Perna, 2006) on the other hand incorporates all sectors of higher education, to include two-year institutions, as elements in the college choice process.

As detailed in Chapters 4 and 5, the main factors identified at the sample institutions dealt with academic factors, affordability factors, and personal factors. Each of these areas are represented in some form in the Perna model and addressed in the literature. Selected criteria were chosen and an examination of the literature proved valuable when attempting to determine if tendencies of study participants were normative or differential from national trends. Though every institution is different, the literature provided an academically sound frame of reference for comparison and analysis.

### **Academic Factors**

The desire to attain a quality education at a highly-regarded institution is a common goal of most students. This was certainly the case for participants in my study. The literature also stresses the importance of academic reputation on the college choice decision. Numerous studies detailed the linkages between institutional reputation, specific academic programs, and ultimate college enrollment (Mattern & Wyatt, 2009; Klein & Washburn, 2012, Noel-Levitz, 2012, Niu & Tienda, 2006).

Though my study focused on the southeastern region of the US, academic reputation is seemingly an influential factor nation-wide and applies to all regions of the country. For example, a study of potential students visiting Colleges of Agriculture in the Midwestern US details very similar findings. Klein and Washburn (2012) found the reputation of the institution was an important factor for their studies participants. They also found while “the importance of reputation was expressed differently among the participants...wanting to attend an institution

that was seen favorably by those around them and industry” was a major factor ultimately affecting college choice (Klein & Washburn, 2012). Academic reputation and perceived educational quality within the community were important factors in the college choice decisions of these potential agriculture students. These findings also seemingly support Perna’s model as two of her four contextual layers, individual habitus and higher education context, also address elements that link directly to academic reputation.

A 2012 National Research Report conducted by Noel-Levitz, Inc also proved very useful in understanding current college choice trends and criteria. For over forty years this higher education consulting firm has produced useful studies on a myriad of higher education topics. Primarily focusing on enrollment management issues in many of their studies, this particular study focused exclusively on factors influencing college choice. The study utilized survey data from 118 institutions, and 55,000 students, to formulate college choice factors and yielded similar findings to Klein and Washburn in regard to academic reputation. The institutions included both public and private four-year schools, community and technical colleges, and two-year career schools/private schools. Of the 72 public and private four-year institutions providing data from the student surveys, 75 and 79 percent respectively reported academic reputation as either “important” or “very important” (Noel-Levitz, 2012). Academic reputation ranked in the top three of all types of institutions sampled. These findings also are representative of the Perna model as factors from all layers of her model may be detected in data presented in this study.

Central to Perna’s third layer, higher education context, is marketing and recruitment (Perna, 2006). In this context, review of a study by a higher education marketing consultant firm was helpful in understanding the changing markets and college choice implications. According to their website, the Art and Science Group provides market-informed strategy to dozens of

public and private research institutions to include institutions such as Yale and Drexel University. Their Center for Student Opinion Research employs survey methodologies to collect and analyze student data and identify pertinent trends in higher education. Currently, 22 private research universities and 26 public universities are listed as past clients. A “studentPOLL” published in 2013 by the Art and Science Group utilized data collected from surveys of college bound high school seniors also stressed the importance of academic reputation and rankings (ARTSCI, 2013). In this study, 66 percent of respondents reported they considered college rankings when decided where to submit applications.

All the above studies reflect a continued, if not growing, importance of academic reputation in attracting students. These findings also align with the Perna model where cultural capital, specifically value of college attainment, is a central factor. Whether attracting agriculture students or veteran students, seemingly quality matters more now than ever before.

### **Affordability Factors**

Regardless of the academic reputation of an institution, a student must be able to afford the education they intend to pursue. While this proved to be a significant factor for participants in my study and this issue is obviously not limited to veteran students in the southeastern US. Extensive literature deals with college affordability and a sampling provides insight into the sometimes complex world of financial aid and its influence on college choice.

The availability of financial aid and its impact on enrollment decisions is a common theme. However, the institutions setting, reputation, and proximity are also significant factors. As Hossler (2000) details, the requirement for and the offering of financial assistance varies as much as the institutions themselves. For example, a highly selective private institution may have the resources to offer aid but in reality is not required to do so in order to attract the best

students. The same situation may also apply at large, well-known public universities such as my sample institutions. However, affordability remains a central concern for most students.

Additionally, Hossler identifies additional enrollment management and financial aid objectives, such as diversity, that pertain directly to my study. For example, if diversity is an institutional goal, veterans represent less than one percent of the American population. He also states the purpose of many aid programs is much broader than just paying for school. In the past, as it also does now with the Post 9/11 GI Bill, financial aid often rewarded “past service to the nation” (Hossler, 2000).

Hossler also referenced previous studies (Heller, 1997; Jackson, 1978, Leslie & Brinkman, 1987; St. John, 1990) that found a financial aid offering, even if small, significantly impacted college choice. Aligning with the Hossler findings, the previously mentioned Noel-Levitz study identified the top two college choice criteria at the public four-year public institutions surveyed as cost and financial aid (Noel-Levits, 2012). Collectively, Hossler’s findings in relation to financial aid and college choice clearly link to habitus and supply of resources as depicted in Perna’s contextual college choice model. However, institutional characteristics may result in variations. For example, the situation at a near-by exclusive, small private liberal arts school, as described by Schifrin (2013), may be completely different.

Schifrin (2013) described the challenges of attracting students in the modern market and the role tuition discounting plays especially at private, liberal arts colleges. Published shortly after the traditional May deadline for many freshman to make fall enrollment deposits, he analyzed data from the National Association of College Admissions Counselors (NACAC) on institutions self-reporting freshman class availability. Comparing the NACAC list against the *Princeton Review’s Best Colleges* guidebook, Schifrin produced, for *Forbes*, a listing of *Top 50*

*Colleges with Space and Tuition Discounts.* He found many colleges offered substantial tuition discounts and were willing to deal with students and their families. Affordability in this scenario hinged not the high tuition but rather the availability of aid in the form of tuition discounting. He described the situation at one such institution where 99 percent of all incoming students receive discounts and most only paid half the advertised tuition rate (Schifrin, 2013). Though this situation may not be the norm nationally, and certainly not at most public institutions, it does clearly demonstrate the relationship between tuition and aid in terms of higher education affordability.

### **Personal Factors**

Many elements in the Perna model reflect personal factors as identified in my study and the findings of other scholars presented below. For instance, location, social capital, and cultural capital, as identified by Perna, all may be linked to proximity and institutional familiarity when a student makes their college choice decision.

A significant factor affecting college choice is institutional proximity to the student's home (Mattern & Wyaat, 2009; Niu & Tienda, 2006). Accordingly, one of the recurring personal factors raised by participants in my study was institutional proximity to the veteran's home of record. This is further examined in later chapters. The term "home of record" essentially details the location from which the individual entered military service. In many instances, for those entering the military straight out of high school or after a short period in college, the home of record is their hometown. This hometown linkage is useful as it is very similar to the enrollment preference of traditional students. As almost all of the participants in my study were originally from the states in which the sample institutions were located, I wanted

to determine if this was a common enrollment trend or an exception. The literature proved valuable in analyzing this issue.

Mattern and Wyatt (2009) found the median distance a student travels away to college in U.S. was 93 miles. Institutional location is also identified by Perna as a critical element in the higher education context layer of her college choice model (Perna, 2006). The Mattern and Wyatt study utilized the data of a million students and compared the zip codes of their home and the institution in which they enrolled. Distances were also affected by other factors such as variations in parental education attainment levels, race, and household income. This rather close proximity also mirrored the findings of Klein and Washburn (2012) who found “convenience and location” as importance college choice factors. In regard to the sample institutions in my study, the median distances from home to school in Alabama and Georgia were 80 miles and 63 miles respectively; both less than the national median distance. In this context, enrollment at an institution in close proximity to their home of record was expected.

Niu and Tienda (2006) also identified proximity as an important criteria affecting college choice. In their Texas case study, in some instances the proximity of the institution was a direct manifestation of the desire to gain in-state tuition rates and as such was a reflection of affordability influence. However, it was also a matter of the state, not unlike Georgia and the HOPE scholarship, making a concerted effort to keep the best and brightest within its borders. The Top Ten percent law in Texas guarantees admission to high achieving students at their preferred institution and thus there is a compelling argument to remain close to home.

### **Emerging Trends and Issues**

Society has changed dramatically since the original GI Bill. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, both higher education and society are better positioned to respond to the demands of the returning

veteran. However, global economic concerns persist and a weak job market has fueled a spike in enrollments by not only traditional students but also non-traditional ones - to include veteran students. The literature reveals five specific emerging trends and issues that guide and influence my study.

First, continued high Post 9/11 GI Bill benefit utilization rates provide clear indicators of the potential impact on higher education. Regardless of whether enrollment rates are closer to the Vietnam-era rate (76 percent) or the WWII figure (50 percent), more veterans on campus are a certainty. In this context, each and every veteran student faces a college choice decision. As detailed in literature from previous eras, this increased enrollment provides not only great benefit to veterans and institutions alike but also presents many challenges. Post 9/11 GI Bill utilization has increased from 30,000 in 2009 to over 600,000 in 2011. The same issues of access, enrollment management, housing availability and institutional capacity remain as valid today as they did almost seventy years ago. Institutions capable of meeting the growing demand, either via on campus initiatives or distance education, are best positioned to flourish.

Second, does the current trend of veteran attraction to for-profit and distance education programs continue or do traditional “brick and mortar” institutions gain ground? Academic flexibility is vital for many veterans and institutions offering distance education, perhaps even exclusively, seem to have gained an early advantage in competing for veteran students. Obviously the issue of distance education (specifically at for-profits) remains an intriguing aspect of the greater landscape. Norton (2008) provided good background on this issue and detailed the efforts some colleges put forth to attract veteran students. Sewall (2010) also provides detailed information concerning the utilization of GI Bill benefits specifically at for-profit institutions. The VA’s National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics (NCVAS) also

records enrollment status and “type of training” pursued to include graduate, undergraduate, and vocational. Interestingly, their January 2012 report *Trends in the Utilization of VA Programs* reflects a drop in undergraduate training since 2008 yet corresponding increases in vocational and graduate training (NCVAS, 2012).

Third, as James Carville famously declared during Bill Clinton’s first presidential campaign: “it’s the economy, stupid.” Clearly, the overall health of the US economy and the federal budget (specifically mandated military end strength limits) influences college enrollment. Continued sluggish economic recovery may facilitate continued strong enrollments as many students, including veterans, delay entering the job market. Continued pressures on the Federal government to curtail spending for the foreseeable future are yielding greatly diminished Department of Defense budgets. Department of Defense budget reductions plan for a minimum 100,000 reduction of active duty end strength over the next two years. Further defense cuts could potentially more than double this figure. Compounding the issue are current reductions in state funding. Kelderman (2012) presents a grim picture as he reports a 12.5 percent increase in enrollments while at the same time state funding for higher education reached a 25 year low in 2011.

Fourth, what role does institutional proximity to major military installations play in veteran’s decision to pursue academic studies? The literature does not directly address this possible influence. However, the veteran, emboldened by the Post 9/11 GI Bill, has the ability to select from schools across the nation. Further, if legislation in the next US Congress is passed, veterans will be allowed to utilize their Post 9/11 GI Bill in any state as an in-state student. House Resolution 357 (HR 357) specifically calls for Post 9/11 GI Bill funding to be utilized for in-state tuition. The impact of this proposed legislation provides greater flexibility to veteran



students as they would be able to attend any public institution in the US as an in-state student. In this regard, it seems institutions in close proximity to military installations may hold a distinct advantage. Field (2008) is one of the very few to write about veteran student college choice criteria and indications are that convenience, to include distance education, is a major factor. That said, as found in my study, perhaps a majority of veterans intend to return to their “home of record” - entry point for military service. If this is the case, then the aforementioned advantage of military installation proximity may be minimized. The findings of my study help clarify the influence of proximity on veteran student college choice.

Fifth, it is critical to understand “transition issues” and clearly grasp what college choice factors veteran students consider important. Similarly, these issues must be sufficiently addressed by institutions catering to veteran populations. For example, what level of importance do veterans place on factors such as academic reputation, cost, proximity, affordable housing, and support systems to include medical and/or psychological?

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) also present potential challenges for institutions. A study by the National Center for Veterans Studies at the University of Utah found veteran students were 6 times more likely to attempt suicide than general student population (Jayson, 2011). In these instances, a veteran’s college choice may be strongly influenced by availability of these support systems. The sample institutions in my study have relatively easy access to VA medical care due to their proximity to either an outpatient clinic or a VA hospital.

Regardless of the status of the economy, federal spending or troop levels, one thing seems evident: growth of veteran students on campus over the next five years. Like other non-traditional student populations, these students are often more mature and focused. Veterans are

exactly the type of student colleges and universities strive to attract. Incorporating successful veteran student initiatives and addressing the unique needs of some veteran students serves well both the institution and the student. Further, understanding the factors affecting college choice and linkages between veteran desires and institutional offerings is critical to continued improvement of both veteran access and attainment rates.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHOD AND DESIGN

The college choice decision of veteran students is understudied. As previously stated, prior research and literature focused very heavily on transition issues, affordability, and institutional support requirements. However, understanding what contributes to a veteran's college choice is instrumental in formalizing plans to attract, support, and retain this student population.

My study follows a qualitative research design. A combination of interviews, focus groups and documents were the primary data sources. The data collected at the sample institutions aids in defining or "framing" the problem in relation to critical college choice factors and available resource support. Though the landscape of higher education is seemingly ever changing, the two exploratory case studies provide a snapshot in time capturing current and planned veteran initiatives. Further, understanding the influence of such initiatives on veteran college choice at the sample institutions was a primary goal.

Drawing on data from interviews and documents, I conducted a comparative case study. The goal of this approach was to identify both divergent and common approaches to serving veteran students. Ultimately, the study findings add value to validate or counter perceptions of both administrators and students. Additionally, the data may then be incorporated to promulgate or inform institutional policy recommendations based on both the case findings and the student data. The case study method is often appropriate when the research questions may be structured as "how" and "why" questions (Yin, 2009). In addition to descriptive research questions that

begin with “what,” my study specifically aims to understand “how institutions seek to attract and retain veteran students” and “why veteran students select certain institutions.” As stated in Chapter One, the research questions for the study were:

### Research Questions

1. How have institutions of higher education responded to attract and retain veteran students?
2. What do veteran students perceive as the strongest influences on their college choice decision?
3. To what extent, do institutional initiatives align with students’ primary influences?

### **Case Selection**

Yin (2007) guides the design of my multi-case study. He also recommends that, if applicable and supportable, the utilization of multiple cases, as opposed to a single case design, often yields a more compelling and robust study. My case selection is designed to predict similar results and thus follows Yin’s “literal replication” strategy. Three main criteria shaped the selection of sample institutions.

First, public land grant universities were desired due to their wide ranging mission, to include engineering and agriculture. A second reason for selecting land-grant institutions was that they are oftentimes either the Flagship institution in the state or one of the top 2-3 schools identifiable to much of the population. Essentially, their profile inherently increases their awareness with potential veteran students. The wide array of academic programs offers great appeal to a highly diverse military population of all races, backgrounds (urban and rural), and regions of the country. Second, the southeastern region of the US was selected due to the large active duty military population and proximity of numerous major military installations (Appendix A). Third, employing a “most similar” model ensured like institutions were compared. For example, I wanted to compare a large research university against a peer, not a

smaller regional university. Rationale for this approach was driven by what I hoped to identify in relation to college choice. What made a student pick one research university over another? If a smaller regional school or small public liberal arts institution were utilized, while I am confident criteria would have merged they may have varied greatly compared to the large research university criteria. For this reason, I focused my sampling at the research university level. For example, comparable enrollment figures, selectivity, military installation proximity, peers, and Carnegie classifications ensured like institutions were utilized.

### **Sample Institutions**

The University of Georgia (UGA) and Auburn University (AU) each meet the sample criteria and constitute my two-case sample. Both institutions are large land grant institutions with a strong military ties. Table 1 provides a synopsis of pertinent Veteran Student Support characteristics.

#### **Proximity of Major Military Installations (MMI).**

A significant military population within 150 miles was also a factor in selecting sample institutions. Rationale for inclusion included access to veteran students, prospective student familiarity with the institution and campus proximity to final duty station. In relation to distance to campus, value is perceived in either the ability to commute or a “relative closeness” that would supports relocation without incurring significant cost. However, military personnel are provided one final Permanent Change of Station (PCS) move fully funded by their service upon separation and/or retirement. This relocation would facilitate relocation to an institution.

The column Military Proximity is my assessment based upon institutional proximity to major military installations. For example, Auburn University has three separate MMIs within 75 miles. Fort Benning located in Columbus, GA is home to a very large Army presence and

Maxwell/Gunter Air Force Bases in Montgomery, AL offers a significant military population. In this context, I have assessed Auburn as High in terms of Military Proximity (Table 1). For the purpose of this study, a student would almost certainly have to make a decision to relocate in order to pursue higher education at UGA and AU. The sample institutions also share rather similar institutional characteristics and Carnegie classification metrics (Table 2).

**Table 1: Veteran Support Factors**

School	Principle of Excellence	State Veterans Educational Benefits	*Military Proximity	Yellow Ribbon Participant	Veteran Student Organization
AU	Yes	Some w/ caveats	High	Limits	Yes
UGA	Yes	Some w/ caveats	Medium	No	Yes

Source: Derived from institution web pages and Department of Defense (September 2012)

\* High = Large military population within 75 miles; Medium = 75-150 miles

**Yellow Ribbon and Principles of Excellence Participation.**

Of particular interest is the Yellow Ribbon Participant status as depicted in Table 1. In the case of Auburn University, the institution is a participant, but the program is capped at 10 participants a year with a maximum institutional contribution of \$1,000 (Auburn, 2013). However, active efforts are however underway to secure additional funding and expand the program. The University of Georgia is not currently a participant in the Yellow Ribbon Program; however, initial studies have been conducted by some administrators and the possibility of some future actions remains a possibility. It is interesting to note that many private institutions and almost universally for-profit institutions are Yellow Ribbon participants.

For example, according to the VA GI Bill website, the state of Georgia has 59 participating institutions; however, only 4 of the 31 public institutions of the University System of Georgia, University of North Georgia, Kennesaw State University, Georgia Tech, and Clayton State University, participate at any level (VA, 2013). The Yellow Ribbon program commitment at each institution also varies greatly. For example, Georgia Tech offers Yellow Ribbon to all

applicable students at \$1,000 per semester while the University of North Georgia offers it only to 50 students; however, the amount is raised to \$5,000.

A second initiative depicted in Table 1, Principles of Excellence (POE), was introduced April 27, 2012 by President Obama via Executive Order (White House, 2012). Similar to the Yellow Ribbon program, participation of the sample institutions varies. The Principles of Excellence agreement intent is to have agreeing institutions meet specific requirements to support veteran students. These requirements include:

1. Provide information pertaining to total cost of attendance
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 due to service requirements
5. Designate a point of contact for academic and financial counseling
6. Ensure accreditation of all new programs prior to enrolling students
7. Align institutional refund policies with those under Title IV

Auburn University and the University of Georgia are both participants in this initiative. In this fast paced world of higher education, this is not entirely surprising as institutions tend to join these agreements at various times. For example, in the case of the Yellow Ribbon program, Auburn University did not become a participant until 2012 even though Auburn University-Montgomery (AUM) had been a participant since program creation. In the case of POE, the wording of the Executive Order was deemed by many to be lacking specificity and the required level of detail to facilitate implementation. Institutions were granted approximately one month to declare intent to comply with the requirements. For this very reason, many institutions elected to delay responding to the request for compliance and the National Association of College and

University Business Officers officially recommended institutions delay until specifics were provided (NACUBO, 2012).

Similar institutional characteristics were desired to ensure comparative profiles and enrollment trends. I utilized the institution Carnegie classifications to identify an initial sample school listing and subsequently eliminated institutions, also considering availability, until I determined my sample schools. For example, according to Carnegie classifications, both the sample institutions are considered “High Transfer In” and “More Selective”. Translated this depicts at least twenty percent of entering undergraduate admissions are transfer students and those students are in the top twenty percent of all baccalaureate institutions (Carnegie, 2013).

Due to the transient nature of military service, I also specifically sought High Transfer In schools for my sample selection. Similarly, size and setting, enrollment, and research focus were also utilized to ensure selection of comparable institutions. As an example, the enrollment at each of these research universities exceeds twenty-five thousand and both are categorized at least “High” in terms of research activity. While these elements may not directly influence college choice, they clearly identified two comparable institutions for the study.

Though both schools are considered selective, there was some slight differentiation when comparing admissions rates. According to the IPEDS Data Center, Auburn admittance rates for all applicants in 2011 and 2012 were seventy and seventy-seven percent respectively. For the same time period, the admissions rate at Georgia was fifty-nine and sixty-three percent (IPEDS Data Center). The selectivity and lower admission rate at Georgia, discussed further in Chapter 5, was also a factor for the focus group participants.



## **Data Collection**

Yin (2007) identifies six sources of evidence often utilized while conducting case studies: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant-observation, and physical artifacts. The first three are utilized in my data collection. This study has a foundation drawn from four data collection mechanisms: interviews with an administrator at the sample institution, focus groups with veteran students, follow-up interviews with students, and institutional documents and policies related to veteran students. The convening of focus groups of currently enrolled veteran students at the sample institutions advances the understanding of veteran student college choice decisions. Ultimately, these findings were utilized for institutional comparisons in the cross-case method.

### **Student Focus Group Selection**

Focus groups at both sample institutions were comprised primarily of veteran students affiliated with the institutions corresponding student veteran organization. Focus groups are especially useful in determining preferences and interviewing a group of people who have specific knowledge of a topic (Merriam, 2009). In this case, the preferences and common topic is clearly the veteran college choice decision process. Additionally, my research focused on former military members pursuing primarily undergraduate degrees though participants in graduate programs were also allowed to participate since they also made a college choice decision. As a vast majority of officers already hold bachelor degrees, it was understood the student population sample would consist primarily of former enlisted personnel. This demographic also accounts for the vast majority of potential veteran students as enlisted numbers far exceed the number officers in the armed forces. In 2010, the total number of enlisted personnel in the armed forces was 1,183,000 as compared to 234,000 in the officer corps (US Census, 2010). Coordination

with the corresponding veteran student group aided in identification of a representative sample of students meeting the following criteria: undergraduate, ideally within first two years of study at institution.

Focus groups were allowed to comprise up to 10 students of varying race and gender. However, a representation of multiple military services and varying marital status was preferred in order to compare and contrast perceptions, college choice factors and student support requirements. The focus groups were conducted on the campuses of each institution and coordinated via their respective veteran center or with Student Affairs. Membership in the veteran student organization was not mandatory for focus group inclusion though many participants were affiliated with the recognized organization. Approximately 75 percent of the participants at each institution self-identified as members of the campus veterans group. The value of some non-member participation lied in the possibility that those not group affiliated may offer a different perspective and identify additional issues for future study.

### **Student Focus Group Composition**

At Auburn University, the focus group was comprised of eight veteran students. Their length of military service ranged from 2 to 20 years. Of the eight participants, seven were enlisted and ranged from junior ranking personnel to very senior non-commissioned officers. One group participant completed a 20 year military career in the officer corps.

The composition of the focus group represented a combined 73 years of military service in all branches of the armed forces. With service during wartime, it was also expected that many experienced numerous deployments. Accordingly, 75 percent (6 of 8) had deployed during their military careers. Of those that had deployed, all had experienced a deployment to a combat zone and half experienced combat operations during their time in uniform.

At the University of Georgia, the composition of the 4 participant focus group represented a combined 32 years of military service in the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps. The participants' military service ranged from 4- 17 years. Similar to the Auburn group, many had deployed during their time in uniform. As such, 100 percent of the participants had deployed to a combat zone a minimum of two times. Half of the participants also reported experiencing combat operations. Due to student availability and timing factors, this focus group was half the size of the one conducted at Auburn; however, they were very engaged and the sample included undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral students.

### **Administrator Interview Selection**

In addition to the student focus groups and institutional documentation review, another key element of the study involved sample institution administrator interviews. Two interviews were conducted at each institution. The first interviewee was either the respective student group advisor or an administrator closely related to the veteran student center. The value of this interview was gaining insight of an individual very familiar with the pertinent issues affecting the organization, student center, student concerns, and institutional initiatives affecting college choice.

The second interview was conducted with a senior Admissions administrator knowledgeable in veteran student initiatives, admissions, and financial aid. While the title of the individual varied by institution, the study originally focused on interviews at the level of Vice President of Student Affairs or the Director of Admissions. After corresponding with these senior administrators I was referred to specific Admissions representatives that dealt with veteran students regularly. Ultimately, I interviewed Admissions representatives who specialized in military and veteran admissions. This proved very beneficial as this provided the study with

better granularity in regard to veteran concerns and college choice criteria. These interviews provided a wealth of data pertaining to perceived effectiveness of current initiatives, future initiatives (if any), and current campus climate.

At Auburn, I interviewed two administrators and discussion focused on institutional initiatives designed to serve the needs of veteran students. The participants were the Director of the Veteran Resource Center and an Admissions representative that deals with veteran students. The influence of institutional initiatives on veteran student college choice was the primary focus of the interview questions.

At Georgia, I interviewed three administrators. Two Admissions representatives were interviewed and collectively they worked at the institution for over thirty years. Their experience and insight provided great value in understanding the linkages between meeting admissions objectives and simultaneously achieving institution goals and ambitions. Additionally, I interviewed the Dean of Students. He is involved closely with all areas of Student Affairs. With the focus on college choice, the first question for both the individual administrators and the focus group participants pertained to current and planned initiatives designed to serve the veteran student population.

### **Data Analysis**

As described by Merriam (2009), I used data collected from the sample institutions for the “within-case” analysis of the institutions. The data collected at these institutions addressed veteran and institutional initiatives as well as respective veteran student college choice criteria. Once completed, a “cross-case analysis” between sample institutions revealed both variations and commonalities amongst the sample pool.

Analysis of data collected from the focus groups and interviews was coded. Proper coding of data characterized the data to yield “a theme, a pattern, or a finding” to answer the pertinent research questions (Merriam, 2009). Coding of responses and interview transcripts identified trends and critical college choice criteria as well as perceived value of institutional initiatives. As data was coded, categories or “conceptual elements that cover or span many individual examples” were formulated (Merriam, 2009).

My coding framework included core elements from all of the research questions. Additionally, the data coding was further categorized into one of three stages of the college choice process: predisposition, search, and choice (Perna, 2006). Obviously, as data emerged new categories were identified. However, initial assessment from literature indicated many factors which potentially affected college choice selection.

1. Academic Factors
  - a. Instructional method delivery preferences
  - b. Course of study
  - c. Academic support
  - d. Academic reputation and/or rankings
2. Personal Factors
  - a. Family status
  - b. Work/School balance
  - c. Medical (includes mental health) matters
  - d. Proximity to military installation
3. Affordability Factors
  - a. Financial aid
  - b. Veteran student support and transition/First Year initiatives
  - c. Housing affordability and availability

The data analysis of my dissertation focuses on three main points for the study: student college choice criteria, administrator perceptions, and similarities or divergence in the findings. First, validity of college choice criteria as identified by enrolled veteran students. Focus group data collection at the sample institutions depends upon access to veteran students. Second, the

impact of institutional initiatives was derived from both interviews with an administrator at each sample institution and publically available information.

The research focus of interviewing administrators is to compare/contrast their perceived “veteran college choice criteria” with those identified by the veteran student population. The sample institution initiatives were also compared with the institutional initiatives nationwide as detailed in studies such as ACE’s *From Soldier to Student II: Assessing Campus Programs for Veterans and Service Members* (2012) and *From Soldier to Student: Easing the Transition of Service Members on Campus* (2009). These ACE studies are far reaching and entail survey data from hundreds of higher education institutions. For example, the 2012 report utilized survey data from 690 respondents.

A final factor, not necessarily the focus of this study, was to identify other factors affecting college choice decision that warrant further study. Data collected from the focus groups interviews and surveys identified areas perhaps not being addressed. Examples of these included access to mental health professionals and/or VA medical facilities, differing needs between “combat vets” and “non-combat” veterans, and variations in state veteran benefits. For example, the state of Alabama provides four years of free tuition and books to qualifying disabled veterans. (VA: Alabama Office of Veteran Affairs) What role does proximity play in the college choice selection? One might assume that university close proximity to a large military installation plays a significant role in attracting veteran students.

### **Potential Challenges**

A major focus of the literature, both WWII and in the current Post 9/11 Era, is “veteran student transition.” Many examples in the literature and media, as well as personal experience, offer insight to student veteran transition issues; however, I must guard against preconceived

perceptions and bias. As per Merriam (2009), I have avoided the problematic questions often associated with case study methods; namely: hypothetical questions, devil's advocate questions, ideal position and interpretive questions. Challenges of the study included access to students and administrators. Data collection was conducted during the summer so student availability was a particular challenge. These risks were mitigated via working through and with already established structures and organizations.

Further, no personal identifiable data was collected. While basic demographic data such as service affiliation, age, race, marital status, military home of record and last duty station was collected; no names were utilized in the study. The institution administrator interviews focused squarely on current and future veteran initiatives and their perceived influence on college choice. No attempt was made to deem an initiative as "ineffective." Rather, a synopsis of institutional efforts demonstrates the commitment of resources. These initiatives were analyzed against the most influential college choice criteria identified by the veteran student.

As a veteran, I took care to guard against personal bias. For example, in my case, the sole factor affecting my college choice was academic reputation; proximity and cost were lesser factors. In contrast, this study may clearly identify proximity and cost as driving influences on veteran college choice. These differences are non-problematic as the focus of the study is on clarifying college choice criteria of veteran students and comparing against institutional efforts. My views had no effect on either the sample institutions or the veteran students.

The significance of understanding veteran college choice is far reaching. Veterans provide many of the positive attributes institutions desire in students such as a global perspective and, in many cases, an increased level of maturity and focus. A benefit of understanding veteran college choice is the focused application of limited resources by higher education institutions.

## CHAPTER 4

### AUBURN UNIVERSITY

Auburn, Alabama, labeled “The Loveliest Village on the Plains,” lies in east central section of the state, near the Georgia border, and is home to Auburn University. Auburn is a typical southern college town with an expansive campus, quaint downtown adjacent to the school, and surrounded by the rolling countryside. Founded in 1856 as the East Alabama Male College it has changed names numerous times throughout its history. As a land grant institution under the Morrill Act, it evolved from the Agriculture and Mechanical College of Alabama (1872) to Alabama Polytechnic Institute in 1899. Remaining true to its land grant mission, the institution has traditionally excelled in numerous areas to serve the citizens of the state. In 1960, the institution changed its name one final time and has since been known as Auburn University.

Auburn University is one of but a few major research universities designated as a land, sea, and space grant university. University enrollment is roughly 25,000 with the majority (20,000) being undergraduates. The university and especially its highly ranked engineering and agriculture programs are highly regarded both nationally and internationally. In the 2014 U.S. News and World Report rankings of Top Public National Universities the university ranked #40 among its peers nationwide.

In 2013, many of its most notable colleges remain dedicated to its traditional strengths particularly in the fields of agriculture, engineering, and education. Given its land grant origins, where military training was previously an integral part, a long tradition of military service exists at Auburn. The university proudly claims numerous Generals, Admirals and astronauts as



alumni. Situated near two Major Military Installations (Maxwell-Gunter AFB in Montgomery and Fort Benning Army Base in Columbus, GA), the institution is ideally positioned to serve, as it historically has, large numbers of military and veteran students.

I conducted interviews with two university administrators and a focus group of nine currently enrolled veteran students. This chapter is presented based upon the data collected and the main topics identified during the analysis. The introductory section, Overview of Veterans Initiatives, details initiatives in place to serve the veteran student population. My analysis is presented in three sub-sections: Veterans Resource Center (VRC), Auburn Student Veterans Association (ASVA), and Other Initiatives. Section two of the chapter, College Choice, discusses many of the most critical factors affecting college choice as extracted from the data collected during the interviews and focus group. This section is organized in three main sub-sections titled: Academic Factors, Affordability Factors, and Personal Factors. Finally, an overview of the main points and analysis of Auburn's efforts are presented in the concluding Case Summary.

### **Overview of Veterans Initiatives**

Since the 2009 implementation of the Post 9/11 GI Bill, many colleges and universities throughout America took substantial steps to both attract and serve a growing student veteran population. In this regard, Auburn University implemented numerous initiatives designed explicitly to serve this student population segment. While additional efforts are under consideration to improve affordability, namely Yellow Ribbon program expansion or tuition classification modifications, the already existing initiatives flourish.

In place initiatives that not only attract veteran students but, more importantly, also provide key services for students once on campus are the Auburn Veteran Student Association

(ASVA) and the Veterans Resource Center (VRC). The first provides an opportunity for self-identifying veterans to associate with a student organization specifically designed with veteran students as its sole focus. The latter provides access to a designated facility, veteran staff, academic support, and other institutional student services. Together these initiatives represent a significant university commitment to meet student needs. Discussions with students indicated they appreciate these efforts and find them of significant importance once enrolled. When discussing current campus initiatives with participants, a current undergraduate student quickly mentioned both initiatives,

There are certain initiatives, I don't know if they are plainly available for veteran students to see, but there are initiatives available once you do choose Auburn. For example, we do have the Veterans Resource Center and a student veterans association with a bunch of veteran students.

The VRC and ASVA were perceived by both administrators and students alike as significant initiatives that, from inception, were designed to serve veteran students. These initiatives also serve a vital role for Admissions as they can publicize them, increase potential student awareness, and influence college choice. Additionally, the Admissions representatives often redirect potential students directly to current students and staff at the VRC. These staff and students are ideally suited to answer military specific questions and alleviate uncertainty. A current Admissions representative viewed the role of the Admissions Office, frequently a potential student's first point of contact, as critical in answering queries and promoting the VRC as a place to answer specific VA benefit or military related questions. According to the Admissions representative,

I always ask them, "Let me have your email. I'll give you further information." They may not be able to write everything down. So, I send the procedures on how to apply and also include the Veterans Resource Center and mention they have a veteran's organization here. I send all of that to them before they even ask...that's just automatic.

## **Veterans Resources Center (VRC)**

The current VRC opened on November 13, 2012. Following the introduction of the Post 9/11 GI Bill in late 2009, the VRC was initially introduced in 2010 and consisted of a small office with two desks in Haley Student Center (Harding, 2012). Though conveniently located, the old office lacked resources and space to effectively deal with large numbers of veteran students. Last year the VRC was established in Foy Hall, which also houses ESL, Study Abroad, multimedia, auditorium, classrooms, and various other units. Just a short walk from Haley Center, the VRC remains centrally located and is afforded substantial room to accomplish its mission. The VRC includes a reception desk (manned by VA work study students), a large lounge area, offices, multiple conference rooms, and even a small kitchen. The VRC now easily accommodates large meetings, study sessions, and social gatherings of veteran students. The VRC website, [http://www.auburn.edu/academics/provost/undergrad\\_studies/veterans/](http://www.auburn.edu/academics/provost/undergrad_studies/veterans/), provides a wealth of useful information for both incoming and current students. The site also includes a link to the topic of the next sub-section, the Auburn Student Veterans Association.

The VRC Director is passionate about its existence and strongly advocates its student centric role. Designed as a one-stop shop, the VRC fulfills numerous functions important to veteran students. This one-stop-shop approach was lauded for its efficiency by administrators and for its ease of access by student participants. Students can not only socialize with fellow veterans but also accomplish many important academic and administrative tasks. For example, the designated Veterans Certifying Official (VCO) for Auburn University is located within the center. This individual, with over fourteen years of experience certifying VA educational benefits, provides a wealth of knowledge. The co-location of the VCO within the VRC ultimately results in the efficient and expeditious certification of enrollment each semester and

he is available to answer student questions immediately. Students also now enjoy room to study and can also print papers. According to the VRC Director,

It's important because student groups on campus have to have a place to socialize, to develop, to congregate, to study, to feel that they can be successful. It says "We value you. We appreciate you." It gives them some motivation and some incentive by not only having a place to do some work, they can print papers, get on the computer...but we can answer the benefits question.

Its role as a centralized point of contact for students is another advantage of the VRC.

Quite simply, and perhaps equally as important, if the VRC staff cannot personally address a student's issue, they know who within the university can. Many focus group respondents found this one-stop shop approach and coordination across a myriad of university units very beneficial as problems were often mitigated before they arose. The Director supports this holistic approach and works tirelessly to build and strengthen ties within the university. According to the Director, this cross-enterprise effort adds great value in addressing veteran student needs quickly,

Here in this office, we naturally certify benefits. That's probably our number one draw. Second, we have relationships with generally every unit on campus that provides; for example, marriage and family counseling, academic support, and scheduling/advising. We also have support from the Montgomery VA Center. This is a person who provides counseling - PTSD, TBI type counseling. We do all that here in this office. We can also schedule tutoring.

Students are very supportive of the VRC and in many cases it influenced their college choice. Though many students stated that school selection would not be solely made based upon the existence of a veterans center at an institution, two students, a Marine and a former Navy officer respectively, felt the presence of a center on a campus demonstrated a commitment by the institution and generally peaked interest of potential students. The VRC played a significant role in the Marine's college choice.

When I was looking for schools, I knew that Auburn had a veteran resource center and I heard it was pretty nice. That was really the only thing that I knew about...everything else I learned when I came to the actual transfer day.

The former Navy officer, now enrolled for over two years, personally witnessed the VRCs growth, evolution, and impact since he arrived on campus. During pre-enrollment correspondence with the university he learned of the initiative and has since seen the availability of veteran student specific information grow tremendously. He now senses a much broader distribution of information and recognized the recent improvements. He stated,

When I was first registering to come back to school, there wasn't a veteran's resource center. However, email back and forth with the veteran representative was very helpful to be able to discuss the things that were going to going on here (the VSRC starting) and how the GI Bill was going to work. Subsequent to that, I think more information has been put out by the center now here and they make sure that everybody who is going to come through has the information they need to have.

In at least one instance, a student claimed an on campus veteran's center was a firm requirement for an institution to even be considered in his college choice decision.

I mean just having the veterans resource center at a school is definitely a go/no-go criteria for me. I know of some schools that have very weak veteran resources. If they do, it's just the bare minimum. It was a big comfort to know this school had a real nice one.

The VRCs creation, and the one-stop-shop approach, proved very helpful to students.

Institutional processes are streamlined and the need to walk from office to office is greatly minimized. Naturally, time saved by students resulted in more time for academics; much appreciated by many participants. According to the Director,

We try to get it all done right here. We try to spearhead some of the issues they may be having so they don't have to go talk to the Provost or to Admissions. We don't do it all, but when there's a need, we step right in there.

### **Auburn Student Veterans Association (ASVA)**

The second initiative the students deemed important to college choice was the presence of a student veteran's organization. Founded on February 1, 2010, the ASVA serves veterans, active duty military members, and reservists (Norwood, 2010). The mission of the organization is centrally focused on students and community engagement. It reads: "To promote the general

welfare of veterans attending Auburn University and to continue serving our country by contributing to the betterment of the Auburn community” (ASVA website, 2013). A student centric organization designed to assist military members with successful transition to academe, their motto, *Veterans Supporting Veterans*, also reflects a sense of teamwork and camaraderie.

The ability to meet former military members and share common experiences, both from an academic and military mindset, was considered highly valuable. That said, as with any organization challenges exist and group composition presents some unique ones. As described by a current member, getting a group of students together, many of whom have families and also work, is often problematic,

I will say having a veteran student organization is more difficult than a traditional group were you have freshmen and sophomores living in a dorm. We have a lot who are married, have kids, and jobs...it’s just a little more difficult to have meetings and events. We try to do something at least once a month if not more often.

Despite challenges juggling busy schedules, participants felt the ASVA provided an invaluable service. The resultant camaraderie, claimed by all participants to be very important, was perceived as a natural by-product of being with those with whom you are most comfortable and familiar. A sincere appreciation for the opportunity to interact with former military members and the mutual support provided by members were collectively touted as benefits. A Marine also found the age of members more compatible with his experiences and expectations of college life.

It’s important because who’s going to understand what a veteran is going thru better than another veteran. It hard to talk to a regular, run of the mill, 18-19 year old kid. A veteran can relate better and they know where you’re coming from. They might be going thru, or have gone thru, the same issues. It’s great to have an organization like that on campus.

The willingness to engage the veteran students was viewed as a very positive gesture on the part of the university. While many activities and initiatives on campus are naturally geared toward the younger undergraduate population, the existence of the ASVA, and the continued

strong support by the university, was deemed extremely significant in providing veteran students a voice. In the words of one student,

I think for someone who's going to come back here, especially for undergrad, it's important for the student organization to be there. I think its import for university to recognize and listen to the organization and see what they have to say. I mean they do the same for all the other organizations. The veteran student group is a unique subset and I think it would be important for their views to be noted by the university.

### **Other Auburn Initiatives**

While the VRC and ASVA were the two main initiatives highlighted by students, there are others worthy of mention. The first, a university policy granting priority registration for veterans, directly influences academic scheduling and contributes to on-time graduation and stress reduction. This policy, if further publicized, certainly was believed, by students, to potentially impact veteran college choice. The second, a peer advising initiative, provides opportunity to benefit from “previous lessons learned” as experienced by current students.

#### **Priority Registration for Veterans.**

Student participants universally appreciated veteran priority registration. When faced with completing coursework within 36 months (Post 9/11 GI Bill benefits), success during registration is perhaps as important as classroom success. An inability to secure course seats on time and in proper sequence may ultimately result in out-of-pocket costs. Auburn provides this benefit to assist veterans in the timely completion of their coursework. The participants expressed belief that this benefit oftentimes may be overlooked by potential students. However, in the view of one student, it is a tremendous benefit that impacts timely program completion,

One thing people are not always aware of is Auburn allows veterans to have priority one registration. This is a big, big deal; especially if you're a freshman or sophomore trying to register and get your classes...so, all students that are receiving GI Bill benefits get priority one registration. The only people who register before veterans are graduating seniors.

### **PAVE Program.**

In September 2013, Auburn was named as a participant in the Peer Advisors for Veteran Education (PAVE) program. The program is a joint effort between a veterans organization (Student Veterans of America) and the University of Michigan Depression Center. The program addresses veteran student transition to higher education issues by pairing new students with experienced students serving as mentors. Auburn, the only school from the southeast, was one of only five schools selected. The other four were the University of Maryland, George Washington University, Central Michigan University, and Eastern Michigan University.

While the affect of the program is not immediately known, it is hoped the additional support alleviates some of the angst veterans frequently report when moving into the academic world. Four months earlier when interviewing the Director of the VRC, he referenced forthcoming mentoring opportunities and it is good to see they materialized. Auburn's selection is a significant accomplishment and yet another reflection of the institution's commitment to veteran students.

### **College Choice Criteria**

While the initiatives described were touted as important factors, others emerged in the course of conducting interviews and convening the focus group. Participant responses were transcribed, analyzed and subsequently placed in three categories dependent upon data coding. The majority of issues identified fell within the categories of academic factors, affordability factors, and personal factors.

In regard to academic factors, academic reputation and specific courses of study were cited most often. However, student statements and administrator comments also captured other pertinent issues such as instructional method (online), course scheduling (night courses), and



perception of degree value. Affordability factors almost exclusively focused on two main points: Yellow Ribbon and tuition classification. Personal factors covered a wide range of topics. Examples included family proximity, spouse career considerations, and quality of life.

### **Academic Factors**

Issues categorized as academic factors related to institutional reputation and degree programs, instructional delivery, and faculty. Universally, student participants were pleased with the academics and quality of an Auburn education. Though some participants had family ties to other institutions within the state, specific Auburn programs were deemed of such quality that the college choice decision ultimately was made easy. In some instances, the program was very specialized and no other in-state school offered a comparable course of study.

#### **Academic Reputation and Course of Study.**

Time and again, the reputation of the institution and desire for a quality education emerged as significant factors. In this context, reputation of the institution was perceived by participants a representation of quality. These findings were also reflective of the research by Mattern and Wyatt (2009) and Noel-Levitz study (2012) as referenced in Chapter 2. In those studies, academic reputation was consistently ranked as a top factor in college choice. My research found the perceived value added by attending one of the sample institutions was a significant contributor to the college choice decision of the veteran student participants. Additionally, participant responses clearly reflected the cultural and social capital factors as presented in Perna's (2006) college choice model.

While these factors may not influence all veteran college choice across the nation, certainly for those electing to pursue a degree at this research university, a major issue was quality. Simply stated, participants expressed a strong desire to know their degree was reputable

and the education was highly respected. A retired Marine was a strong advocate for quality and the need to ensure the degree represented value. The quality of the institution as a whole was also a factor effecting college choice. According to the student,

I think Auburn, pretty much like any other large school, has everything you need. The big selling point of Auburn is Auburn...that fact that Auburn is what it is. Name recognition means a lot going forward. Whatever degree you get from Auburn, versus getting it from some other school, means a lot. Auburn's reputation is great.

The quality of the institution and specific programs drew many to Auburn. Though almost all had considered other schools, the quality of Auburn impacted their college choice decision. For example, another student stated, "I think the reasons I chose Auburn are that it's a great school, great program, and it will carry a lot of weight moving forward after graduation...and it was affordable."

A third student expressed a similar academic focus and extended the discussion beyond course of study. In this instance, academic extracurricular activities and organizations within his chosen college were important college choice factors. He detailed his criteria as such, "My biggest factors affecting college choice for any school were: did they have the major, the minor, and any extracurricular activities that supported the specific program?"

A fourth student reiterated the value of both the entire university as well as the high rankings of certain colleges and programs. Further, he provided examples of students he knew who selected Auburn specifically for a specific course of study. While some more flexible programs were considered at other institutions, ultimately the question of quality once again emerged as a leading college choice factor. According to this participant,

I think for some veterans the program does matter. Definitely the name recognition goes along with the program too. Certain schools, like engineering, Auburn has everything and carries a lot of weight. Agriculture and engineering that's what the university was founded on and those are probably our two biggest. I would say for most veterans, if they

look at Auburn and see it has their program...kind of a bonus. Some are even willing to pay the out-of-state to come here because of a certain program.

A Marine had a differing set of criteria in mind when he made his college choice decision. He decidedly wanted to attend a traditional, brick and mortar, respected university and intentionally avoided online institutions because of what he perceived as questionable quality. He further lauded the quality faculty at Auburn and had serious reservations about similar quality at some other institutions,

One of the big deciding factors was that it was a brick school. It was a university. That was big for me. The faculty was the ultimate deciding factor for me...good credentials. I didn't want some bogus teacher.

Despite being a "rabid athletic fan" for an in-state rival institution his entire life, an Air Force veteran ultimately enrolled at Auburn for a very specific degree and the exceptional program quality. While he considered the other school, in the end the quality of the Auburn program was enough to sway his college choice decision.

One of my big choices was Alabama. I am a huge fan. I looked at the programs and I was more focused on the program for my degree...Auburn had so much more. In my engineering program we build a car – Alabama didn't have that. A huge deciding factor was the program of the degree I was interested in.

Lastly, a graduate student, who years previously graduated Auburn, considered not returning to Auburn as he thought earning a graduate degree from a separate institution may be viewed more positively by future employers. However, when the college choice decision arrived, the program's quality appealed and the degree disparity alleviated his concerns.

I came back to go to graduate school. The program is fairly well established and has had a lot of changes. Changes I think improved the program considerably...I was a little reluctant to come back and get the masters in the same place I got my bachelors but that was a history degree so there is some diversity in terms of the degree program.

The students above had definitive educational goals; however, this is not always the case. A clear vision of academic aspirations originally eluded some participants. As is common for

freshmen, one student began his college career without a major identified. However, he recognized the value of an Auburn degree and enrolled solely on the belief in the institution and what it represented. He recounted his experience,

For me, I didn't know what I wanted to study in school. There might have been some other school in the state that might have had stronger courses in a specific major, but since I didn't know, Auburn was a sure choice.

### **Instructional Delivery.**

Though academic reputation and degree programs were dominant factors, participants also perceived instructional delivery methods and course scheduling significant. While Auburn University offers some online programs, they are mostly at the graduate level. Night classes, for most every program, are a rarity rather than a norm. This backdrop fueled discussion in regard to online education and the availability of course offerings to meet non-traditional student needs. When asked about the availability and value of online offerings as it related to their college choice experience, student responses varied widely. I also asked participants if any college choice consideration was afforded strictly online programs.

Two students exemplified the range of responses. The first was an Air Force veteran who continues to serve as a current member of the Army reserves. The second student was a Navy veteran. The Army reservist had a clear idea of what type of instruction worked best for her learning style and immediately ruled out exclusively online institutions. The student succinctly stated, "I definitely did not want to get my degree from an online school." The second student did not rule out online education but expressed trepidation over perceived quality, "I was open to online schools but chose not to do that."

Four other focus group participants concurred with the views of the Army reservist and stated they also immediately eliminated from consideration any exclusively online program and

generally had negative perceptions of this education sector. In this context, exclusively online instructional delivery from a predominantly online institution was a major issue - it was not preferred. These views were informed by what they collectively perceived as marginal quality and minimal support. However, when asked to elaborate, numerous respondents expressed belief that night courses and additional online offerings at Auburn would certainly help meet the need of the military and veteran students. One student, who works part time in the VRC, regularly fields calls from potential students and described the conversation in regard to online offerings as very “to the point”.

I think with the flexibility of having night classes or distance learning classes where they can do it online is big. If we had that, I know the numbers would go up tremendously. I can't even tell you the number of calls that I get asking, “Do you have online classes?” “No.” “Okay. Thank you.”...and they hang up.

Night class availability and online courses effect on college choice was also very evident during the interview with the Admissions representative. Dealing regularly with potential military and veteran students, questions frequently pertained to online education and night course availability. In regular interactions with potential students, these issues were thought to “the biggest factors” affecting college choice decisions.

In support of this claim, the Admissions representative, drawing from past personal experiences, provided numerous examples. For instance, as mandated by their respective work schedules, numerous students drove an hour away to take night courses at AUM (Auburn University – Montgomery). According to the Admissions representative in one instance,

He applied and was talking to an advisor...“No, we don't have any night classes or anything like that.” So, he drove to (Montgomery) twice a week...and met others doing the same thing! I think if we had more night classes or something like that. I know we would have more military and veterans. There's no doubt in my mind.

### **Transfer and Service Credit.**

The issue of transfer credit, or more specifically the reluctance to accept such credit, was raised by many participants. In perhaps somewhat of a surprise, though students desired more transfer credit and military schooling credit, they also proved very aware of the issues complexity. While advocating for more credit they also considered the ramifications and didn't want Auburn to "freely" accept credits since, it was felt, would weaken their brand. One student's views provided insight into the challenge perceived,

It's a double edged sword. Whose accreditation credits is SACS (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools) going to accept? It's our good name. So if Auburn starts accepting anybody and everybody's transfer credit, then that takes away from the perceived value of having a degree from Auburn.

A graduate student made a similar observation. He previously witnessed numerous military colleagues pursue higher education at schools located on base only to find credits were accepted at very few institutions. Ultimately, his colleagues accrued a lot of credits that did not transfer and they started over at another school. He observed, and admitted, he thought those schools "knew how to work the system;" however, he also felt it important that Auburn remained committed to only accepting credits for coursework from schools deemed academically rigorous enough to count towards an Auburn degree. He also expressed a view that if the schools were accredited then perhaps Auburn should at least give some consideration,

They know how to work financial aid and I think veterans are going to stay with those schools...instead of worrying "Well is this going to transfer?" Looking at those schools, some may call them a second tier school, but if they have accreditation from SACS or whoever, maybe we could look at credits coming from those schools. At some schools, you may have some academic integrity issues. You want to transfer something that's going to be quality, because you ultimately are going to put Auburn on your diploma.

The participants perceived some institutions, in particular smaller schools and proprietary institutions, as more accommodating to credit transfers and were keenly aware of the competition

this presented Auburn. Still the desire for credit remained strong and if a viable school had accepted more credits the college choice decision would have undoubtedly been more difficult. A student summed up his perception,

If there would have been an offer between this school and another school...and one was accepting a lot of my credits, then that would have hugely affected my choice. Because, you know...I'm a little bit older and I'm ready to graduate.

Another student, originally from the Auburn area and fully committed to Auburn, also confessed that a more generous credit offer from another institution may have proved significant enough to alter his college choice decision. He stated that, "I'd say a major factor is accepting military credits. If military schooling counted that would be huge. Now you get like one hour."

The Admission representative had experienced countless questions from potential students pertaining to transfer credit and military credit. While an appreciation for the selectivity of the institution was obvious, so were the oftentimes unfortunate realities the representative had to communicate to potential students. Fortunately, if the potential student was an Air Force veteran, the news was often somewhat better. The Air Force painstakingly details courses completed via the Community College of the Air Force (CCAF). The CCAF, an accredited institution, awards credits, recognized professional certificates, and associates degrees. The academic focus of the CCAF typically facilitates more transfer credit. According to the Admissions representative,

We have questions about well, you know, "I'm taking logistics and everything. Can't that transfer in?" No, because that's considered technical. However, if it is CCAF, we many times can. We accept more classes from CCAF than any other institution in regards to the military because it's classified as more academic rigorous and is an accredited institution.

Similarly, military members when they leave the service are provided with a service transcript (SMART or AARTS) that ideally results in credits based upon experience and training. These, along with the new JST, are discussed further in Chapter 5. While some schools and

educational sectors may grant this credit more freely, this study found it is seemingly much less prevalent at public research universities.

While the transcript is common for former military members, the awarding of credit by an institution varies greatly. As might be expected, the more selective the institution, the more difficult the task. Reviewing these for years, the representative spoke of the challenge,

They'll call me up and say, "Well, I can send you my SMART transcripts...have eighty hours. Well, how many do you think will transfer?" I said, "Seeing other SMART transcripts...you'll probably just get PT, and that's it."

Discussions have taken place at many schools to try and find ways to award more credit but it remains a major hurdle. Even though ACE painstakingly validates military courses and then makes recommendations for awarding credit, ultimately the institution, or perhaps more accurately a department, decides what to accept. This is an area institutions must continue to explore if veteran students have any chance of completing degree requirements within the 36 months covered by the Post 9/11 GI Bill. Still, the Admissions representative and VRC Director see this as an initiative they can continue to support. According to the Admission representative,

I want to try and push too...is there some way we can give them at least electives or some basic core? Military guys have to write reports and submit them. That's basically an English thing going on right there. I feel like we should be able to give you at least English 101 or 102 or something.

## **Affordability Factors**

### **Yellow Ribbon Program.**

Auburn University currently has limited Yellow Ribbon opportunity. Recall, the Yellow Ribbon program is designed to cover half of the additional cost when a student attends either a private institution or is classified out-of-state at a public. The institution covers the other half. While this provides more funding from the VA, the institutional also commits resources to cover their portion. Though all administrators interviewed advocated increasing the availability, to



date the number remains at 10 scholarships per semester. The Admissions representative viewed this as a severe impediment when speaking with potential military student as Yellow Ribbon is often a leading question. As told by the representative, in some cases, Yellow Ribbon availability was also a clear disqualifier.

Not a lot, but there are some that ask, “Do you have Yellow Ribbon?” I reply “We do, but you have to apply for it.” He goes, “So, it’s not automatic that you get Yellow Ribbon?” No. “Okay. Thank you.” Click.

Students further lamented the impact of limited Yellow Ribbon to increasing veteran enrollment at Auburn. However, one student’s comments addressed not only the impact on affordability but also the ability to compete with other institutions with more generous offerings.

I think the biggest thing Auburn could do to attract veterans, and dependents, is to become 100 percent Yellow Ribbon. It would bring in more guaranteed money to the university! I don’t know why they haven’t changed it yet especially when our in state rival is 100 percent Yellow Ribbon. If Auburn could be 100 percent, I think we would see the number of students increase dramatically especially over first couple years.

However, this is not an entirely accurate statement concerning their “in-state rival” Alabama. Upon further investigation, I found the University of Alabama is not a one-hundred percent Yellow Ribbon program. Rather, according to the VA website’s Yellow Ribbon participants listing, they offer fifty-two opportunities at \$6,100 a piece (VA, 2013). Though the student’s statement may not have been factually accurate, the intent was clear. It is also important to note that Auburn University is now examining ways in which to increase Yellow Ribbon scholarships without state appropriations. For example, leveraging the strong military history of the institution’s alumni is seen as a possible resource to address Yellow Ribbon.

According to the VRC Director,

We have 15,000 alumni, at last count, that were in the military. They’re graduates from Auburn, but they’re also military veterans. I think we have a pretty decent sized pool to provide a base for some Yellow Ribbon funding, and that’s what’s being planned right

now. We need to increase the Yellow Ribbon scholarship allowance and then we're going to have to raise some money to offset it so that veterans can come out-of-state.

The Yellow Ribbon program is designed to mitigate the difference between in-state and out-of-state tuition, and given Auburn's currently very limited Yellow Ribbon opportunities, the overall issue of in-state tuition versus out-of-state weighed significantly on college choice. In numerous cases, in-state tuition classification was the primary factor affecting college choice. In weighing the options of pursuing education in another state, quite simply, it was not an option for many participants. Three student statements recounted almost identical scenarios. According to the first student,

I started here before I went in the military. Ultimately, when it came down to it, finances were big. I knew I could come back and finish what I started. I was a resident so it was all paid for and I could finish without taking out any student loans...which for me was important.

A second student offered a similar perspective,

"I'm from Alabama and I couldn't afford to go to an out of state school and pay that tuition...so, it had to be an in-state school. Then there weren't that many choices."

The third student had another reason to pursue only in-state options, a new family. As is often the case, veterans tend to be older and many already have families. In this scenario, without Yellow Ribbon or some other financial aid, out-of-state options are quickly removed from further consideration. As told by the student, "I went for in-state because with a new family I couldn't afford not to."

The availability of part time employment is also a factor not overlooked by the VRC Director. When it comes to paying bills, tuition, and living expenses, many students by necessity must work. The validity of this statement was further supported by the employment status of

study participants. Approximately ninety percent, 8 of the 9 participants, reported currently working at least part-time. The Director detailed the issue,

I think one of the other things though that influences college choice for veterans you have to think about, they're married and perhaps have other issues ...they must have financial support. Sometimes it comes in the form of a part-time job. The places that can identify and provide pretty decent part-time jobs will probably see an influx of veterans because they need money. They have to pay for school (and living expenses).

### **Tuition Classification.**

The Admissions representative linked affordability directly to tuition classification and the issues created. Given the military's transient nature, many service members move every 2-3 years. Residency options include either retaining their Home of Record (location entered service) or continually changing residency. In-state classification is often linked to the state listed on military discharge papers (DD-214) or Leave and Earning Statement (LES). An Admissions representative detailed the challenge,

Benefits won't pay the whole tuition especially if they're out-of-state and it's going to hurt them really bad. I always ask them, "Well, what's on your DD214s?" And they'll say, "Florida." Oh, no. "Can you change it to Alabama?" No. So, you just say that's (Florida) going to be your residence. I wish we could give them all in-state tuition. I think the military should automatically get in-state tuition. It would be no different than an Alabama student applying to Auburn....and the money's guaranteed.

Despite potential financial issues, the Admissions representative recognized benefits of military and veteran students on campus. Generally, they were slightly older, more mature, and extremely focused on graduating. With so much attention now placed on graduation rates, veteran students seem a perfect fit. The Admissions representative suggested that any initiative a school chose to implement, such as waiving a minimal application fee, was worth the effort and paid long-term dividends. In the words of the representative, "The military come in and they're hardcore. They are here to learn, not here to party. An application fee is \$50...go ahead and waive it for military. I mean, it's just 50 bucks."

A Marine expanded the discussion by drawing comparisons with academic benefits of a state he perceived as very military friendly: Texas. In that case, the Hazlewood Act allows for greatly reduced, or free, tuition for veteran Texas residents. The state also grants stipulations for service members awarded the Purple Heart.

If Auburn would grant acceptance and tuition waiving the way Texas...if you're a combat veteran with a Purple Heart you get all these benefits. We don't do that and maybe that's a state mandated thing.

Although the Auburn administrators did not mention this, it seems that state law would allow institutions to adopt policies similar to Texas. In the course of my research, I discovered a somewhat similar provision in Alabama state law. While the verbiage specifically identifies some forms of colleges, it appeared this also applied to four-year degree granting institutions. In accordance with Alabama Code 16-1-43, recipients of the Purple Heart are entitled to tuition waivers:

Public institutions of higher learning in the State of Alabama, including two-year and four-year postsecondary technical colleges, community colleges, and junior colleges, may waive tuition and fees for recipients of the Purple Heart medal for undergraduate studies.

### **Personal Factors**

Certainly other factors besides affordability and academic programs influence college choice. Further research is required to determine the proportion of influence but it is clear other factors are weighed. I asked students to elaborate on any additional factors they considered in their college choice decision. In one case, the decision clearly hinged on what was the best move for the students family. A Navy veteran stated,

I have a wife and kids and coming back here, they were going to be in school, things like that...so there were certain towns we were considering. My other opportunities would be back to D.C. and work, where we had come from, so we really didn't want to go back to D.C. necessarily so coming here was a good option for us.

Other factors playing a role in college choice criteria included home town, social setting, and past history at the institution. One student, born and raised in Auburn, knew he would always return to Auburn to continue education pursuits. Two other students past experiences at Auburn played a major role in their decisions to re-enroll at the institution. A retired Marine felt a natural progression to pursue higher education since being on military assignment at Auburn.

I was stationed here, this was my last duty station so I spent four years here as an instructor at Naval ROTC. It was important for me to come back and graduate from here. I feel like I was part of the family anyway.

A current member of the Army reserve had previous ties to the university and was fully committed to coming back and finishing what they had started years before. As told by the student, “I was a freshman here a *very* long time ago...and I wanted to finish it – here”.

Lastly, I asked students about the influence on college choice of a sampling of topics that included athletics, intramurals, social life, and the traditional college experience. In somewhat of a surprise, not a single participant said these factors had any significant impact on their college choice decision. As a matter of fact, almost with disdain, it was felt that serious students would not even consider these. For example, an undergraduate engineering major stated, “I think for most people serious about college it [athletics and social organizations] is a “nice to have” thing; however, the more responsible person will chose the education”.

### **Campus Climate and Value of Veterans on Campus.**

Auburn University provides many other services that seemingly make the institution an ideal destination for veteran students. Auburn’s location offers many unique advantages as the school’s proximity to military installations and access to VA services are a definitive strong point. However, students felt the university might miss opportunities because they did not aggressively, to their knowledge, advertise these services and advantages. A student observed,

A lot of the things we offer you kind of find out once you are here...like counseling services through the VA. We also have counselors for the university that come here and help you plan out your schedules. There's a lot of stuff you can take advantage of once you're here. However, putting that out there to help recruit, I don't think that's done.

All participants viewed the campus climate as very supportive. They also praised the efforts of university administrators and VRC staff that regularly went out of their way to assist veteran students. The campus was deemed very accepting of veterans and not a single person reported a negative experience.

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

Veteran students, as with any student population, experience challenges. Whether or not these are related to their military service, they need to be addressed and Auburn University certainly demonstrated a capacity to deal with the issues. Three subsections identified address a majority of issues presented by the participants: mental health and medical resources, competition for veteran students, and academic preparedness.

#### **Mental Health and Medical Resources**

Differences between the highly structured military environment and college life are substantial and not everyone can make the transition smoothly. The Admissions representative provided a good example of the inner struggle sometimes faced by veteran students,

He wouldn't even look at me and I knew something wasn't right. I said, "Come on. Let's go talk." He came in here and he just kept looking down. I asked "What's going on?" and he replied "I can't handle it." I asked if he meant classes and he said "No, I can't handle civilian life. I can't handle it." I made some calls.

Fortunately the Admissions representative was able to not only remain with the student and talk, but also arranged for the student to speak with a counselor immediately. In this case, the student was fine financially and academically, but navigating the unstructured academic environment proved a daunting task. Proximity to VA resources in Tuskegee provides

opportunity for continued efforts to meet both the medical and mental health needs of students. While the number of students requiring these services is thought to be relatively low; it was reassuring to know help is close when, and if, it is needed.

Another recently launched initiative brings VA counselors to campus and also makes them available for video sessions. Conducted in private, specially established video teleconference rooms for veteran students, a counseling session is now only a secure “Skype-like” connection away. The VRC Director is a strong supporter of the initiative,

We’re initiating what’s called tele-mental health support. In other words, you’ll have a psychiatrist with the VA, located physically maybe in Tuskegee. We’ll have a monitor with a camera where they will be able to go into a room, check in with a technician, and meet with their doctor here at Auburn. They don’t have to drive to Tuskegee.

He also believed the convenient set-up was very responsive and hoped the privacy and accessibility more easily facilitated sessions. This initiative leverages technology to address student needs in a more rapid, flexible, and confidential manner. As described by the Director,

A counseling session right here...you gain the privacy and the dignity that comes with being who they are. That’s coming up probably this fall. We’ve got those things in place. We have a lot of social work support here and the social workers at Tuskegee are phenomenal. They just recently hired 70 more [social workers].

Access to military medical care, TRICARE, is not a major issue as providers are readily available in the area. The VRC Director noted TRICARE availability is often a major concern for both current and potential veteran students. The nearby VA resources are also important if a veteran student requires any special support due to service-connected disability.

I know that I’ve talked to several and it’s good that we do have medical facilities here. They have TRICARE...because a lot of them say they don’t want to go to the VA. They do ask “Well, what’re the medical facilities here like? Do they take TRICARE?” I say, “Yes, they do, I know that for a fact.”

Auburn University is also poised to deal with support requirements for veterans that have a service-connected disability. While the VA is an obvious near-by asset, the university also has

taken a leading role in providing support to disabled veterans. A leader in classroom innovation, the university's design experts study and often provide required innovations such as modifications for wheelchairs, desks, or whatever else a student may require. The Director, very familiar with the structure of the VA, favors the service team approach they utilize,

They [VA] are important because they are tasked with whatever a veteran needs. If, for example, I'm in a wheelchair with 60 percent disability... then what do I need? Do I need a better chair? Do I need a better doctor? The VA is organized into service teams. That team will have on the health side a doctor, a social worker and a nurse. That's important because you could be in the wrong place.

A reality the university must also address is the fact that many veteran students remain in the reserves and are subject to deployment. While this poses a unique challenge for students, Auburn works closely with the student to ensure benefits are maximized and lost time does not equate to lost educational benefits. The Director detailed an example of how institutional initiatives and policy support the veteran student.

We have policies in place, for example, I'm thinking of a veteran who might want to come to Auburn or a person who is in the military. They come to Auburn and they get deployed. Will they lose ground? No. We disenroll them going back to day one, so they don't lose any credit or anything. Then they come back, pick back up where they left off. That's university policy in regards to veterans.

### **Competition for Veteran Students**

Student participants felt Auburn University possessed all the tools and resources required to deal with challenges students, and veteran students in particular, may ultimately face. If many of these initiatives were more publicized then perhaps the veteran student population would grow even larger. However, like many top tier research universities, marketing to particular student populations is not always done. Quite simply, research universities want the best and brightest from all walks of life so targeting specific groups for recruitment is not common.



On the other hand, stiff competition for students is lurking in the technical college, junior college, and for-profit sectors. Despite the challenge from these sectors, participants believed an opportunity exists for Auburn to expand enrollments. However, competitors are often more affordable, more flexible, and more aggressive in pursuit of the veteran population. A Marine recounted his experience with educational recruiters often present at the pre-separation programs on base. These mandatory workshops, commonly referred to as Transition Assistance Programs or (TAP), are required for all military members prior to departing the service. He described the dominant presence of the technical colleges,

Trade schools were everywhere ...but you don't see four-year universities there at all. When I was getting out you had to figure it out on your own. There was help if you were getting out get a job...people lined up to help you. However, if you were going back to school you had to figure it out on your own. If Auburn could market your program to folks ending service then I think you would bring in a lot more people.

Another participant, who attended an on base job fair, recalled a similar experience. The effort put forth by the “trade schools” was extraordinary. This is the competition Auburn faces.

There were tons of trade schools there and I did not have an idea what I wanted to do. They were so oriented on veterans and my best friend from the Marine Corps went there. They took care of him like he was family. They're very appealing to the veteran. They are: “loving the money.” They get it and they know it. Their veterans association took them out to eat every two weeks - every veteran in the school!

Another student advocated for more college fairs on military bases vice the usual career fairs. Similar to the observations of the previous student, he sensed a void of what he described as “reputable schools.” He also felt, unlike the scenario faced by those seeking employment, the burden shifted to military members looking to enter higher education. He described the situation, “There are job fairs all the time on base but you rarely have a college fair...like you had in high school. There are never any of those...ever”.

Opportunities certainly exist to recruit, attract, and serve the veteran population. All participants felt Auburn had much to offer, if only they would market themselves more aggressively to veteran populations. A common, and truly compassionate, concern repeated time and again was that veterans are misled by some in the proprietary education sector. The fear was that utilization of a “one-time benefit” would result in an end product not worth the benefit expended to secure the very credential. That said, some high profile schools have fully embraced serving the veteran population and enrollment figures depict great success at some of our nation’s best schools. An Ivy League school, Columbia University, was identified by a graduate student as a superb example,

Columbia University has a program for a couple years now and they are leading the way for the Ivy League schools to do that recruiting and marketing. Their Dean of Admissions regularly goes to bases to see what they can do for them.

Indeed, according to a recent article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Columbia University enrolled more veteran students than all the other Ivy League schools combined (Sander, 2013). As an example, in May 2012, Columbia had almost five hundred veterans enrolled and roughly half were members of the student organization Military Veterans of Columbia University (Columbia University website). The institution accomplished this by partnering with the services and more specifically the Marine Corps Leadership Scholar Program (LSP) to provide superb educational opportunities for qualified military members departing the service. This initiative is covered further in Chapter 6.

### **Academic Preparation**

A final challenge raised by participants related to academic preparedness for college level coursework. Many veterans, far removed from high school, sometimes felt overwhelmed when returning to academe. One student identified an opportunity that could seemingly mitigate some

of the issues and leverage the aforementioned mandatory Transition Assistance Program (TAP) currently conducted on military installations. This student stated,

You could do an initiative with the educational offices on base. They already have ACT and SAT prep classes. If you have been out of school and haven't done math...perhaps if there was a course like TAP that, for a week, you did college prep.

Another student added the importance that courses such as these, notionally labeled Math 101 or Writing 101, should not utilize VA educational benefits, but rather maximize resources already in place on military installations. A third student thought these initiatives could be done in conjunction with TAP and that would be the ideal setting since taking remedial classes once in college "eats away" at your educational benefits. He further stated,

Just do it on the front end. If you're going to TAP and you're going to school – this is required. I was required to sit in a resume' class but that doesn't even apply until I'm done with school. Why can't we sit in a professional writing course for a couple days?

A final student expressed the impact his perceived unpreparedness had on one recent semester. He felt it wasted not only his time but, more importantly, months of educational benefits. He stated, "I went from high school Calculus I to college Calculus II... ten years later. That semester is gone".

The VRC Director, while acknowledging that students sometimes struggle, also indicated the veteran overall graduation rate is slightly higher than the overall student body. This same finding has been reported to some degree in other studies. According to the Director,

Veteran students, by the way, do pretty good academically. They struggle with some of the same issues regular native students struggle with, but in terms of retention and persistence, they're pretty strong. Descriptive data we've run here on the DWF [D's, F's and Withdraw rates] are a little higher for veterans because they stick in there longer...but we also looked and noted the graduation rates of 70-71 percent were slightly above. We're pretty excited about that because you hear reports that veterans only graduated 20 percent or 30 percent. We found out, for us, that's certainly not true.

While the students revealed many challenges, it was reassuring to know they also identified some potential solutions for potential discussions with leadership. The team of veteran students and administrators at Auburn share a common vision and all work together and to make Auburn as welcoming and supportive as possible for both current and future veteran students.

### **Case Summary**

Auburn University is seen as a very friendly and supportive environment. As one student stated earlier in this Chapter, the biggest selling point of Auburn is Auburn. While at the time he was speaking in terms of academic reputation, the same argument can be made in relation to the university, and city, as a whole. Its proximity to services, such as the VA and military bases, makes the school a strong candidate for consideration when it comes to veteran college choice. Though some issues dealing with Yellow Ribbon remain, Auburn University remains relatively affordable when compared to many other educational options – and it has superb support mechanisms in place to meet veteran student needs. However, for veterans seeking highly respected programs in a traditional college environment responsive to veteran needs, Auburn is an institution worthy of further consideration.

Additionally, initiatives such as the VRC, ASVA, and PAVE demonstrate the institution's solid commitment to serving veteran students. The academics, college setting, and manageable cost of living add significantly to the appeal of the institution and the area. Marketing the numerous strengths of the institution to military and veteran population informs college choice decisions by increased awareness among potential students, both native Alabamians and those originally from another state. Naturally, military members from Alabama likely already know of Auburn. When they ultimately depart the military and seek to either begin

to resume their higher education pursuits perhaps they should consider a veteran friendly community and institution in “The Loveliest Village on the Plains.”

## CHAPTER 5

### THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

The University of Georgia, located in Athens, is the state flagship institution and a major research land grant/sea grant university with an enrollment of approximately 35,000 students – a third of who are graduate students. In recent decades, the university has slowly and steadily risen in prestige both nationally and internationally and is ranked #20 in the 2014 U.S. News and World Report Top Public National Universities rankings. Athens, called “The Classic City,” is the quintessential southern college town with the usual array of activities pertaining to academics, research, public service, arts, and athletics. A combination of affordable housing, the university offerings, a vibrant music scene, and close proximity to Atlanta makes it an attractive destination not only for students but also, more recently, retirees.

While Athens is highly regarded for retirees and academic pursuits, the student veteran population is, by current estimates, less than 400 - but growing. Due to its distance from military installations, Athens is decidedly not a military town like one may find in close proximity to an installation. That said, Athens and the University of Georgia have a long-standing relationship with the military. ROTC has been on campus since 1919 and the U.S. Navy Supply Corps School was located in Athens from 1954 until 2010 when it relocated to Newport, R.I. as a result of BRAC (Base Realignment and Closure). However, there remain numerous large installations in the state and the military population of the state includes roughly 110,000 active-duty military, National Guard and reservist. Additionally, over 750,000 veterans call Georgia home.

As per my research design, I conducted interviews with various university administrators and a focus group of 4 currently enrolled veteran students. The chapter is presented in a very similar manner as the previous Auburn chapter. An introductory section, Overview of Veterans Initiatives, details current, and any planned, initiatives in place to address the needs of veteran students. Two main focus areas are presented as sub-sections: Student Veterans Resource Center (SVRC) and Student Veterans Association (SVA). The chapter's second section, College Choice, examines major points presented by administrators and students in regard to college choice criteria and their perceived influence. The college choice section is further presented in three main sub-sections titled: Academic Factors, Affordability Factors, and Personal Factors. Finally, the Case Summary presents a quick overview of the major points and an impact assessment of the institutional initiatives is presented.

### **Overview of Veterans Initiatives**

The data collected from all participants, and taken together, provides a picture of the institution working across many functional areas to better meet the needs of this segment of the student population. When asked about current or planned initiatives specific to meeting veteran student needs, all administrators were energetic and thought the campus wide efforts to bring all the main functions together to build synergy and collaboration were every promising. According to the Dean of Students,

We have a coordinating committee that represents veteran interests from across the campus. The committee has individuals from financial aid, registrar's office, student affairs, equal opportunity office, Academic Affairs - just a wide range. It is a very broad campus community that's chaired out of EOO to make sure that we're paying attention to how we can address veteran needs. That group is not so much involved in recruiting student veterans, but they're involved in overseeing the veterans once they're here and coordinating services.

This cross enterprise approach was further expounded upon by an Admissions representative who detailed the current focus in regard to veteran students. In this case, it was very much a matter of expanding institutional visibility and ensuring the current systems were as user friendly as possible.

We're kind of in a transition period where we're trying to be more accessible...right now it's about finding ways for student veterans to find information about the University of Georgia and about our application process easily.

Increasing visibility of the university and transparency of the admissions process plays an important role as many veterans begin the application when they are deployed overseas. When questions arise about application procedures, financial aid, student organizations, and courses of study; the Admissions representatives reach out, frequently across the globe, to answer questions and provide guidance just as they would for incoming recent high school graduates. The Admissions representatives recounted past correspondence via email with deployed service members in an attempt to clarify either procedures and/or policies.

However, institutional selectivity, deemed very much a positive element by all the research participants, also presented challenges. The Admissions representatives frequently advised both veteran and non-veteran students to pursue community and technical colleges initially and then encouraged them to reapply. It is important to note these selectivity challenges are not veteran specific and also affect applications of all incoming students. A second Admissions representative added perspective as he described the impacts of the increased selectivity and the challenges presented to those applying for admission,

The University of Georgia, for the last two decades, has undergone big transition to being way more selective...the university is coming to grips with becoming a very selective undergraduate institution. Now, you've got to present credentials that you can do "B" or better work, which means a much higher standard for freshmen admission for grades, curriculum difficulty, and test scores.



The selectivity of the institution was also raised by students participating in the focus group, half of whom pursued the 2-year college route mentioned above as a means to ultimately gain admission to Georgia. A senior student described the situation as,

Universities, like this one, where freshmen can have a near 4.0 GPA, community involvement and not get selected...can essentially pick and choose. They don't have to reach out for guys like us...we just sort of make our way in.

As is often the case, for both students matriculating directly from high school or the military, the need to establish a pattern of academic achievement may be required before gaining admittance. In many cases, this required enrolling at a technical or community college, excelling in the classroom and then applying for admission as a transfer student. While this may impact initial college choice, it also presents a definitive path that, given hard work and sound academics, may lead ultimately to admittance. Of the focus group participants who had followed the transfer route, one of them shared his experience and it mirrored exactly what had been previously described by the Admissions representatives: "When I got out of the service I didn't have the qualifications to get into UGA so I had to go and take some classes...so I was able to transfer in."

Students were very cognizant of the efforts of the university to reach out to veteran students. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, given the technical college route required by some, they collectively spoke particularly highly of the Admissions Office, which they perceived to be very receptive to their needs and felt this experience might affect one's college choice.

They are definitely open to making things more appealing to veterans, especially the Admissions Office. They are doing things so that they can target veteran students more, but I don't think advertising is a big thing for UGA...some schools might, but the university as a whole, as diverse as it already is, I don't think targets specific groups of students. I don't think they advertise in magazines and such but as they move forward...I think these initiatives will eventually lead to a larger veteran student population.

The students were also appreciative of the efforts by university administrators to take positive steps and visit other institutions to see what efforts others were undertaking to serve the veteran population. These fact finding initiatives also usually include student participation and students took an active part in the discussions and working groups. The students also felt the administrators sincerely appreciated feedback and were receptive to change and external ideas. According to one veteran student,

I think it was a great thing that the administrators were willing to take that initiative and go and see what other universities are doing. As a veteran, I can say I know our administrators took a great deal away from that trip...have already started to make significant improvements in making the University of Georgia more veteran friendly.

Of all the initiatives discussed, a couple clearly stood out both in terms of institutional commitment and visibility: the Student Veteran Resource Center (SVRC) and the Student Veteran Association (SVA). For example, the SVRC is an initiative that grew out of the discussions within the aforementioned university committee. This committee plays a central role and helps present issues, and frame a problem, for the proper administrative unit. The Dean of Students discussed its role and link to the SVRC,

I think Georgia, like many places, is a very decentralized university. We have lots of different things that could be going on across the university. This veterans committee is an attempt to coordinate those services among all the different administrative functions and collate our academic components of the university. The Veteran Resource Center is really focused on trying to engage student veterans in the work of Student Affairs.

### **Student Veterans Resources Center (SVRC)**

Increased awareness within Student Affairs helped promote and launch the Student Veterans Resource Center in April 2013. Located on the ground floor of the Tate Student Center it is conveniently located on campus to maximize student access to essential services. The Tate Student Center, a large facility that opened in 1983 and further expanded by over 90,000 square feet in 2009, is seemingly the ideal SVRC location. It is centrally located and contains, among

other services, dining facilities, a movie theater, student organizations, meeting rooms, study rooms, copier services, and the ID office. Though the veteran's center opened just six months ago, plans are already in the works to establish a larger veteran's center and student lounge in a more prominent location within Tate.

Another clear sign of the commitment of resources to the SVRC is the creation of a new position, Associate Director of Student Affairs, located within the SVRC. The recently hired Director, himself an Air Force veteran, is already on campus and making a significant impact on the lives of veteran students. All of these efforts have come to fruition in the last six months and the initiative is rapidly gaining momentum and support throughout the university. According to the Dean of Students,

We're very excited about how that has developed. It came together really quickly. We have a group of students that are very active right now in the Student Veteran Association and we started working with them back in the fall. In April, we had the opportunity to create the Student Veterans Resource Center, a place where veterans can gather while they're here, and they can go to have questions answered.

He further discussed the envisioned role of the SVRC on campus and detailed challenges, such as raising awareness and the ability to identify a veteran, that remain in advancing the initiative,

As far as effectiveness of the Veteran Resource Center, it's given a place for veterans to congregate and network. How well those students outside of that Student Veterans Association know about the Student Veteran Resource Center is still a question. That's part of what we're getting our hands around while creating the Veteran Resource Center in the first place...trying to identify, out of all the students that are receiving benefits, which ones are veterans? Are we going to focus on veterans, or are we going to focus on everybody that's receiving the benefits? So, those are questions we have to ferret out.

As pointed out by the Dean, identifying student veterans remains a work in progress.

Since the Post 9/11 GI Bill benefit can be transferred to dependent children and a spouse, a simple matter of tracking who is receiving GI Bill benefits does not specifically identify the

person as a veteran. It becomes more complex when identifying a veteran either not utilizing the VA benefit or does not affiliate with the campus organization. A veteran student stated,

Even here at Georgia, we have a lot of vets that don't identify. They don't really care about identifying with organizations and they are just here...to get their school and move onto the next step.

A sense of optimism is emerging in Athens, or at least within Student Affairs, that the fledgling SVRC grows in both magnitude and importance. Having visited other institutions to see what efforts are underway to address veteran student needs, the Dean and student leaders of the SVA are optimistic for the SVRC evolution. Ultimately, they would all like to see even more services added and for the center to expand beyond its current Student Affairs focus. The Dean of Students,

My hope is this Student Affairs Veteran Resource Center will grow into a university Veterans Resource Center. Right now, it's a primary function of student affairs, and we have to be very careful . . . logically a veteran is going to come to the veteran resource center thinking that's going to be a one-stop shop. We're not there yet, but I want to be there. I would like to be, my dream, is to have a Veterans Resource Center that will have experts that can deal with the financial aid, registrar issues, all those other things in one office.

In the interim, the university took steps to bring the experts to the students. As representatives from various units are engaged by the SVRC, these efforts increased program awareness and access to the resources needed by the students. According to the Dean,

In the short term, through the Veterans Resource Center, we'll bring staff members down at different times to make sure the student veterans know that those resources are there. I would like to see us grow to where it's just a one-stop shop. We're not there yet.

A military student pursuing a PhD also addressed the value of the SVRC in relation to social aspects and peer support as it affects potential college choice decisions. As one might expect from a military member, camaraderie and building rapport plays a major role in building relationships with other student veterans who frequently share some similar level of experiences.

I would say it is an important resource for a segment of the veteran population. Some want to just separate and move on and not identify as a veteran for the rest of their lives...and that is fine. However, there is a good proportion of those who still want to have that social aspect and support aspect that sort of organization can provide.

### **Student Veterans Association (SVA)**

A second major initiative participants deemed important to college choice was the presence of a recognized veteran student organization. Officially titled Student Veterans of America @ UGA, the evolution of the SVA is ongoing at Georgia. Initially launched a few years ago, the membership dipped after the founders of the organization graduated. Ultimately, a new group of student veterans have re-energized the SVA. According to the Dean of Students,

The spring of 2011 graduation, and fall of 2012 we could not identify anybody to continue the group. Then last academic year, we identified this group of students that really reengaged the Student Veterans Association and we started from there.

Many respondents touted the presence of the veterans group as an important step in providing veteran students a group, if they so choose, with which to associate. As the organization ebbed and flowed over the recent years, a core group of students proved critical in promoting growth and assuring continuity. A Navy veteran described his experiences with helping revitalize the organization and spoke of the past issues,

As of about a year ago when I first got to Georgia there wasn't much established for veterans. I found out quickly, as I became more involved with Student Affairs, there weren't really any organizations for veterans. However, there had been some attempts in the past to try and get veteran students involved on campus with Student Affairs.

While not all students initially sought out information of veterans student groups, many have come to realize such an entity can play a significant role in building rapport. Perhaps, just as important as it relates to college choice, the organization has been able to connect with and offer advice to potential future students. An undergraduate described his experience,

Since I didn't look into whether we had a SVA or any other organization before I came here I guess it wasn't important to me at the time. However, I know for a fact that it is

important to some people because guys who are on active duty have reached out to guys like us asking about Georgia, the admissions process, and what do I need to do set myself up for success? They are using our organization as sort of an outlet for that.

Obviously, not every veteran elects to participate in the SVA. Many veterans simply are content to move on after their military service and start a new chapter in their lives. For a wide range of reasons, many students elect to either not self-identify or participate in the organization. A current group member spoke with many veterans and fully understands their position.

You find veterans who had horrible experiences and don't want to ...self identify. Some have families or businesses while they are in school and just don't want to join an organization. Then you have veterans...done one tour or more, some are reservists and some are not. They want to convert to civilian life without any influences of the military and put it behind them.

Given the absence of a large, well established veteran student organization in the past, it is understandable what occurred next in the military mindset – a few motivated individuals took the initiative. This realization led to discovery learning that fueled discussion and ultimately action on the part of a core group of students. The initiative displayed by the students is certainly recognized, and appreciated, by the Dean of Students who stated,

You've got to have a readily identifiable group. From my standpoint, particularly related to the Student Veteran Resource Center, my biggest concern is making sure that we're identifying the student veterans coming into school, getting them engaged and keeping that group sustainable and vibrant. Once we have that group, then we can plug them into different areas of the campus, and that will get even more veterans involved and give more of a veteran voice for them. So, it's one thing to have the programs. We've got to have the advocacy as a group.

A veteran of the United States Marines, who departed the service and enrolled the very same month in 2010, echoed the importance of the group's actions and improvements he has seen in his time at the school.

I didn't care about veteran friendly or anything...I was just ready to get into the classroom. I didn't care if they liked veterans or not to be perfectly honest. It wasn't until I transferred here and met other students and realized the potential for the student veterans organization...I saw that it was actually a fantastic movement.

Another student perceived a huge benefit of the VSA, especially once a student is on campus. Additionally, he presented a compelling argument that the organization positively affects retention and attainment because of the support structure a group of military peers provides. In part, he stated,

I think that once you are in college, the veteran's organization plays a significant role in helping the success rate. I think it is good to have those positive influences around you and help get you involved in different aspects of the college. I also think it helps in getting connected with resources.

As the Dean of Students touted group advocacy as a critical element, these students have taken "ownership" of the organization and the leadership and initiative of a small group of engaged students has proven very effective at Georgia. A Navy veteran, and the current group president, described the evolution of the organization and the way in which they proactively engaged the school. Ultimately, the members were very impressed by the willingness of the institution to work closely with the students to address group identified needs. A student noted,

A few guys got together and we brought it to the attention of the administration and they were very receptive of what we were trying to accomplish. Since then the university has reached out to us greatly. They have made huge steps in making higher education more appealing to student veterans.

Lastly, the interaction within the veterans group was also deemed a positive effect not only on the organization, but also on the individual students that benefitted by being around other veteran students. According to a member,

You don't know the kind of people you're going to be interacting with just because they served in the military. Those that chose to go to college may be a different breed than those who don't; but the folks I have interacted with, are just fantastic, hard working, and motivated individuals. I think that is another reason the veteran's organization is a good thing. In my mind, it puts a very positive influence, on those who decide they want to be part of something like that.

## College Choice Criteria

While the initiatives presented above certainly can shape perceptions and influence college choice decisions, student respondents identified many other factors as important criteria in their college choice decisions. With an understanding of the institution's current initiatives, this section reports the specific factors deemed most important to college choice. Both the administrators and the students had some very clear ideas of what they deemed most appealing and important. While course offerings and academic reputation were highlights, the availability of resources, such as the VSRC, and affordability were also common issues. The Dean of Students stated,

I think access, availability and institutional reputation and academic standing are the things that are most important. Of the dozens of veterans that I've personally interacted with since I've been at Georgia...they have a very clear set of goals that they have and they seem to have a clear path that they are wanting to follow. They want to know that the institution is a reputable institution—Georgia certainly meets that. They want to know that there's going to be a variety of things that they would get academically—Georgia certainly has that.

My analysis of student responses revealed three main areas affecting college choice: academic factors, affordability factors, and personal factors. Within each of these areas additional, more specific, factors were identified as they emerged from the collected data. Understanding the influence of these various factors on college choice provides greater insight into the criteria deemed most relevant by the respondents.

### Academic Factors

The first main area identifies pertaining to college choice was academic factors. In this case, issues relating to academic reputation, majors, and method of instructional delivery were cited most frequently. A sampling of statements by students and administrators demonstrates major areas deemed most influential to college choice decisions. The academic factors section



can be further split into three sub-topics: Course of Study and Quality, Credit for Service, and Distance Education as a Primary Method of Instruction. Respondents repeatedly identified these topics for their significance in their college choice decision.

### **Course of Study and Quality.**

One of the first items mentioned when students were asked to elaborate on factors affecting their college choice was academic reputation. Universally, responses clearly and repeatedly stressed the importance of “earning a degree that was respected” and the academic reputation of the institution. In many cases it was not just the value of the current degree ambition, but also potential future academic endeavors that might be adversely affected if the institution was not perceived as “quality.” A participant’s words best reflect their desire for a quality experience,

I do think the reputation of the institution, particularly if they want to go into business, for an example, is important. We have one of the nationally-recognized business programs in the country. And so, that’s going to be very attractive to individuals.

Another respondent, now a senior and headed to law school, selected Georgia based upon the strength of an intended course of study.

I looked at the classics/history program and I liked it a lot. They had a fantastic program so that played a big role.

A current graduate student believed VA educational benefits were a valuable commodity. With this in mind, he specifically ensured they were utilized on a quality program that would prove valuable in the future.

There is federal money involved and that could go somewhere else. It could go into a propriety program, a two year school...at the end of that program or that certificate might be limited in value.

A final student tied his college choice decision to the academic reputation of two different programs – one for undergraduate work and the second for planned follow-on graduate studies.

The school of political affairs here at Georgia is nationally known, I think it is #4. Their MBA program, moving forward - which I am interested in - is one of the best. I knew that coming here, as far as my major was concerned, was an outstanding decision.

Factors such as finding the right program, or the timing of course offerings, are also important in achieving academic ambitions and subsequently inform college choice. It is critical for institutions to realize veteran students have a limited number of months of VA educational benefits. When the time comes to select an institution, the veteran student is naturally going to try and identify a school that is reputable, offers the desired course of study, and they have an opportunity to actually complete the degree. A doctoral student stated,

I was very forthcoming with my background and where I am coming from... where I am going. I needed to find a program that was going to be friendly to that situation so I was very deliberate in choosing a program.

A graduate student and also a full time teacher, selected Georgia primarily because of summer course scheduling that facilitated pursuing his masters without impacting work responsibilities,

The opportunity to take summer graduate courses is what brought me to UGA as opposed to another school to pursue a masters degree within my field without having to give up my employment and at same time be a student again.

Another student felt the presence of a sizeable veteran population added to the overall quality of the institution,

The institution has got to see there's also the experience and richness those people (veterans) bring into the classroom. So maybe there are some folks who don't have the high school credential, or the board scores, but the school must see there are other aspects.

### **Credit for Service.**

Perhaps no other topic produced such strong reaction as the issue relating to awarding of college credit for military service or training. In some cases, a military specialty may be easily

identifiable as something that can translate into course work; while other times it is much more problematic. For example, if a veteran was a nuclear reactor operator in the Navy or a medic then some obvious core, or even major, courses might be worthy of consideration, validated, and credit awarded.

However, in many instances this is not the case and as a result this introduced much angst into the dialogue. Participants considered the awarding of college credit for service as a major issue. They also believed schools that more readily met this requirement were advantaged when it came to influencing veteran college choice. Across the board, participants had not been awarded much credit, if any, for their service. A Marine in the group, with more than one combat deployment to his credit, expressed frustration with his lack of credit for experience,

If universities are willing to give you credit for certain things you did in the military that would be fantastic. I know when I was getting out...experience with SMART transcripts (all nod agreement). None of that is being used. I mean I get PE credit...damn right!

The SMART transcript is a Department of the Navy (Navy and Marine) produced transcript of service related schooling, job assignments, and training. The acronym SMART stands for Sailor-Marine American Council on Education Registry Transcript System. In the past the Army also produced a similar product for departing service members called Army/American Council on Education Registry Transcript System (AARTS). Currently, a Department of Defense initiative launched a newer version that standardizes this form into a common format for all services. The new Joint Services Transcript (JST) ultimately makes interpretation of data, and awarding of credit, much easier for college administrators.

Comments from two other participants detailed similar frustrations and personified feelings of “they don’t realize what my experiences are worth”,

We come out of the military with a lot of skills and information that students in this school aren’t going to have. For example, the multicultural aspect, I spent nearly two

years of my life in Iraq, that's pretty damn multicultural compared to spending three months in a classroom talking about...Native Americans. I actually enjoyed that class very much, it was a fantastic class. But little things like that.

A Navy veteran expressed a similar scenario in which he had substantial experience in a particular area yet was required to take a course that added little perceived value and utilized part of his educational benefit, "I had to learn about the Panama Canal, and I've been through it five times! Things like that are just frustrating."

Despite these frustrations, and usually receiving but a single PE credit, all these students ultimately made Georgia their college choice. In their view, the academic reputation and quality of the institution outweighed the lack of service credit; however, this is not always the case for all veterans. Recent enrollments trends from the VA indicate many veterans enroll at institutions that willingly accept military credit regardless of perceived support services or academic reputation. In a sense, this is not surprising. When awarded only 36 months of VA educational benefits, veterans naturally seek out institutions willing to grant more than a single PE credit.

### **Distance Education as a Primary Method of Instruction.**

I next asked about the utilization of distance education and views varied widely as some students were very comfortable with the idea while others remained focused on the in-class experience. Of note, the University of Georgia in 2013 launched its first ever degree program delivered exclusively online and is now making significant advances in distance education. Two students presented very divergent views of distance education and this further illustrated the differing learning styles one might find in students. One student described the continuing explosion of distance education and its growth at Georgia,

I think one thing that appeals to a lot of veterans and military members is distance learning. Georgia's starting to get onboard with that a lot more here recently and will be even more in the future.

The other student knew that distance education was not the method of instruction that would work best for him.

I knew that when I got out, taking something entirely online, with only online courses, would not have appealed to me. If that had been my only option, I likely would have pursued full time employment instead.

In defense of his strong position, and with non-verbal concurrence from other focus group participants, numerous views were presented that clearly expressed a strong desire to experience the collegial environment as an “on campus student” in a traditional brick-and-mortar institution.

I knew when I departed (the service) I wanted to live in a college environment, see classrooms again, and change the nature of the way in which I was living and do something uniquely college oriented. I wanted to be a college student...I was conscientiously not willing to consider online classes at the time.

A second student supported the view of inherent value of a college experience and pursuing academic ambitions in an on-campus setting.

Once you make your decision, and just walking through campus, you can't help but realize you made a good decision to come here. The education is top notch and it is just a great place to be. I don't know anyone who ever regretted their decision to come here.

### **Affordability Factors**

The second main area affecting college choice related to higher education affordability. The term affordability reflects many composite parts that make higher education either affordable or not for a student. Tuition and fees are but one part; however, they are perhaps the most visible and scrutinized element of cost. Another part, equally important, is financial aid and institutional initiatives like whether or not the school is a Yellow Ribbon program school as previously detailed in Chapter 2.

### **Yellow Ribbon Status.**

In the case of Georgia, which is not a Yellow Ribbon participant institution, obviously Yellow Ribbon status was not a factor for the participants. This was not a college choice factor because all students had secured in-state status prior to enrollment. Half of the participants were already residents of the state of Georgia, another was active duty military, and yet another secured in-state classification utilizing a waiver as a full-time summer graduate student. For veteran students, the Yellow Ribbon status is minimized since they may also gain in-state rates by applying for a waiver per current Board of Regents Policy.

The Board of Regents (BOR) of The University System of Georgia, the state's governing board for all public, 4-years institutions, utilizes policy to provide in-state rates for many veterans. In this case, BOR Policy Manual, Section 7.3.4.1, essentially provides in-state classification via the *Out-of-State Waiver for Recently Separated Military Members*. This policy waives the out-of-state classification for a period of 12-months while the student establishes domicile within the state. However, lack of Yellow Ribbon status can limit the institutions visibility to military members not residing in Georgia.

For example, many veterans go directly to the VA webpage and eliminate from consideration those schools in other states that are not Yellow Ribbon schools. When this occurs, the institution may never even get to speak to the potential student. This is unfortunate for two reasons. First, the school may possess the ideal, quality program the veteran is seeking. Second, the prospective student never learns of other initiatives that may explain lack of Yellow Ribbon status. As mentioned above, under BOR policy, the University of Georgia has the ability to grant out-of-state waivers for "recently separated military members" or active duty personnel stationed

within the state. However, lacking knowledge of such policies, the potential student may likely just remove the University of Georgia from consideration in their college choice decision.

Given the above Board of Regents policies, relative affordability of higher education in the state, as compared to many other states, the Dean of Students believed that Yellow Ribbon status was not a major factor affecting college choice at Georgia.

We have so much to offer at the university that I think there's enough that we have here that attracts students even without Yellow Ribbon status. If we get the status...and this is why I would recommend that we get it, there's lots of people from other parts of the country that may have an impression about Georgia. They may really have no idea what all is available at the university. I think if we get Yellow Ribbon status that will help us get the message and the story about Georgia out more...at least get on veterans' radar screens that maybe we're not on now.

Though all participants were in-state students, one student stated that if he were to pursue additional education in the future and Yellow Ribbon was not available, only in-state schools would be considered.

For me the biggest thing, if I were doing it all over again: is a school willing to grant me in state tuition? That would be a huge deal maker.

### **Tuition Classification.**

The in-state tuition factor also played into the ultimate destination of another student. In his case there was no question concerning in-state status because he was a Georgia resident. Rather, the inability to secure in-state status in his home of record compelled him to remain in Georgia for his education.

So I didn't have to sort of tread water for six months...and financially be in a bad situation. I decided, well I'm a resident of Georgia so I am just going to go to the best school in Georgia...that was definitely UGA in my mind.

Other expenses, besides tuition and fees were also a consideration for at least one student.

Cost of living, more than the cost of the school, because we were being funded...having a family and understanding all the expenses besides just tuition and books ....that played into our lifestyle.

Major issues pertaining to affordability brought up by both administrators and student participants almost exclusively focused on Yellow Ribbon status and tuition classification. A student explained his situation,

I am originally from Massachusetts, and when I first got out I was looking at moving back there and looking at U. Mass. At the time I was a Georgia resident so I would have had to go back there ...at the time I was going to junior college here in Georgia... and I was going to have to transfer. They didn't have a Yellow Ribbon program and I spoke to them about what I could do to get in-state. I was going to have to move up there for six months, acquire residency, and then start school.

A Navy veteran focused on the University of Georgia for exactly the same reasons.

I had been stationed in Mayport, Florida but I am originally from Loganville and that was my home of record while I was stationed in Florida. Classification as an in-state student wasn't a concern for me if I wanted to go the University of Georgia - which was my primary choice. In-state tuition did play a significant part in my choice to come to UGA.

A graduate student recounted a similar yet slightly different scenario that linked college choice to affordability as it pertained to state residency status as he pursued his undergraduate degree.

The ability to get in-state status for tuition purposes was probably the key thing for me. I went to high school in Florida and at the time I was getting out of the Marine Corps, in 2004, Florida was not making allowances for returning veterans and was holding onto state sponsored, lottery sponsored scholarship assistance. My residency had just expired and there was no provision for me to get it back at that time.

Ultimately the situation led him to pursue his undergraduate degree in the state where his parents had relocated – Tennessee. During his final two years of service he changed his residency and thus was in a better position to attempt to acquire in-state status upon separating from the military.

I contacted University of Tennessee – Chattanooga and applied for in-state residency. Initially, I was declined. I wrote a letter and petitioned, stated my case as a veteran, this is my period of service, I had an address with my parents here for two years...and I was granted in state student status I think on the basis of having been a veteran. That was explicitly my appeal. Can you cut me a break?



## **Personal Factors**

In an attempt to examine additional factors affecting college choice, I asked focus group participants to elaborate on any additional factors they considered when deciding where to pursue higher education. Responses varied but some consistent themes emerged as subsections: veteran acknowledgement, home of record, campus climate, and environmental change. For example, the desire to experience college as a resident student played heavily in their decisions as did non-academic costs such as affordable housing and perceived value of veterans.

### **Veteran Acknowledgement and Home of Record.**

One student, a big advocate for the SVRC, believed institutional efforts to work with veterans and acknowledge that they are not a “typical freshmen” play heavily into college choice. Recognizing the contributions of veterans and the value they bring to an institution was at the forefront. A student presented his view,

I wouldn't have to have my own center for veterans but small gestures, like if they gave priority registration, say you are not the typical walk-in the door freshmen. We understand that we can give back to you a little bit. Those would be huge things that would swing me to see that a school is conscientiously making a choice to acknowledge you have done something different than everyone else who walks around here.

Being the only native Georgian, the decision to apply to Georgia was a natural selection for one student. With state residency already established and superb academics available in his home of record, there was simply no compelling argument to pursue higher education elsewhere.

When I came back, I looked at my options closely. I looked at some schools up north, and decided that my best option was right here at home. It was pretty much an easy decision for me to make.

As the size of military likely continues to decline for the foreseeable future; another student believed institutions best positioned to meet the demand are poised to reap the rewards.

There is going to be a huge influx of the student veteran population and there is going to be a lot of competition to get those students into universities. I think universities have more of an incentive to bring on those student veterans than they would typically.

**Campus Climate.**

As previously mentioned, Athens is a “college town” and not necessarily a “military town”. However, both the city and the university have embraced and engaged the military throughout the years and the relationship remains strong. Descriptions of the atmosphere were generally characterized as accepting and never, in my data collection, detailed as combative or contentious. Rather, the general perceptions of all interviewees, both students and administrators, could best be described as one of acceptance. The Dean of Students stated:

The veterans that I’ve interacted with the most have been primarily the leaders of the Student Veterans Association and others affiliated with that organization. I would say they see the campus as veteran-friendly.

Many times a campus may be deemed friendly or hostile toward veteran students. According to many respondents, however, in Athens neutral seems to be a more fitting descriptor as faculty, staff, and veteran students co-exist in academic nirvana. The comments of a Marine student seemingly reflect the general tone and subtle admiration of those with whom he shares the fact that he is a veteran.

I mean it not like we have yellow ribbons hanging on trees around campus or anything. At least, not now... I think it is more indifference. I think if the situation arises then people would show their true colors. As far as faculty goes...I like to go and sit down with my professors. Occasionally it will come up that I am a veteran and 9 times out of 10 my professors are like that it really awesome. They are very positive and receptive of it.

A similar positive experience was recounted by another student who witnessed no negative aspects. Further, while studying Greek tragedy and the issues of returning warriors in ancient times, he enjoyed the instruction of a professor whom he learned actively worked within

the community, not just in Athens but around the state, to facilitate discussions in regard to combat stress.

One of my professors has been engaged off campus helping to deal with and participate in issues pertinent to the community and thought it was well received. Most classmates in my program are adults so I just assume they have good manners and if they aren't thrilled with the veteran bit they don't say anything. That has been my experience.

While these experiences may differ depending on student status and varying personal background, this very diversity clearly demonstrates that every student is different. In this regard, veteran students provide a good reminder of that fact. For example, not all veteran students experienced combat and they all are not twenty-two years old. Their varying experiences and background adds richness to the academic setting and demand an understanding that what appeals to one does not always translate directly to another in terms of college choice. It is a matter of institutions understanding that, just as with traditional students, every student is different and this may be even more applicable when dealing with veterans. The veteran population on campus as described by one student paints a collage of interwoven personal experiences and academic ambitions.

I think it is extremely diverse. You run into veterans of all kinds...veterans in their late 60s finishing their undergraduate degree to an active duty Army officer finishing up their PhD. A lot of folks finishing up masters degrees so it is a very diverse atmosphere.

A challenge for administrators is meeting the needs of the individuals when student body composition is shifting. For example, shifts in recent years included more veteran students, more non-traditional students, more ethnic diversity, and more international students. These shifts bring richness and diversity to an institution. Luckily for the current veteran students, university administrators have dealing with student populations for years and addressing whatever issues arise in generally superb fashion.

A final advantage of having veterans on campus had more to do with benefitting the non-veteran students. This insightful student observation is perhaps one of the strongest arguments presented on why institutions should actively engage and recruit veteran students.

It's important for students at the University of Georgia...so they get a better idea of what veterans are. They don't generally have any interaction with them. They are not being raised around military installations and veterans are such a small portion of the population that I think it is important...There's plenty of stereotypes about veterans that I think they are actually better served meeting some people who actually served in the service, and have experiences, and they can share those with student body.

Another student immediately added that those that serve in the military comprise less than one percent of the U.S. population and these role model veteran students are also frequently working, maybe taking care of family, and otherwise demonstrate that veterans are not what you may necessarily think they are.

A dichotomy exists where some think veterans are these broken guys and girls, who have dealt with all this stress; and their lives are changed negatively because of it. On the other hand, you have folks who are highly motivated, hard working individuals who are going to give their all...while working!

Finally, the Dean of Students also alluded to the inherent value of having veterans on campus and the positive contribution they make not only on campus in general but more specifically in the classroom. In relation to a current student he said:

He's gained the benefit of what we have to offer that's different than he had through the military. We're gaining the benefit that he's engaging and enriching the discussion these students are having when they're talking about "what they're going to go out and do in the world" and he's talking about "what he's already done in the world based on those experiences"...it's a win-win.

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

Despite the positive environment and accolades expressed by the students, there exist real challenges. For example, significant differences between the structure associated with the military and university setting. While not directly linked to college choice, it may be safe to

assume the institutions poised to minimize the effects of these challenges yield a more positive experience that is shared by current students with potential future students. Perhaps one of the biggest challenges identified by both administrators and the students may be collectively termed as “learning the university way vice the military way”. The Dean of Students recognized these differences and the problematic shift in cultures oftentimes experienced by new students.

Now, they’re going to have a transition process where they’re going to have to learn the culture of higher education and learn how to navigate some of those obstacles...it’s a different culture.

### **A Cultural Shift**

These cultural differences were also highlighted by multiple students in the study and many struggled at first with the change in both lifestyle and expectation. Detailing their past experiences, students reflected upon the structure and the change in mindset from a regimented military life to one of individualism and personal accountability. One student stated,

It takes awhile to make the adjustment from one extreme to the next...from military lifestyle to university lifestyle...from a structured lifestyle where you know what you are doing every day, going by a schedule and you know exactly what it is that you have to do, to coming to a university environment where everything is completely on you.

Another student experienced a similar situation and identified an opportunity for the university to address additional transition issues. He believed current initiatives offered by Georgia help alleviate some of the issues new students experience but he would endorse the establishment of a veteran specific seminar,

A tough transition, I know that’s something I initially struggled with. I think there are things the university could do to make that easier for veterans. Most colleges, I know UGA does, offer a one hour freshman seminar...introduction to college environment.

The idea of the freshman seminar was further advocated by another student, but with a slightly different approach. He recommended a focus on the non-traditional, including veteran, student.

If they can do that for traditional freshman, then why can't they do it for not only veterans but other non-traditional students? Offer a one hour veterans seminar where they come together...learn they are not the only ones dealing with the same situation.

The concept of a non-traditional student, or even veteran specific, orientation was advocated by many participants. This idea had previously been presented, and well received, by the administration and as a result, this very initiative is now in the works at the University of Georgia. These very challenges were also recognized by the Dean of Students and he found, as perhaps expected, students with previous university experience seemingly made the transition more smoothly.

If they went through ROTC, they may be coming back...for a graduate degree. Those students are going to be more successful because they already came to the institution, and they graduated. They're going to be able to deal with those issues...we have plenty of others that have done that. I do feel good about where we're going.

Despite efforts of dedicated administrators and students, challenges remain. However, as highlighted by the Dean of Students, many veteran issues are also issues that affect traditional students and the university is prepared to address them. The Dean observed,

We are not seeing unique needs of veterans. Veterans are having the same types of needs...maybe a different focus...maybe a different catalyst for that need. We certainly have the expertise through things like counseling and psychiatric services so we are geared up to help and assist student veterans if they want that service. So, are they unique to our other students? Yes and no. The catalyst may be different but they share similar issues and we are prepared to address that.

### **Case Summary**

Ongoing and planned future veteran student initiatives at the University of Georgia are significant moves designed to meet the needs of the veteran student population. These positive measures not only benefit current students but also appeal to potential students who are considering applying to this highly selective university. Addressing many factors identified by

current students as important to college choice, the university is now better positioned to attract and retain veteran students.

The knowledge base of fully committed administrators is ever expanding and the university has aggressively moved to study the actions of other institutions and implement best practices as applicable to meet student needs. Additionally, institution initiatives have much greater visibility as compared to just a few years ago. An engaged and active student organization is growing and the commitment of resources has led to the creation of a new administrative position specific to veteran and military students. The new SVRC, and planned expansion, undoubtedly serves the veteran population of Athens well and provides an invaluable service. Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia policies, such as the ability of institutions to waive some out-of-state tuition for recently separated military members is also a valuable tool in meeting the needs of veteran students.

The veteran's situation at the University of Georgia has, by all accounts as told by students and administrators, improved dramatically over the last 2-3 years. The University of Georgia, despite a somewhat late start as compared to some other institutions, is now fully committed to better serving those who served. These increased efforts demonstrate a new level of institutional commitment to serve veteran students. Taken together these initiatives and policies should be viewed as significant influencers on the college choice decision of veterans who now claim to have "Georgia On My Mind".

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

The current veterans initiatives of both institutions, Auburn and Georgia, appear to have a positive impact on the college experiences of the veteran students. The positive environment and availability of resources undoubtedly has some effect on college choice; if only to raise institutional awareness. Ideally, the impact of these initiatives would be perceived as so significant by potential students they would directly influence the final college choice decision. The institutions took substantial steps to serve a growing student veteran population and both have examined opportunities to further expand services.

This concluding chapter first presents a comparison of institutional initiatives and the college choice criteria identified most important by participants. In conducting the comparison, commonalities and differences in regard to veteran student support are examined. Special attention is given to institutional initiatives and college choice criteria to identify linkages or alignment. The list is not meant to be inclusive of every single commonality or difference between the institutions, but rather, represents a collection of those deemed most influential to college choice. The next section presents some recommended actions, informed by the data collected, other institutions may consider in their quest to effect veteran college choice decisions.

In the final section, potential future research topics are identified that warrant further consideration and research. Topics discussed include variations in college choice criteria among different institutional types, college completion rates at institutions that possess a veteran student center and student group, and student support challenges for veterans who do not self-identify.



## **Institutional Commonalities**

Auburn University and the University of Georgia have enacted some similar initiatives to address veteran student needs and appeal to future veteran students as yet to make their college choice decision. Institutional commonalities presented here include: veterans center, veteran student organization, institution selectivity, Yellow Ribbon issues, military credit challenges, dedicated administrators, and campus-wide collaboration. A few differences between the institutions are also presented as they also potentially impact college choice.

The creation of a veteran student center was a significant milestone for each school. In the last two years, both schools established a veteran's center and either expanded, or plan to expand, to better meet student needs. For good reason, these were highly publicized events that raised awareness and engaged the university and community. Further, each center has a full time staff, many of whom are veterans themselves. Part time staffs at both schools include VA work study students. The work study opportunity is an added benefit since it also addresses issues related to affordability. The centers represent a significant commitment of space, funding, personnel, and a collective effort on the part of each institution.

A veteran student organization was established and they are supported with faculty advisors, space for meetings, and support from the administration. Both organizations are also chapters of the largest veteran student advocacy group in America: Student Veterans of America. Effective communication, both internally and externally from the institution, is required to address the needs of these students and both institutions have engaged the student leaders. Far too many times, administrators talk to administrators and students talk to students; it was reassuring to see at both schools the administrators and students were talking to each other.

Due to the selectivity of each institution, unlike some institutions, not all veterans are granted admission straight from the military. Initial matriculation at a community or technical college was also a common tendency as a majority of study participants began their higher education pursuits at a two-year institution prior to enrolling at the sample institution. My study also captured previous higher education endeavors of focus group participants. For example, many participants completed academic coursework while on active duty utilizing military Tuition Assistance programs. This trend is also consistent with the findings of Field (2012). While selectivity is not an initiative, the secondary efforts put forth by the institutions to aid veterans in gaining admissions were common traits. Each school works closely with other institutions to facilitate transfer opportunities once the student is academically ready to apply. The institutions' selectivity also ensures continued credibility, promotes academic rigor, and aids in protecting the institutions' reputation. For these very reasons, all participants viewed the selectivity of the school positively.

Another common factor pertained to Yellow Ribbon status. Recall, this program covers the differential between in-state and out-of-state tuition by matching contributions by the VA and the institution. As presented earlier, both schools have limited, or no, Yellow Ribbon opportunity. Though the schools may not perceive this as a major factor, it certainly has some negative impact on institutional visibility as detailed by administrator and student responses. While the limited opportunity may affect consideration by potential students, the students in both focus groups presented a different perspective. In the case of the participants, Yellow Ribbon status was not an issue since one-hundred percent of the participants were either from the respective states or had taken steps to establish residency prior to enrolling.

As previously described, credit for military training was minimal at each institution. The standard was a single PE credit. This caused common frustrations for students at both institutions. While all but one participant hoped for additional credits, they also expressed an understanding of the issues surrounding academic integrity.

Students at each school spoke very highly of Deans, Admissions, and other university entities. Student participants genuinely felt administrators were dedicated to their continued success and aware of challenges veteran students face. Time and again, students commented on the institutional commitment and the support provided them. While things are not perfect, students seemed to appreciate that the institutions are making an honest effort.

The schools formulated many of their initiatives by utilizing an inclusive approach to address student needs. Involving representatives from a myriad of university functions, these working groups addressed topics originating from such entities as Students Affairs, Equal Opportunity Office, Office of the President, and Financial Aid, and Health Services to name a few. The collaboration ensured differing views were presented and all voices were heard. It is also important to note each school also included student veteran representation in all such endeavors.

### **Institutional Differences**

Perhaps the most obvious difference between the two institutions is their proximity to military installations and VA medical centers. While these factors are not related to initiatives, they may affect college choice for those students in need of additional support and resources. As previously detailed, Auburn is almost equal distance from two major military installations. These installations place tens of thousands military members within a short (less than an hour) drive. In regard to Georgia, recent BRAC closures greatly diminished the military population

near Atlanta as both Fort Gillem and Fort McPherson were ultimately closed. However, the state still retains a sizeable military population with over 100,000 active duty assigned in the state and an additional 750,000 veterans.

Additionally, the large VA hospital in Tuskegee is one exit down I-85 from Auburn. The PAVE initiative and access to VA counselors, to include the aforementioned teleconferencing capability, places Auburn in an enviable position when addressing veteran's medical needs. Though the University of Georgia does not share this ideal access, it does have a VA clinic nearby, a VA hospital in Augusta, and the full array of medical services available in Athens and nearby Atlanta. Thus, while perhaps not as convenient, Georgia possesses all the resources required to deal with veterans medical and potential mental health issues.

A final difference that affects college choice and recruiting efforts is perceived desirability within the state. This seemingly is a reflection of both selectivity and stature. Though both institutions are highly ranked, well respected, and offer an outstanding array of well-respected programs and degree offerings; according to the participant responses there seems to be a slight difference in Georgia versus Alabama. In the views of student participants and administrators, it was very difficult to be admitted to Georgia as a Freshman coming out of the military. According to IPEDS, for 2011 and 2012, the ACT and SAT scores for all admitted students were also slightly higher, in all areas, for incoming students at Georgia. As a result, half of the participants attended a two-year school prior to enrolling at Georgia and were admitted as a transfer student.

In comparison, Auburn is also considered very selective and roughly a third of the students attended a two-year school prior to being admitted. The real difference may be in stature related to academic and social profile. For example, all participants at Georgia indicated the

school was their first choice and not a single other school was mentioned, during any of the conversation, by name. In contrast, at Auburn, even though the academic programs were a major college choice factor and the students were happy with their decision to enroll, all but two students mentioned Alabama during the course of the discussion. Quite simply, Auburn apparently has to work a little harder when it comes to recruiting in state – for both non-veteran and veteran students. Luckily, as the participants observed, many of the programs offered at Auburn are nationally highly ranked and therein lies the strength of Auburn. As the one student stated “the biggest selling point of Auburn is Auburn.”

### **College Choice Comparisons**

Participants at both institutions provided a litany of criteria effecting their college choice decision. However, a few were consistently repeated and provide a base frame of reference for institutions hoping to influence college choice. These included academic reputation, a traditional college experience, state of residency, and academic programs.

Academic reputation and a desire for a traditional college experience were major college choice influences for study participants. A dominant college choice theme expressed by participants was academic reputation. In this context, academic reputation was perceived as an indicator of quality. However, this may not always be a true representation. For instance, a highly regarded institution may have some programs that are not accredited by their respective professional association. Similarly, a perceived marginal institution may have some outstanding academic programs. Ultimately, both the institution and the specific academic program must be considered when making the college choice decision. Despite easy access granted in other education sectors, the participants clearly desired the value added of attending a traditional college on campus. Central to this theme was institutional reputation and the belief that the

degree reflected quality and value. Further, the institutions represented, in many regards, the typical college environment. A major university in a classic college town with all the amenities a student may ever need. These included student affairs, academic support, big-time college athletics, the arts, and a wide array of degree offerings.

Tuition classification, closely related to state residency, was perhaps the dominant college choice criteria articulated by the participants. Simply, the ability to either secure in-state classification or utilize the Yellow Ribbon program makes higher education more affordable. At the sample institutions, a common approach may be to actively recruit military members from your state since they are more likely to enroll. However, it should be noted that this criteria may be a slowly eroding. Thirteen states currently offer in-state tuition to all veterans, regardless of their state of origin and this trend is also gaining national support. In January 2013, House Resolution 357 was introduced in the US Congress and emerged from committee in June. This bill, with fifty co-sponsors from twenty-seven states, if passed in the next Congress, will require every state to grant in-state tuition for all veterans utilizing the Post 9/11 GI Bill (Congressional Record, 2013).

### **Recommendations**

The land grant institutions in this study are representative of other similar institutions in the southeast region. While each school certainly possess some unique strengths and various specialty programs, in general terms, given their broad mission, the institutions offer a wide array of degree programs and academic courses of study that appeal to veteran students. Whether a potential veteran student is interested in business, education, biomedical research, agriculture, engineering, veterinary medicine, or liberal arts, land grant universities of the southeast provide a high quality program. When the total college experience, to include

advantages of the collegial setting such as arts, volunteerism, social, and athletics, are considered, these schools are an attractive option for military members entering academe.

In this context, and based upon data collected during administrator interviews and the student focus groups at the sample institutions, I outline several recommendations for consideration by institutions desiring to effect a veteran's college choice decision. Though the recommended actions may not inform every potential student's enrollment decision, they convey the institution's commitment and indicate veteran students are valued and wanted at the institution. Do all recommendations apply to every institution? Likely not. Collectively, however, they may provide a roadmap for institutions hoping to affect college choice and better serve this segment of the student population.

The recommendations address the main factors students identified as important to college choice: academic factors, affordability factors, and personal factors. Recommendations 1-3 directly deal with affordability. Each recommendation is further defined and discussed in the subsequent paragraphs.

1. Expansion or introduction of the Yellow Ribbon program
2. Identify opportunities for VA work study and community employment
3. Examine ways to further reduce fees and grant in-state tuition
4. Leverage your "good name" to maximize visibility
5. Institute priority registration for students utilizing Post 9/11 GI Bill
6. Introduce or expand Leadership Scholars Program participation
7. Explore opportunities to conduct non-traditional or veteran specific orientation
8. Institute veteran peer-to-peer mentoring
9. Establish a Veterans Center and veteran student organization

### **Yellow Ribbon Expansion or Introduction**

Institutions should recognize there is a link between the Yellow Ribbon program status and institutional visibility by military members. The responses of the participants indicated many potential out-of-state students automatically remove the school from consideration if they are not

listed on the VA webpage as a Yellow Ribbon participating institution. As detailed in Chapters 4 and 5, the sample schools had either zero or very limited Yellow Ribbon opportunity. While participants perceived this as a negative for recruiting veterans, the reality is that in many cases veteran students were granted in-state tuition based upon their home of record or via the utilization of out-of-state waivers. A school may argue they cannot afford expansion or introduction of this initiative; however, the question the institution should ask is “to how many does this apply?”

This study found a vast majority of the focus group participants at the sample schools were either already residents of the state or initiated the steps to establish residency prior to enrolling. As noted by more than one student and administrator, this is actually more guaranteed funding for the school. Additionally, the institutional brand expands to a much wider audience by simply agreeing to be a Yellow Ribbon school – even with limited slots or other caveats attached. Given the increase funding by the VA and increased visibility, whatever additional expense the school may incur due to Yellow Ribbon status may be considered a “marketing expense.” As this study found, Yellow Ribbon status demonstrates, in a veterans eyes, a commitment by the school and gets the school onto the “college choice radar” – both good things. Once on the potential student’s radar, the institution can further promote the quality of the school and academic offerings; however, the first step is getting the veteran to notice your institution and Yellow Ribbon certainly accomplishes that.

### **Identify Employment Opportunities for Veterans**

Both sample schools utilized work-study opportunities to help meet veteran student needs. When veterans enroll, they often times bring families y and the availability of employment helps mitigate financial issues that may threaten academic persistence. The veterans



center on campus can assist in this endeavor by seeking out, and advertizing, employment opportunities for veterans and their families.

### **Fee Reduction and In-State Tuition**

This was a common concern raised by participants, but is also perhaps one of the most complex. While the full extent of the issue cannot be presented here, within the authorities granted to an institution, minimizing fees makes higher education more affordable for all students – not just veterans. Many states grant in-state tuition for active duty military and this was the case for the sample institutions in this study. However, this does not apply to veterans. Some states, such as Georgia, allow institutions to grant out-of-state waivers for recently separated military members. This is a very good initiative as it allows an individual to leave military service, enroll in the state, and then establish residency. Schools hoping to effect college choice decisions should consider similar initiatives.

### **Leverage Good Name of Institution**

Students at both institutions highlighted this consistently as a major factor affecting college choice. Faced with competition for veteran students from a wide assortment of institutions, leverage your institution's strengths. Ensure veterans at college fairs know your programs and how they are ranked either regionally or nationally. Many veterans, though perhaps not all, desire academic rigor and quality. My research indicated, for those electing to pursue education in a research university, a strong desire to earn a quality degree. This clear predisposition to pursue higher education was also reflective of Perna's findings (2006) and was certainly the case for my study's participants as all had either previously attended college or had always planned to attend college. Put simply, they want their degree to be worth the hard-earned

benefits they utilize to earn it. For those that simply “want a degree from anywhere”, there are plenty of other institutions willing to help them achieve that goal.

### **Introduce Priority Registration for Post 9/11 Recipients**

This benefit is offered at Auburn and some other institutions. While there may be some good reasons to not initiate this policy, Auburn student veterans clearly voiced strong support for this benefit. An institution can demonstrate their commitment to veterans by implementing such a policy and ensuring class scheduling issues do not impede academic achievement. During my research I spoke with individuals at two other schools, not one of the sample institutions, and asked why they did not have priority registration for veterans. They responded that while they did have priority registration it was typically for athletes, graduating seniors, or perhaps incoming freshmen.

### **Introduce or Expand LSP**

As mentioned in Chapter 4, many top tier schools participate in the Marine Corps Leadership Scholar Program (LSP). These schools often travel to bases, interview perspective students, and even set aside a certain number of seats each year for guaranteed admission. For example, according to the LSP website, in order to meet applicants and conduct interviews, the following universities and colleges sent representatives to three Marine Corps bases in California and Camp Lejeune in North Carolina during September – October 2013:

Georgetown University, NYU, Fordham University, Rutgers, Amherst, Harvard, Emory, Notre Dame, Williams College, Dartmouth College, University of Southern California, Yale, University of Pennsylvania, Princeton, Boston University, and University of Colorado

Both sample institutions of this study, along with almost 200 other schools, also participate in the LSP. However, obviously missing from the above list are land grant

universities in the southeast – the focus of this study. While many LSP partner schools are private schools and not land grant institutions, the states involved in this study all have multiple LSP schools. In Alabama, four schools participate (Auburn University, University of Alabama, University of Alabama- Birmingham, and Troy University) while in Georgia the number of participating schools is five (University of Georgia, Emory University, Georgia Southwestern State University, Kennesaw State University, and Valdosta State University). Aside from a few public institutions listed above conducting the base visits for LSP , it appears most of the active recruiters are from highly selective private institutions. While some may argue it is easier for private institutions to support the program, the counter argument administrators must ask is thus: “If Harvard and Yale can make room for them, why can’t we?”

### **Non-Traditional or Veteran Specific Orientation**

Focus groups at both sample schools raised the issue of non-traditional or veteran specific orientation. An initiative such as this further demonstrates sensitivity to student needs. At the University of Georgia all freshman take a one-hour freshman seminar to introduce them to college life and faculty mentors. As of September 2013, plans are now in the works to launch a veteran version. With minimal effort, institutions can develop a non-traditional/veteran orientation to better address needs of the adult learner. While this may not change a potential student’s college choice, it at least makes them pause and consider the commitment demonstrated by the institution. An initiative such as this, while better serving the student, is yet one more thing to differentiate an institution from the competition.

### **Initiate Peer-to-Peer Mentoring Programs**

The sample institutions either have, or are introducing soon, peer-to-peer mentoring programs. The PAVE program at Auburn is a superb example of a mentoring initiative that other

institutions could strive to either emulate or join. Peer-to-peer mentoring initiatives maximize veteran to veteran interaction and facilitate the camaraderie that focus groups at both institutions deemed so very important to transition and academic success. If a school currently has but a few veteran students, or they are unavailable due to work or academic requirements, reach out to the community. Veterans are everywhere. They reside on faculty, staff, VFW, Navy League, and churches. Find them, engage them, and let the veteran students benefit from their mentorship and experience.

### **Establish a Veterans Resource Center and Veterans Organization**

Obviously, these are both very common today on college campuses. Quite simply, if an institution does not have a specific organization for veterans the school is the exception and not the norm in higher education. While space utilization is oftentimes a challenge for many schools, allocation of a dedicated space, even a small office, is recommended. There is great variation in the on-campus veteran's centers in the southeast. Some institutions have dedicated entire buildings, such as Alabama, while others have launched the initiative with a small office. Regardless of the facility, the mere existence of a center sends a positive signal to both current and future students. Recall, some study participants indicated this was a firm requirement for a school to be even be considered in their college choice decision.

### **Future Research Topics**

This study details veteran specific initiatives at two schools and their impact on college choice. While some linkages were fairly evident, such as veteran student centers and student organizations, many other factors remain to be further studied. Additionally, this study focused on two rather similar institutions in one particular region of the country. Three specific research topics were identified for future study: differentiation of veteran college choice criteria by

institutional type, college retention and completion at institutions with veteran centers and student organizations versus rates institutions lacking those services, and unique challenges of veterans who do not self-identify.

College choice criteria may differ greatly depending on the institutional characteristics. For example, differences might be expected between public and private institutions, secular and non-secular, and large research universities versus small liberal arts campuses. While some criteria may be almost universal, such as affordability, the extent to which they are applied is informed by variables such as tuition classification, financial aid availability, cost of living, and institutional fees. A study comparing college choice criteria at institutions of various size and setting would prove especially useful and quite compelling.

College retention and completion is impacted by numerous factors. However, in relation to veteran student persistence and attainment, the influence of veteran centers and student groups is unmeasured. Participants at both schools indicated the presence of these initiatives were perhaps less important to college choice when compared to importance once enrolled. A study to analyze correlation between these entities and retention and completion would prove very helpful to institutions. Quantified data could provide both justifications to proceed with such initiatives as well as resource expenditures. A measurable attainment rate differential between institutions with these resources and those without would provide additional granularity for administrators making resource allocation decisions.

This study dealt with mostly students engaged in the institutions veteran student group. However, they may represent only a fraction of the veteran population on campus. Many schools have found it difficult to identify veterans especially if they were not utilizing VA educational benefits. As a result schools, including both sample institutions, have added questions to their

admissions application asking if the potential student ever served in the military. This identification is very important for two reasons.

First, an accurate count of veterans is required to determine the level of support required and the amount of resources associated with providing such support services. This is also important when schools are applying for programs such as the VA VetSuccess program that is designed for institutions with specified enrollment levels. Second, those who do not self-identify may actually have greater need for support services. For example, a former military member who engaged in combat operations or had a bad experience in the military may have minimal desire to engage with veterans. As numerous participants observed, those students have moved on and desire no affiliation with military focused organizations. That said, they are veterans and they are on campus. Additionally, given their past experiences, they may be susceptible to issues related to PTSD or TBI.

### **Conclusion**

The factors affecting college choice are far ranging but in many cases are actionable. In other words, an institution can do something to inform the college choice decision by taking action and demonstrating institutional commitment. The sample institutions in this study, Auburn and Georgia, both took significant steps to address the needs of veteran students, and continue to improve upon these even further. Students and administrators at both schools recounted experiences and personal examples they thought directly affected college choice in a hope that lessons learned at their institution may become lesson applied at other schools.

Participants' responses were analyzed and collectively fell within the three main areas defined as: academic factors, affordability factors, and personal factors. Within each of these sections, specific elements were uncovered that either reinforced common held beliefs or

illuminated a new factor affecting college choice. Some factors, such as tuition classification, are researched regularly and most administrators fully understand the ramifications of tuition status and the impact it may have on enrollment decision.

As other factors and initiatives gain visibility, institutions should consider implementation of these best practices to better serve and attract the veteran student population. For example, priority registration now considered in relation to the 36 months of benefits provided under the GI Bill, may be viewed in a different light and given due consideration at institutions actively recruiting the veteran population. Factors such as priority registration and credit for service, gain increased importance when consideration is given to expiring educational benefits.

The non-profit, Complete College America, works with states to increase the number of quality certificates and degrees and to close the attainment gap of historically underrepresented populations (CCA website, 2013). Given their focus and President Obama's goal of leading the world in attainment rates, college completion has gained new levels of state and national attention. In this context, issues such as awarding of credit significantly impact a veteran's ability to finish a degree within the 36 months funded by the VA. The stated goal of all concerned parties, to include federal and state governments, is completion. After all, the national focus is completing college; not starting college.

While the input and views of administrators were critical to this study, the specifics of college choice criteria were naturally drawn primarily from those who made the decision, the students. The purpose of this study was to examine current initiatives serving veteran students at the sample institutions and determine if disparity existed between administrators and students in regard to their perceived value and impact on college choice. Most initiatives were perceived

similarly in terms of value but there were some slight differences in regard to college choice. As an example, Yellow Ribbon was seen as very important college choice factor to students, even though they had all attained in-state status, for the message of institutional support that moniker conveys. Conversely, administrators perceived it less important in terms of affordability, perhaps because many students attending school were originally from the state, but recognized a value in increasing institutional visibility.

The institutions in this study are ideally positioned to attract veteran students and offer a superb educational experience in a classic collegiate setting. As a veteran myself, I applaud the efforts of these institutions to meet the needs of this segment of the student population. In this regard, not only do these institutions have much to offer veteran students but so do the states of Alabama and Georgia. Given their strong traditions of military service, assigned active duty military population, established military families within their communities, propensity of bases, and affordable cost of living, the states provide a compelling argument for separating military members to remain and either join the workforce or pursue post-secondary education.

In closing, it might be helpful if the term “veteran student” were viewed as two separate segments. Yes, they are students. They enroll in our schools, pay our fees, live on our campuses, and engage in rich discussions oftentimes far above what is expected of an undergraduate, or even a typical graduate, student. However, these warrior scholars are veterans first. This is what separates them from the masses. They represent a miniscule percentage of our population and yet at the same time represent everyone - all races, ethnic groups, genders, and religions.



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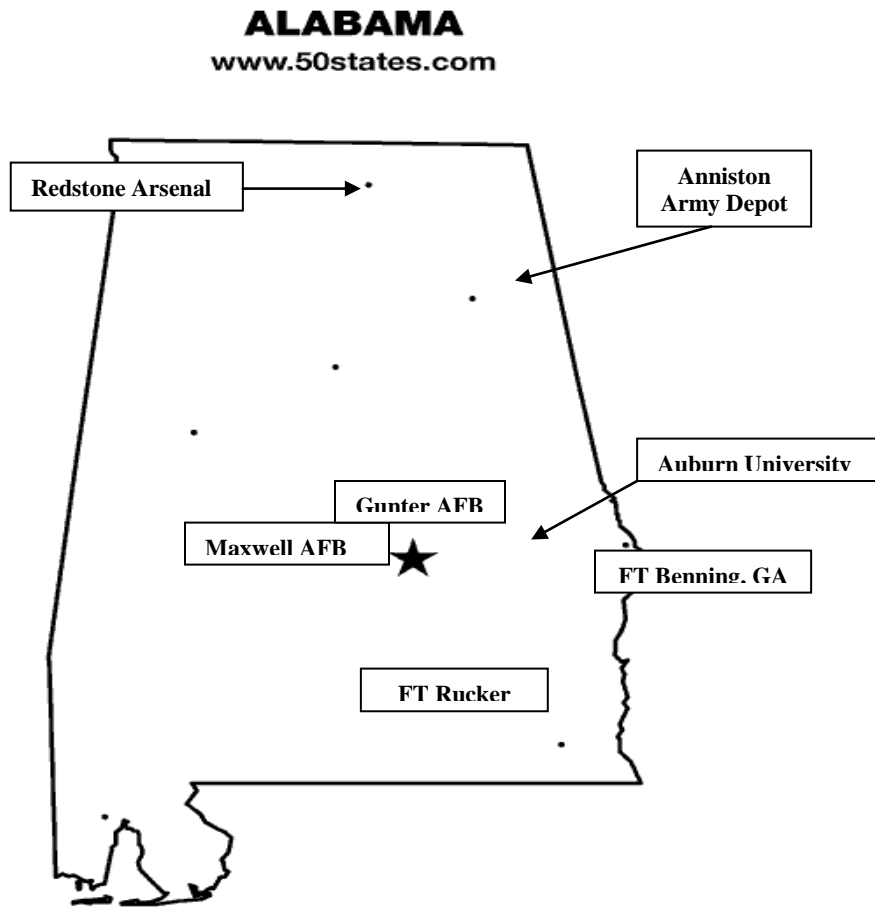
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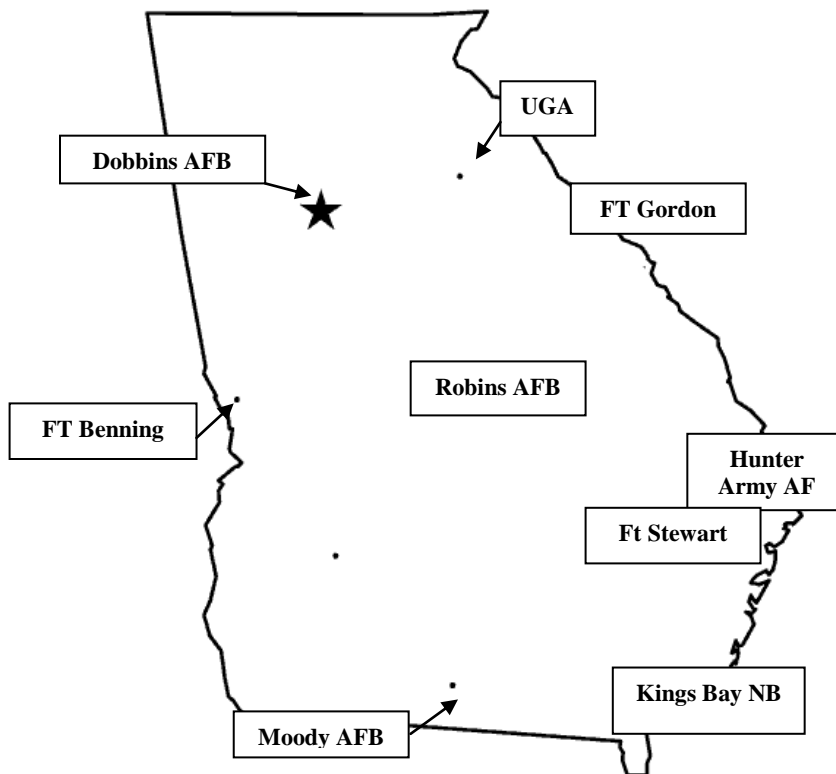
APPENDIX A

SAMPLE INSTITUTIONS AND MAJOR MILITARY INSTALLATIONS



Installation	# Military Assigned	Driving Miles to AU
Anniston Army Depot	4,000	95
Ft Benning, GA	23,000	41
Ft Rucker	5,400	118
Maxwell/Gunter AFB	25,000 Active/Guard/Reserve	59/54
Redstone Arsenal	1,100 (+3K BRAC)	210

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<b>Installation</b>	<b># Military Assigned</b>	<b>Driving Miles to UGA</b>
Dobbins AFB	4500 Reservists	77
Ft Benning	23,000	171
FT Gordon	16,000 Active	112
Ft Stewart	21,000 Active	239
Hunter Army Airfield	5709 Active	239
Kings Bay Naval Base		327
Moody AFB	4499 Active	242
Robins AFB	25,000 Military and Contractor	109

APPENDIX B

POSITION POSTINGS APRIL 2012 – JULY 2013

<b>DATE</b>	<b>POSITION</b>	<b>INSTITUTION</b>
4/12	Academic Program Director-Military	Georgia Tech - Savannah
4/12	Director, Veteran Services	University of Alabama
4/5/12	VISTA Vet Support Services Specialist	Moraine Valley Community College (IL)
5/10/12	Regional Military Base Representative	Thomas Edison State College (McGuire AFB, NJ)
5/14/12	Assistant Director, Military and Veteran Advisor	UMUC
5/15/12	Financial Aid and Veteran Affairs Counselor	UNLV
5/24/12	Marketing Manager, Military Education Programs	Vincennes University (IN) (Norfolk, VA)
5/29/12	Veteran Advisor (PT)	Northern Essex Community College
5/31/12	Coordinator Vet Affairs (PT)	Rider University
5/24/12	Assistant Director Veteran Services	Texas A & M University
5/30/12	Staff Assistant Coordinator Veteran Services	Framingham State University (MA)
5/31/12	Director, Military and Veteran Services Center	Bellevue University (NE)
6/5/12	Military Student Success Specialist	Fort Hays State University (KS)
6/6/12	Student Financial Planner- Military Affairs	Everest University (Tampa)
6/15/12	Undergrad Operations Coordinator and Veterans Affairs Rep	Worcester Polytechnic Institute (MA)
6/15/12	Veterans Incentive Program (VIP) Program Coordinator	Missouri State University
6/18/12	Veteran Certification Assistant	George Mason University (Fairfax, VA)
6/18/12	Veterans Program Administrator	Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University
6/19/12	Financial Aid and Veterans Coordinator	University of Wisconsin Colleges
6/20/12	Veterans Center Outreach Recruiter	Central Washington University
6/20/12	Director Military Community Relations	Texas A&M University-San Antonio
6/20/12	Academic Advisor, Veteran Affairs	Queensborough Community College (CUNY)
6/20/12	Veteran Services Specialist	City Colleges of Chicago
6/21/12	Site Director	Central TX College (Ft Benning, GA)
6/25/12	Certification Specialist Veteran Affairs	Cameron University (OK)
6/26/12	Director, Office of Military and Veteran Affairs	Eastern Kentucky University (KY)
6/26/12	Admissions Counselor and Veterans Liaison	Metropolitan State University (MSP)
6/26/12	Certification Specialist, Military Operations	UMUC (Adelphi, MD)
6/27/12	Library & Learning System Support Specialist – Developmental, ESL, Veterans, ADA	National-Louis University (Chicago)
7/6/12	Veteran Resource Center Specialist (PT)	Portland Community College (OR)
7/6/12	Recruiter-Advisor for Veterans	Pine Manor College (MA)
7/6/12	Military Services Specialist	Fayetteville Technical Community College (NC)
7/9/2012	Coordinator, Veteran Services	Pensacola State College (FL)
7/10/12	Adult Ed Specialist, Veterans Upward Bound	Austin Peay State University (TN)

7/13/12	Coordinator 2, Veteran Services	Salt Lake Community College (UT)
7/13/12	Veteran History Program Director	University of Massachusetts- Boston (MA)
7/17/12	Multicultural Student Advisor w/ Veteran Focus	Northern Idaho College (ID)
7/17/12	Assistant Director, Military/Veteran Advisor	UMUC (MD)
7/17/12	Academic Program Director	Emery Riddle (Aviano AFB and Germany)
7/18/2012	Coordinator Military and Veteran Services	UNC-Pembroke (NC)
7/19/12	Veteran Affairs and Financial Advancement Counselor	Angelo State University (TX)
7/20/12	Manager Financial Aid and Veteran Services	Madison Area Tech College (WI)
7/20/12	Registrar Support Manager – Military	Embry-Riddle (Daytona Beach) (FL)
7/30/12	Veteran Affairs Administrator	Berkeley College (NYC)
7/30/12	Director, Office of Military & Veteran Services	Southeast Missouri State University (MO)
7/31/12	Financial Aid & Veterans Coordinator	University of Wisconsin Colleges (WI)
8/1/12	Veteran Affairs Coordinator (Mountain View)	Dallas County Community College District (TX)
8/1/12	Program Manager, Military Child and Family Education Initiatives	Old Dominion University (VA)
8/4/12	Coordinator, Center of Excellence for Veteran Student Success	Community College of Allegheny County (PA)
8/9/12	Veteran Services Specialist (5)	City Colleges of Chicago (IL)
8/10/12	Administration & Recruiting Specialist – Veteran Specialist	Grossmont Cuyana Community College District (CA)
8/15/12	Coordinator Military Student Center	Austin Peay State University (TN)
8/15/12	Veteran Resources Center Assistant	Sam Houston State University (TX)
8/16/12	Director of Veterans Center	Bunker Hill CC (Chelsea) Re-advertised 10/16 (MA)
8/22/12	Military Billing Liaison	Grand Canyon University (Phoenix, AZ)
8/23/12	Coordinator of Veteran Success Center	Edinboro University of Pennsylvania (PA)
8/24/12	Director, Distance Education and Military Programs	George Washington University
8/26/12	Coordinator – Veteran Services	Utah Valley University (UT)
8/27/12	Military Enrollment Specialist (2 posits- 1 FT/1 PT)	Montgomery College (MD)
8/28/12	Assistant Director of Financial Aid – Veteran Affairs	Excelsior College (Albany, NY)
8/29/12	Veteran Services Coordinator	Atlanta Metropolitan State College (GA)
9/1/12	Veteran Student Affairs Coordinator	Hillsborough Community College (FL)
9/3/12	Assistant Director of Veteran Affairs	TAMU- Central Texas (Killeen)
9/5/12	Veteran Affairs Administrator	San Bernardino Community College District
9/7/12	Military & Veteran Student Services Coordinator	University of Northern Iowa
9/12/12	Veteran Services Manager	CUNY – John Jay College of Criminal Justice
9/13/12	University Development Rep- Military Enrollment	Grand Canyon University (Colorado Springs)
9/15/12	Veteran Affairs Coordinator	Dallas County Community College District (El Centro)
9/16/12	Military Student Agreement Processor	Post University (CT)
9/18/12	Coordinator Veterans Resource Center	Clayton State University (GA)
9/26/12	Military Programs- Clerical	Vincennes University (PT in San Diego)
9/25/12	Veteran Services Specialist	City Colleges of Chicago
10/2/12	Veteran Services Coordinator	Eastern Illinois University
10/2/12	University Development Representative –Military Enrollment (7)	Grand Canyon University (TX, CO, HI, TN, FL, NC)
10/5/12	Associate Student Services Coordinator, Veteran/Non-traditional	University of Wisconsin - Superior
10/9/12	Student Program Advisor- Veteran Advocate	West Virginia University - Parkersburg
10/11/12	Veteran Services Specialist	Northeastern University (Boston)
10/17/12	Coordinator, CCE/Veterans Affairs (PT)	University of Rhode Island
10/22/12	Coordinator, Veteran Services	University of Houston - Clear Lake (TX)

10/23/12	Coordinator, Veteran Services	Polk State College (FL)
10/23/12	Vet Upward Bound/Vet –Mil Affairs Specialist	Western Nebraska Community College (NE)
10/24/12	Program Manager, Institute for Veterans and Military Families	Syracuse University (NY)
10/24/12	Program Manager, Veterans Upward Bound/TRIO	Prince Georges Community College (MO)
10/25/12	Veteran Services Manager	Grantham University (NE)
10/26/12	Coordinator for Veteran & Military Student Services	Louisiana State University (LA)
10/29/12	Veterans Certification Specialist	George Mason University (VA)
11/1/12	Director, National Center for Research & Practice, Vet and Military Psychology	Chicago School of Professional Psychology (CA)
11/7/12	Veteran Affairs Coordinator (Brookhaven)	Dallas County Community College District
11/7/12	Veteran Services Technician (2)	Palomar College
11/7/12	Military Billing Liaison	Grand Canyon University
11/9/12	University Development Representative – Military Enrollment	Grand Canyon University (Jacksonville, FL)
11/9/12	System Director, Veterans Affairs	Lone Star College System (TX)
11/11/12	Associate Director for Student Veteran Services	ECU (NC)
11/13/12	Veterans Advocate	West Virginia University at Parkersburg
11/14/12	University Development Representative – Military Enrollment	Grand Canyon University (Atlanta)
11/15/12	Director of Veterans Initiatives	Boston College
11/15/12	Director – Financial Aid/Veteran Services	North Seattle Community College
11/15/12	Veteran Services Specialist	City Colleges of Chicago
11/16/12	Director Veterans’ Success	Georgia Gwinnett College
11/16/12	Veteran’s Benefit Coordinator	California State University, Los Angeles
11/21/12	Director, Military Partnerships, Portals and Programs	UMUC
11/21/12	Coordinator, Military Programs	UMUC
11/26/12	Specialist Veteran Affairs III (PT)	Lone Star College System
11/27/12	Student Life Specialist – Veteran Services	Borough of Manhattan Community College
11/27/12	Director Office of Adult and Veteran Services	St John’s University
11/29/12	Veteran Services Certification	Grantham University
11/29/12	University Development Representative – Military Enrollment (SC)	Grand Canyon University
11/29/12	University Development Representative – Military Enrollment (PA)	Grand Canyon University
11/29/12	Veterans Services Certification Official	Grantham University
12/3/12	Regional Assistant Director of Admissions and Military Recruitment	Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University (Texas)
12/3/12	Military and Veterans Education Specialist	University of Iowa
12/5/12	Veterans Affairs Certifying Officer (PT)	Caldwell College (NJ)
12/6/12	Veterans Upward Bound Program Coordinator	University of Texas - Arlington
12/7/12	Military Outreach Specialist - DC Center	Excelsior College (DC)
12/9/12	Veteran’s Services Specialist	City Colleges of Chicago
12/10/12	Veterans Services Specialist	Rose State College (OK)
12/11/12	Military Recruiting Manager	Medaille College (NY)
12/12/12	Veteran and Military student Support Specialist	Virginia Tech
12/14/12	Department Assistant-Veteran Affairs	Lone Star College System (TX)
12/16/12	University Development Representative – Military Enrollment	Grand Canyon University (Los Angeles)
12/16/12	University Development Representative – Military Enrollment	Grand Canyon University (Dallas, TX)
12/17/12	Veterans Affairs Coordinator	Arizona Western College
12/18/12	Veterans Affairs Specialist	Walden University - Minneapolis

12/19/12	University Development Representative – Military Enrollment	Grand Canyon University (Colorado Springs)
12/19/12	University Development Representative – Military Enrollment	Grand Canyon University (Hawaii)
12/19/12	University Development Representative – Military Enrollment	Grand Canyon University (Clarksville, TN)
12/21/12	Coordinator of Veterans Services	Southern Illinois University Carbondale
12/21/12	Veterans Educational Benefits Coordinator	Colorado State University -Pueblo
12/27/12	University Development Representative – Military Enrollment	Grand Canyon University (Hawaii)
12/31/12	Executive Director of Military and Veteran Affairs	Monroe College (NY)
1/2/13	Military Enrollment Representative	Post University (CT)
1/4/13	Military Affairs Specialist	Keiser University (FL)
1/11/13	Director of Disability and Veteran Resources	Helena College, University of Montana
1/17/13	Coordinator, Military Outreach Center	Georgia Perimeter College
1/20/13	University Development Representative – Military Enrollment	Grand Canyon University (Los Angeles)
1/24/13	Program Manager (Colorado Springs and Military Markets)	Colorado State University-Pueblo
1/25/13	Director of Veteran and Military Affairs	Quinnipiac University (CT)
1/25/13	Veteran Process Coordinator	Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University (Prescott, AZ)
1/26/13	Coordinator, Veteran Affairs	Palm Beach State College (FL)
1/28/13	Director of Military Enrollment Management	Thomas Edison State College (NJ)
1/28/13	Coordinator of Veteran Services	Maricopa Community Colleges (AZ)
1/29/13	Veterans Success Advisor	Berkeley College (NYC)
1/29/13	Advisor- Financial Aid/Veteran Affairs	Collin College (TX)
1/30/13	Veterans Affairs Specialist (El Centro)	Dallas County Community College District
1/30/13	Assistant Director, Military and Veteran Student Services	Park University (MO)
2/1/13	Military Community Liaison	TAMU-San Antonio
2/4/13	Director of Veterans Resource Center	St Cloud State University (MN)
2/4/13	Counselor Generalist/Veterans Affairs	Santa Rosa Junior College
2/5/13	Director, Veterans Center	Bunker Hill Community College
2/6/13	University Development Representative – Military Enrollment	Grand Canyon University (North Carolina)
2/6/13	University Development Representative – Military Enrollment	Grand Canyon University (Illinois)
2/6/13	University Development Representative – Military Enrollment	Grand Canyon University (Missouri)
2/6/13	Military/Advisor- West Phoenix	Grand Canyon University (AZ)
2/11/13	Veterans Upward Bound Instructor	Prince George’s Community College
2/12/13	Veterans Resources Specialist	San Bernardino Community College District
2/14/13	Assistant Director of Veterans Affairs	TAMU-San Antonio
2/14/13	Director Military Affairs	Ole Dominion University
2/14/13	Marketing Manager – Military Education Programs	Vincennes University (Norfolk, VA)
2/20/13	Sr Associate Dean, Veterans and Mil Affairs	George Washington University
2/21/13	Director of Military Affairs	Thomas Edison State College (NJ)
2/21/13	Military and Veterans Education – Associate Director (West)	Thomas Edison State College (NJ)
2/22/13	University Development Representative – Military Enrollment	Grand Canyon University (Hawaii)
2/27/13	Veterans Services Coordinator	Eastern Illinois University
3/1/13	Military Enrollment Service Specialist (PT)	Montgomery College (MD)
3/4/13	Military and Veterans Services Coordinator	Regis University (Denver, CO)
3/4/13	University Development Representative – Military Enrollment	Grand Canyon University (Los Angeles)
3/4/13	Director, Veterans Advising	UMUC
3/5/13	Veterans Center Director	Excelsior College (NY)

3/7/13	Director – Financial Aid And Veterans Affairs	Gaston College (NC)
3/8/13	Coordinator of Student Veterans Services	Portland State University (OR)
3/8/13	Advisor – Financial Aid/Veterans Affairs	Collin College (TX)
3/12/13	Executive Director for Military and Veterans Affairs	Monroe College (NY)
3/18/13	Military Business Center Coordinator	Coastal Carolina Community College (NC)
3/19/13	Director of Veterans Upward Bound	University of Arkansas
3/20/13	Veterans Certification and Transcript Coordinator	Northern Kentucky University
3/20/13	Program Coordinator – Veteran Student Affairs	University of Cincinnati
3/20/13	Coordinator, Veteran Service Fiscal	Front Range Community College (CO)
3/27/13	Director of Military and Adult Education	Darton State College (GA)
3/27/13	University Development Representative – Military Enrollment	Grand Canyon University (Albany, NY)
3/28	Military/Advisor – West Phoenix	Grand Canyon University
3/29/13	Veterans Counselor for Extended Education	Cal State University – Monterey Bay (1/2 time)
4/1/13	Program Director, Office of Student Veterans and Commissioning Programs	Brown University (3/4 time)
4/2/13	Regional Military Base Counselor -Hawaii	Thomas Edison State College
4/3/13	University Development Representative – Military Enrollment (NC)	Grand Canyon University
4/6/13	Director of Veterans Service Office	The Evergreen State College (WA)
4/7/13	Director of Military/Vet Student Affairs/Asst to VP for Student Affairs	Saginaw Valley State University (MI)
4/12/13	Veterans Services Associate (PT)	Norwalk Community College (CT)
4/22/13	District Director of Financial Aid/Veteran Affairs	Collin College (TX)
4/23/13	University Development Representative – Military Enrollment (IL)	Grand Canyon University
4/23/13	Coordinator of Veteran Recruitment and Admission	College of Saint Rose (NY)
4/24/13	Strategic Relationship Specialist – Military (Fort Bragg, NC)	Norwich University
4/25/13	Veterans Sanctuary Manager	Idaho State University
4/25/13	Asst Director of Financial Aid – Scholarships and Veterans Services	Sinclair Community College (OH)
4/30/13	Advisor Financial Aid/Veterans Affairs	Collin College (TX)
5/2/13	Veterans Coordinator	University of Wisconsin-River Falls
5/3/13	Veterans Affairs Certifying Official	Savannah State University
5/6/13	Veterans Outreach Coordinator	East Tennessee State University
5/7/13	Director, Veterans Affairs	Mercer County Community College (NJ)
5/7/13	Manager of Veteran Service Center –Texarkana	Texas A&M University - Texarkana
5/13/13	Coordinator, Veterans Affairs	Palm Beach State College (FL)
5/17/13	Coordinator of Veterans Affairs	College of Southern Maryland
5/20/13	Administrative Assistant – Veterans Affairs	Confidential (Nashville, TN)
5/23/13	Director – Veterans Resource Center	Georgia Tech
5/23/13	Veterans Resource Coordinator	Black Hills State University (SD)
5/24/13	Office Associate II, Veteran Services	Frederick Community College (MD)
5/24/13	Veteran Services Program Coordinator	Community Colleges of Spokane
5/28/13	Military Recruitment Manager	Medaille College (NY)
5/29/13	Coordinator of Veterans Success Center	Edinboro University of Pennsylvania
5/30/13	Veteran Affairs Specialist (El Centro)	Dallas County Community College District
5/30/13	Associate Director of Veterans Affairs	TAMU –San Antonio
5/30/13	Military Enrollment Counselor – West Phoenix	Grand Canyon University
5/30/13	Military Qualifying Specialist	Grand Canyon University



5/31/13	Veteran Student Services Outreach Asst Coordinator	George Washington University (DC)
5/31/13	Division of Public Service Veteran Coordinator	Tarrant County College District (TX)
5/31/13	Coordinator of Veterans Services	Montgomery County Community College (PA)
6/1/13	Administrative Assistant – Military Affairs	Virginia Tech
6/3/13	Veterans Affairs Benefits Specialist	TAMU – Central Texas
6/4/13	Military and Veteran Student Success Coordinator	San Jose State University
6/6/13	Career Specialist - Military	Kaplan University (FL)
6/10/13	Outreach Development Specialist - Military	National-Louis University (IL)
6/11/13	Director, Veterans Sanctuary	Idaho State University
6/11/13	Training Specialist – Veterans SMART Trainers	University of Texas at Dallas
6/12/13	Veteran Resource & Outreach Coordinator	Vanguard University (CA)
6/13/13	University Development Representative – Military Enrollment - NC	Grand Canyon University (Northern California)
6/14/13	Asst Director Admission, International Advisor, Athletics, Veterans	California State University, Northridge
6/19/13	Military Services Coordinator	Arizona Western College
6/20/13	University Development Representative – Military Enrollment - NY	Grand Canyon University (Albany, NY)
6/20/13	University Development Representative – Military Enrollment - IL	Grand Canyon University (Illinois)
6/20/13	Coordinator I, Veterans Services	Salt Lake Community College
6/20/13	Veterans Upward Bound Educational Advisor	University of Texas at Arlington
6/25/13	Coordinator, Veterans Affairs (PT)	Rider University (NJ)
6/28/13	Therapist/Clinician – Veteran Specialist	University of Colorado Denver
6/28/13	Military Enrollment Services Specialist	Montgomery College (MD)
7/2/13	District Director of Financial Aid/Veterans Affairs	Collin College (TX)
7/4/13	Admissions Rep – Online Div, Mil Enrollment – Denver/Colorado Springs	Grand Canyon University
7/5/13	Director – Veterans Resource Center	Georgia Institute of Technology
7/8/13	Admissions Counselor/Military Liaison	Cloud County Community College
7/9/13	Admissions Rep – Online Div, Mil Enrollment – LA	Grand Canyon University (Los Angeles)
7/9/13	Admissions Rep – Online Div, Mil Enrollment – SD	Grand Canyon University (San Diego)
7/9/13	Admissions Rep – Online Div, Mil Enrollment – Seattle	Grand Canyon University (Seattle)
7/10/13	Program Manager, Center for Veteran and Non-Traditional Students	University of Wisconsin –Platteville
7/10/13	Records Cler (Veterans Services)	Fayetteville Technical Community College (NC)
7/10/13	Advisor – Financial Aid/Veterans Affairs	Collin College (TX)
7/11/13	Military Qualifying Specialist	Grand Canyon University
7/11/13	Student Services Advisor Manager – Military Enrollment	Grand Canyon University
7/12/13	Veterans Transition Manager	Community Colleges of Spokane
7/16/13	Admin Asst IV – Student Financial Asst and Veteran Affairs	TAMU – Central Texas
7/17/13	Advisor (multiple – graduate, undergrad, military & veterans)	University of Maryland University College
7/17/13	Veterans Benefit Coordinator	University of Texas - Dallas