Perceptions of Military Students on Campus

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Background

According to the U.S. Department of Education, in the 2007 to 2008 academic year, roughly 657,000 undergraduate students were veterans and an additional 231,000 students were either active duty or reserves (Radford, 2011). These numbers are increasing each year, yet many institutions do not have the proper programs in place to ensure the transition from military life to civilian student life is a smooth one. We began our research by examining programs and institutions that track their military student success and sought to determine common perceptions of military students within our own university, as well as the local technical college.

Lighthall (2013) outlines ten important characteristics professors and classmates alike should know about the student veteran sitting in their classroom. Many have been on deployments, have families, and are more pursuing degrees because their military training does not easily translate into a civilian career, unlike typical college students who are taking their first step in finding a career path. Institutions that have the most successful military students are those that simply track their success and are aware of their presence on campus. USA Today published an article summarizing a survey that showed just how few college actively track their military students throughout their time on campus, as well as how few have special services for these unique students. In 2013, less than 11% of the 600 schools represented in the sample reported that they track completion rates of service member students, both current and former (Allman, 2013). Additionally, a majority of the institutions that do offer training for faculty members regarding veteran students, do not make the training mandatory, therefore, it reaches very few people.

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Methods

Participants:
- 611 participants (356 from UW-Eau Claire, 225 from CVTC)
- The participants indicated informed consent by voluntarily completing the Qualtrics survey that we created.

Procedure:
- Survey was created expressly for the present study, and included:
  - 36 write-in, multiple choice, and ranked questions
  - The main set of items asked about:
    1. participants’ opinions of their military student peers
    2. how many, and of what gender those peers are
    3. perceptions of male versus female military students
  - Items from the Socially Desirable Response Set (Hays, Hayashi, & Stewart, 1989)
  - Items requesting demographic information of the participant
  - Sent out to all students at Chippewa Valley Technical College via email, distributed by University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire staff via email sent out by department heads assisting to sign up
  - Write in responses were qualitatively analyzed by placing responses into categories. Other responses were analyzed using quantitative analysis.

Results

In comparison to non-military students, military students...

What do you think are the qualifications for being a veteran? (Select all that apply)

Other Findings

• When prompted to think about the term “disabled American Veteran,” 53.4% of participants stated the image that comes to mind involved some sort of physical disability, 33.5% stated it involved both physical and emotional disabilities, and only 3.1% indicated, specifically, that it involved a psychological disability.
• Respondents were also asked whether they had heard of or know of any stereotypes regarding military students and 64.5% indicated they had not.
• When asked about intellectual capabilities, 87% of respondents stated that they did not believe that there were any differences in intellectual capabilities between male and female military members.
• When shown the statement “A majority of military members that have not seen combat have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD),” 81% of respondents said this was false.

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References


