Peer Tutoring at Colleges and Universities

Paving the Road for Student Success:
Building a Case for Integrated Strategic Planning from Pre-K to Post-Doc

The Disappeared Ones:
Female Student Veterans at a Four-Year College
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I was recently asked how feature articles were chosen for College & University. I explained that when authors submit articles I do an initial review, primarily considering whether the topic would be of interest to AACRAO members and our other readers, if the information presented is new, or if the approach is research-based or would be more appropriate for the Forum section of the journal. If an article seems like a good candidate for the Feature section, I send it out to reviewers—the unsung heroes of academic journals—for their comments and recommendations on whether to publish the article. Their comments, often quite detailed, can provide the authors suggestions for revisions to strengthen the articles. Many of our reviewers are members of the College & University Editorial Board and others are experts on the topic of the article. I am indebted to them for their thoughtful efforts!

This edition contains three research-focused articles. Mikyong M. Kim examines the roles peer tutoring plays in colleges and universities and concludes with recommendations for interdepartmental collaboration and student support services.

Jarrett Kealey, Renee Peterson, Angela Thompson, and Kristin Waters argue that “in order to provide an accurate road map of the options available to all students, administrators of secondary and postsecondary education must come together and create a joint strategic plan,” review several current initiatives, and make a number of recommendations.

Patricia Somers and Amy Neihengen Heitzman report the results of a study of female veterans, with an emphasis on their college choice and persistence decisions.

This edition’s Forum section includes several timely articles. In a Commentary, Rachel Danielson calls for courageous leadership to address the issues facing higher education.

In a Campus Viewpoint article, Earl Dowling describes how the College of DuPage, a large urban Midwestern community college, grew enrollment significantly by focusing on customer services and becoming high performing.

Finally, Rodney Parks, Erin Walker, and Carol Smith review the research on the challenges of academic advising for student veterans.

We have several book reviews in this edition. Matthew Fifold reviews Elizabeth Losh’s, The War on Learning: Gaining Ground in the Digital University, Mark Carnes’, Minds on Fire: How Role-immersion Games Transform College, and Colleges That Change Lives: 40 Schools That Will Change the Way You Think about College, by Loren Pope, revised by Hilary Oswald. Also, Stephen Handel reviews Summer Melt: Supporting Low-Income Students through the Transition to College by Benjamin Castleman and Lindsay Page.

Once again, a heartfelt “Thank you” to all of the reviewers who have contributed to College & University! If you’re not currently a reviewer, but are willing to help out, drop me a line.

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This paper focuses on the important roles of peer tutoring and peer tutoring services that utilize student tutors in higher education. First, the roles and potential benefits of peer tutoring are identified and reviewed as they apply to various dimensions of student development. Second, the impacts, benefits, and extended beneficiaries of peer tutoring or tutoring services are discussed. The article concludes with recommendations for interdepartmental collaboration and student support services in higher education.
Peer tutoring is increasingly popular in higher education. Although many tutoring services focus on assisting tutees, numerous studies note that student tutors as well as tutees benefit (Yook and Kim 2014). Peer tutoring involves individuals from similar groups who are not professional instructors and is “a system whereby learners help each other and learn by teaching” (Mynard and Almarzouqi 2006, 13). It is not uncommon for academic programs or student residence halls to provide peer tutoring or mentoring. Peer tutoring is defined as taking on a specific role: Someone has the job of tutor while the other(s) is (are) in the role of tutee(s) (Topping 1998). Student tutors help other students via any number of different organizations on campus, including writing centers, statistical consulting offices, communication centers, teaching assistant offices, and residence halls, among others. Within and outside of classroom settings, peer tutoring is likely to imply equal status and merit.

Because the roles of peer tutors vary, the terms ‘peer tutoring,’ ‘peer coaching,’ and ‘peer mentoring’ are virtually interchangeable. ‘Peer mentoring’ (of inexperienced mentees by experienced mentors) may be used in place of ‘peer tutoring.’ Advanced students or upperclassmen often serve as tutors for less academically prepared tutees (who often are also underclassmen).

The word ‘proctor’ is also used to refer to students who help other students, though the role is quite different from that of peer tutor. At universities in the United Kingdom, a proctor is responsible for administering discipline (Saunders 1992). According to usage in the United States, a proctor is a more advanced student who tests less advanced students or who tutors peer students (Saunders 1992). Bruffee (1993) notes that peer tutoring is of two types: “monitor type,” using college students as institutional manpower, and “collaborative type,” mobilizing interdependence and peer influence for educational ends. Most peer tutoring programs are a mixture of the two.

Peer tutoring is an important way for tutors and tutees to develop their knowledge and skills. The roles and benefits of peer tutoring are considered here from the perspectives of (a) learning and teaching, (b) interdepartmental collaboration, and (c) resource saving. Current use of peer tutoring and coaching in various campus units (e.g., communication or writing centers, residence halls) is also discussed, and some recommendations regarding peer tutoring are shared. Peer tutoring achieves (or at least attempts) deep
approaches to learning. For some students, it is an opportunity to test their aptitude or interest in teaching.

**STUDENT-CENTERED LEARNING**

Recently, there has been a pronounced movement toward student-centered learning. Students are being asked to take more responsibility for the curriculum and to engage in self- and peer assessment. A capability initiative by the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) stresses the development of transferable skills in higher education (Ball 1990). RSA priorities are to prepare graduates for a career change later in life by helping them develop “crossover” skills that facilitate adaptation to new situations. This emphasis in British education on transferable skills contrasts with that in the United States on liberal arts education.

**PEER TUTORING IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

Writing or communication centers seem to be the most popular places in higher education in which to receive tutoring; they employ many student tutors. This suggests that developing written and oral communication skills is important across all of the academic fields. The most popular type of support or initiative in academic support centers is planned sessions between advanced and less advanced students. Some instructors may choose to use writing, speaking, or other academic centers for student learning.

In addition, there are many discipline-specific tutoring systems and tutoring methods. For example, students who are taking college algebra or microeconomics classes often get help from graduate-level teaching assistants, who usually are students themselves in the department’s doctoral programs. In such cases, the scope of peer tutors expands to include upper-level or graduate-level teaching assistants.

Undergraduate peer tutors typically are upperclassmen, but graduate students from various disciplines may also serve as tutors in academic or communication centers or in residence halls. For tutors, it is like “learning by teaching”—or, “to teach is to learn twice.” Hiring and training peer tutors is an important and challenging part of managing any peer tutoring system (Yook and Kim 2014).

Many college impact studies (e.g., Astin 1993, Pascarella and Terenzini 2005) report that peers and the peer environment are among the most influential factors (along with students’ demographic characteristics) that contribute to student outcomes. According to Astin (1993), “Tutoring itself can have an important positive impact on knowledge retention.... Thus learning the material to teach another student may be a particularly effective way to increase content mastery.” In many studies, peer variables are linked to student outcomes more frequently than any other college characteristic; their effects seem to be stronger than faculty variables in general. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) note that the most influential peer interactions “reinforce the ethos of the formal academic program.” Thus, beyond helping with academic issues, peer tutoring can enhance peer group activities, critical thinking skills, and friendship opportunities, thereby adding great value to the college experience. Student tutors not only further peer influence but also extend the impact of faculty and formal programs by helping with special academic-related skills such as writing and oral presentations.

**PEER TUTORING WITHIN THE CLASSROOM**

Instructors arrange their class projects and class activities, incorporating peer feedback and peer tutoring opportunities. Tutoring can increase a student’s level of engagement in academic tasks; students who are tutored are also encouraged to acquire knowledge. According to Astin (1993), tutoring itself can have an important positive impact even on the tutor’s knowledge retention. Learning material and practicing skills in order to teach another student are effective ways to increase the tutor’s mastery of content or skills (Pascarella and Terenzini 2005). Instructors also sometimes integrate peer tutoring into structured or semi-structured teaching techniques by scheduling a mandatory discussion session with the teaching assistant.

In class, many instructors use reciprocal peer tutoring or teaching techniques (Falchikov 2001). “Think-pair-share” is a frequently used teaching technique in which pairs of students discuss their individual responses to questions posed by their instructors. An expert team-teaching technique was implemented as part of the formal curriculum: a team of students was assigned to teach different topics to another team of students in the class. Problem-based learning centers on problems initiated and solutions proposed by students. Student teachers or teaching assistants may be peer tutors. Upperclassmen and graduate students often serve as teaching assistants, liaisons between students and instructors, and additional teaching resources.
THE ROLES OF PEER TUTORING
Peer tutoring in higher education takes place in communication and writing centers, residence halls, and other academic tutoring or technology centers (e.g., math, reading, computer, and technology labs). The roles of peer tutoring vary, depending on the types and purposes of the centers. They include:

- Supplementing the main course functions, especially in large classes or in complex content or skills areas.
- Increasing students’ opportunities to succeed and persist at the institution.
- Improving students’ communication or writing skills. Communication competencies gained during college and graduate school are transferable knowledge and skills that have a lifelong impact on success.
- Improving reading and math skills through remedial courses.
- Improving public presentation skills. (Public presentations are required in most classes.)
- Helping to improve leadership skills. Good communicators are likely to take on leadership positions at their institutions and in their careers.
- Improving participants’ interpersonal skills. While they are usually improved through communication skills and interaction with peers and faculty, they can also be developed through the peer tutoring process.
- Improving career-related skills. Public communication skill or confidence in communication is closely related to job performance, especially in the service-oriented economy. Success is more likely when one has good oral and written communication skills.

While all of these skills relate to one another and to overall student success, the first four pertain to academic knowledge and transferable skills; the next three deal with social and interpersonal skills; and the last one relates to future careers.

EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS OF PEER TUTORING
Most campus tutoring centers are operated and staffed primarily by peer students, even if directors and faculty members lead the units. Studies report that peer tutoring is an effective way to support students’ academic success and intellectual development. Moreover, some studies document students’ first-year success, grade point average, and other academic performance indicators (e.g., Arco-Tirado, Fernandez-Martín, and Fernandez-Balboa 2011; Laskey and Hetzel 2011) as they relate to tutoring. Lee’s comparative study (1988) found that programs involving peers as resources performed very well in terms of increasing retention and reducing student drop-out rates. Yook (2013) also reported that the speaking center that utilized peer tutors seemed to be linked to student retention at a public university. Peer tutoring is popularly utilized for freshman orientation and remedial education. Atkins-Sayer (2012) reported that communication centers with peer tutoring helped develop students’ critical thinking, debating, and public speaking skills. The benefits of peer tutoring have been reported in surveys of the various centers. For example, Yook and Kim (2014) examined students’ after-session survey data (n = 1,100) in a communication center, demonstrated the usefulness of peer tutoring, and suggested some implications for tutor training and hiring. Numerous studies suggest that student tutors not only have knowledge and a certain amount of authority but also provide student peers with a level of comfort as they improve their academic performance and communication skills.

Mynard and Almarzouqi (2006), who studied a peer-tutoring program at a women’s university in the United Arab Emirates, found that all of the tutors learned from teaching and gained a deeper awareness of the learning process. Another significant benefit was that tutors gained a sense that they were doing something worthwhile or valuable. Tutoring also seemed to provide opportunities for developing friendship, enhancing leadership skills, and/or participating in group work. Communication competencies developed during college and graduate school can encourage and enhance an individual’s learning, success, creativity, and citizenship beyond higher education. Being a good communicator is critically important in service-oriented businesses—particularly in the information age. These benefits have also been documented by other researchers (e.g., Beasley 1997, Kalkowski 1995).

Peer tutoring in residence halls under the student affairs division may not be prevalent in other countries but cannot be ignored. Staff identify two formats: Some campuses have more structured support programs whereby incoming students are assigned to residential academic clusters to live with a particular cohort of peers (e.g., same
class standing or academic major). This is an example of placing freshmen or first-year students in peer tutoring or support groups to enhance peer support or mentoring. Peer tutoring in residence halls is also related to living/learning community concepts. Students teach one another in learning communities while living together in a dormitory. In the second format, drop-in tutoring centers in the residence halls operate during evening hours, when students are more likely to utilize their services. It can be difficult to match and hire student tutors with expertise in the subjects in which student tutees most need support. Nevertheless, the student affairs division strives to utilize students as its campus manpower. Many undergraduate and graduate student residence halls have residential assistants (RAs), and current students play a significant role in student recruitment as well as in most freshman orientations. Regardless, colleges and universities should carefully experiment and evaluate in order to better orchestrate efforts between academic departments and student affairs divisions.

**LINKS AND COLLABORATION AMONG DIFFERENT CAMPUS UNITS**

Interdepartmental collaboration and various types of collaboration among campus units deserve to be examined. Collaborations should take place among tutoring centers, academic and non-academic departments (e.g., student affairs units), and formal and informal curricula.

The necessity of collaboration among academic and student affairs divisions has long been recognized. Above all, major models of student success versus dropout rates emphasize the importance of academic and social integration (Tinto 1987). For example, student organizations on campus should work with communication centers to help students develop the skills necessary for working in multicultural, multilingual, and multinational contexts. Communication scholars advocate for communication centers’ or disciplines’ leadership in peer tutoring and tutor training. Yook and Atkins-Sayre (2015) note that communication centers should be training trainers in order to improve peer tutoring and peer tutors’ communication techniques. (This may be related to their assessment that student tutors often lack communication skills and that tutors in communication centers can guide those in other support centers.) They also propose that communication centers should serve as a unit of synergy among campus tutoring centers.

The necessity of collaboration among formal and informal academic services cannot be overemphasized. Nevertheless, academic disciplines that require extensive writing or other language arts and that supply tutors should work closely with writing centers. Academic disciplines that require mathematics competency (e.g., engineering, science) should work with academic tutoring centers or related programs supported by peer tutors.

Studies on college impact (e.g., Astin 1993, Pascarella and Terenzini 2005) note that beyond providing financial assistance, on-campus jobs such as work-study are positively associated with students’ academic and social development. Thus, promoting peer tutoring might support student development in campus tutoring centers, student associations, or residence halls. Although the hourly wage for tutors is often minimal, students seem to accept the job because transit between school and work is minimal and because they derive other educational benefits.

**RESOURCE-SAVING PERSPECTIVE**

Most U.S. higher education institutions are experiencing financial difficulties. They make every effort to save resources by reducing the number of instructors or increasing class size. If a high quality of education is to be maintained, then it is critical to also maintain the quality and quantity of instructors and of their interactions with students. Academic support centers have proven effective in supplementing instruction for students who lag in certain academic areas and for those who want to perform better despite limited numbers of instructors and/or limited access to them. Academic support centers primarily employ student tutors and are managed by faculty members, but substantial reports of peer tutoring are positive. Used wisely, peer tutoring can be a resource-saving mechanism and an educationally powerful tool with which to supplement formal education.

Peer tutoring is receiving more attention because of increasing concerns about the quality of students’ learning and the availability of resources. Nevertheless, institutions should not succumb to the temptation to replace some faculty and staff members with “cheaper” student labor just for the purpose of cost savings. A study by Moustet et al. (1989) showed that sessions taught by faculty instruc-
tutors were more effective than those taught by peer tutors or teaching assistants, although some discussion sessions were similarly effective. Before making concessions to limited finances, university administrators should assess the effects of campus tutoring programs through an evaluative feedback loop.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the roles of peer tutoring seem to be naturally interdepartmental and full of potential in terms of educational effectiveness and resource management. Anyone who has managed campus programs will understand that the most expensive service programs are not necessarily more effective than cheaper ones. Nevertheless, more results should be documented before any resource-saving actions are recommended.

Much about peer tutoring and tutoring centers remains unknown. For example, do tutees believe that the tutoring they receive is effective? Do they believe that their tutors are sufficiently knowledgeable or skilled? Neither is it known how much (or how little) higher education institutions participate in peer tutoring programs—formally or informally. Are there typically enough peer tutors to meet an institution’s or a program’s needs? In what subject areas do students have the greatest need for tutoring? Do tutors earn academic credit or compensation? Is opening a new peer-tutoring center cost effective from a management perspective? Are some institutions realizing cost savings from peer tutoring? What are the short- and long-term effects of peer tutoring and academic support centers, respectively? How do various types of interdepartmental collaboration and coordination occur in successful organizations? Which tutoring centers should be kept, merged, or changed, and in what context?

Despite the important roles of peer tutoring for student learning and effective resource management, there are not enough studies or constructive evaluation reports to answer these questions. In short, peer tutoring has achieved a measure of anecdotal success but lacks the scholarly investigation and management initiatives necessary to document its accomplishments and formulate recommendations for more widespread implementation by colleges and universities.

REFERENCES


About the Author

MIKYONG MINSUN KIM (PH.D.) is an Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership, the Graduate School of Education and Human Development at the George Washington University. Her teaching and research interests are relatively broad, including equity and opportunity issues, college impact, special colleges for special student populations (e.g., historically black institutions, women-only colleges), marginalized groups in educational settings, finance policy in education, state and inter-state tuition policies, bridging K-12, higher education, and work, organizational analysis, and research design.
Currently, students and their families who investigate the options for higher education lack a clear map to guide them. Today’s students are told that college is either the best investment they can make or a waste of time (Nugent 2015). More than ever before, higher education is considered an investment in a student’s future. Grubb and Lazerson (2004) argue that students and their families are evaluating whether the return on the investment in higher education is worth the expense:

The occupational purpose of schooling has implied a simple promise to students: those who stay in school will get well-paid jobs with prospects for the future, careers, or vocations rather than mere work. This relationship has been asserted in many ways: in the human capital theory developed formally by economists and loosely restated by believers in education; in advice to young people to stay in school; in the image of the college graduate replacing the ideal of the self-made individual, and by college-going as the route to professions; in the goals of high school for all and now of college for all (p. 155).

As a result of government involvement as well as student and family expectations, education administrators...
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The road from pre-K to post-doc is riddled with potholes, detours, U-turns, and zones under construction. Students and their families are investigating options for higher education and encountering many roads heading in different directions, without a clear map to guide them. This article will identify the road blocks and recommend patches that can be put in place in building roadways for a smooth transition.

are under increasing pressure to ensure that all students succeed from pre-K through “grade” sixteen. To ensure a smooth transition from secondary to postsecondary education, administrators from both groups must come together to build roads of transition for all. A strategic plan that encompasses pre-K–16 education is essential. For most secondary and postsecondary institutions, joint strategic planning is not taking place; for those institutions that are attempting to pave those roads and plan together strategically, numerous potholes or program gaps between secondary and post-secondary programs remain.

To minimize these potholes, administrators from both sectors must work together to create an effective joint strategic plan. Initial resistance must be overcome by describing succinctly the community of talent and resources an institution must enlist to survive and flourish (Rowly, Lujan and Dolence 1997). Communication and connections, partnership programs, and greater transparency of practices will create the common ground that is necessary for successful pre-K–16 strategic planning. The purpose of this article is to identify the road blocks that currently exist and to recommend patches that can be put in place in
building roadways for students’ smooth transition from pre-K through grade 16.

**CONNECTIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS**

Clear communication is vital both internally and externally to K–12 and higher education. All stakeholders must be given the opportunity to have their voices heard in an inclusive strategic planning process. In a 2011 paper, the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) outlined various ways for institutions of higher education to communicate with state boards of education for the benefit of all. In order for a state board of education to communicate effectively with its higher education sector, NCHEMS identifies several characteristics including, but not limited to, the sharing of data between entities—including high school feedback reports making “collaborative efforts to address issues revealed by these data” and “active involvement by higher education in the development of K–12 assessments with the purpose of clearly articulating expectations for college readiness” (NCHEMS 2011, p. 12).

In order for pre-K–16 strategic planning to be successful, communication must take place before, during, and after the process. It cannot take place only when specified objectives or goals need to be reached. Administrators representing both groups must understand their colleagues’ goals and objectives and ensure that they stay connected for the benefit of the students.

Little or no communication between leaders in K–12 and higher education helps explain the lack of mutual strategic planning to date. Administrators are not making the necessary connections or communicating their needs; they are not recognizing the value of collaborative strategic planning. There is little evidence to suggest that the breakdown is the fault of one sector more than the other. Despite the tendency to focus on secondary schools as scapegoats, both groups share responsibility for the current state of affairs (Haycock et al. 1999). Both parties must work together to initiate integrated strategic planning.

Communication and connections are vital, but they represent only one step toward integrated strategic plan-
ning. Collaboration on partnership programs must exist and can even be a product of integrated strategic planning.

PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMS

Strategic planning for pre-K–16 requires forward thinking. In The Leadership Challenge, Kouzes and Posner (2012) compare traveling down the coastal highway in California to planning for rapid change. The road weaves in and out, with mountains on the left and the ocean on the right. As long as the road is clear, the trip is easy. But if the fog rolls in, those curves in the road become treacherous. Nothing can surpass “clarity of vision” in times of rapid change. A student planning to enroll in college, a parent guiding his or her child to higher education, a teacher preparing students for the next step, or an institution striving to admit well-prepared students all need to have a clear vision of what is expected from them.

Yet there seems to be a lack of clear vision, partnerships, and joint programs between K–12 and higher education. Kirst and Venezia, editors of From High School to College: Improving Opportunities for Success in Postsecondary Education (2004), report that students are expected to be college bound, but “state policies and practices send them mixed signals and are therefore ill-equipped to superintend the difficult transition that students must undergo to enter into postsecondary education” (Schoenfeld 2005, p.1444). Their case studies revealed students’, teachers’, and counselors’ knowledge deficiencies regarding postsecondary education.

Preparation for postsecondary education is twofold: academic preparation and college preparation. Students need to be prepared for both the rigor of academic work and the freedom and responsibility of college life. Partnership programs between secondary and postsecondary education institutions have helped bridge this gap for students who can take advantage of them, yet they have not yet become mainstream. Developers of local partnerships need to expand and generalize the vision so that more students are prepared to continue their education. When secondary and postsecondary institutions work together, they can eliminate redundant services and align their planning and programming to benefit all stakeholders.

Although not a new concept, career and college readiness gained new prominence in 2009 with the announcement of the Race to the Top Fund (The White House, Office of the Press Secretary 2009). Since then, the phrase “college readiness” has become the vernacular of 21st century American education. But what does it mean? David Conley, director of the Center for Educational Policy Research at the University of Oregon, defined college readiness as the “level of preparation a student needs in order to enroll and succeed, without remediation, in a credit-bearing general education course at a postsecondary institution that offers a baccalaureate degree or transfer to a baccalaureate program” (2007, p.5). If that definition is accepted, then one must also accept that the U.S. education system is far from meeting that standard because “the lack of coordination between the public K–12 and postsecondary sectors [have] impeded successful transitions” (Kirst and Venezia 2001).

English and math placement tests that students take to enter community college and university programs constitute another pothole in the education super-highway of student transition. A strategic plan for successful student transition from secondary to postsecondary education must address the alarming fact that on a national level, “more than 50 percent of students entering two-year colleges and nearly 20 percent of those entering four-year universities” need remediation before enrolling in credit-bearing courses (Complete College America 2012, p.2). Yet placement test results do not accurately measure the ability of applicants, and the result is that students must take a detour into remedial classes that cost them money but do not bear college credit. Judith Scott-Clayton (2014) reports in her college readiness study that nearly one-third of students in remedial classes could have passed college-level courses with a B or better. Better partnership programs between secondary and postsecondary institutions may eliminate this roadblock for students. NCHEMS recommends that state boards of education and the higher education sector redesign placement tests to align with the new Common Core standards and “[re]vise existing state mandates regarding use of admissions test scores to identify students for mandatory placement in developmental education” as they broach the concept of collaboration through assessment (2011, p.8).

While the foregoing recommendations place the onus for change primarily on the secondary sector, transition supports such as college day camps and workshops also exist (Maryland Higher Education Commission 2014).
Cross-sector initiatives also exist, but many tend to be either isolated limited agreements to increase the success of students in a particular school or program or high-level K–16 accountability systems with neither incentives nor sanctions (Kirst, Venezia and Antonio 2004). Often, these programs are not proactive but rather are reactive to either grant funding or state mandates. Both sectors must work together to ensure that high school graduates are well-prepared for college. Programs and plans should be clear, collaborative, and transparent so that students’ transitions are successful and smooth.

**TRANSPARENT PRACTICES**

If education institutions improve so that students become “connected” to them as a result of the academic challenges and the believable occupational promises they provide, then some of the social problems young people face can be moderated (Grubb and Lazerson 2004). Programs have been established to increase student success and transition and to thereby improve education institutions. But because such programs have typically been created by individual sectors, they remain disjointed and have little transparency. If students are to navigate the road from secondary to post secondary education, administrators from both sectors must present a clear and joint vision.

In a strategic planning process, it is important to include all stakeholders, both internal and external, so that goals and initiatives are clear. When illustrating a strategic planning and outcomes assessment model, Morrill (2010), states that, “the first component is inspired by dialogue, transparency, and clarity of the organization’s narrative” (p.258) in meetings and planning sessions. However, leaders do not illustrate being transparent outside of the organization. The same level of transparency that is used when planning within an organization must also be utilized between education sectors. Navigating the road from high school to college will be even more challenging for students if goals, objectives, and plans are not transparent.

Education administrators are constantly reacting to students’ demands and expectations. For example, higher education institutions are continuously refining their plans in order to meet enrollment goals. Global economic conditions, shifting competitive forces, calls for accountability, and dramatic changes in institutional funding streams all contribute to an environment characterized by opportunity and challenges. These forces increasingly elevate strategic planning efforts to high levels of importance (Sullivan and Richardson 2011).

High schools modify and enhance their curricula in an effort to meet state and national score requirements. Kahn (2011) suggests that greater transparency is required if stakeholders are to understand how decisions are made when new activities are launched at the same time that core activities are constrained. The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards indicate that administrators should facilitate activities that ensure that the visit is developed with and among stakeholders (1997) (It is worth noting that these standards do not indicate which community members should be identified as stakeholders). Organizations that have successful strategies monitor the external environment and respond strategically—without sacrificing their essential values and procedures (Peterson et al. 1997). External environments should be better accounted for in education planning. Secondary and postsecondary education administrators need to identify and involve each other as stakeholders.

**RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

In speaking about college readiness, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said that education administrators need to recognize “that these are all of our children, and these are all of our communities. Yes, we should provide incentives; yes, we need to come together, which is a different version than asking, ‘are these my students when they get to me at age eighteen, nineteen, or twenty? Or are these our students at three and four and five?’ And it’s a different sense of what your realm of possibility is” (2015). Currently, deficiencies in connections and communication, partnership programs, and transparent processes have resulted in a series of disjointed programs and undesirable experiences for students. As the nation continues to reevaluate the pathways to and through education, administrators need to work together to create a joint strategic plan.

In an effort to enhance communication and cross-sector collaboration, NCHEMS recommends creating a K–16 or P–20 council; key members of K–12 and higher education would come together with a clear agenda addressing issues of both sectors (2011). Several states, including Maryland, have already implemented such councils (Kirst and Venezia 2004, Maryland Higher Education Commiss-
sion 2014). Education leaders are the change agents who can effectively improve education for all students.

To ensure that students’ college readiness is enhanced, administrators need to work together to identify issues and concerns. College readiness partnership programs may have the best chance of improving student outcomes if common challenges—including issues related to student recruitment and program sustainability—are considered early in the planning stages (Barnett et al. 2012). Once issues have been identified, collaborating institutions should develop common standards for college readiness—as well as admission criteria—while adopting new approaches to delivering and accrediting developmental education. Then, high school teachers and higher education faculty need opportunities for professional development so they can prepare students for a common level of achievement. Communication and collaboration among high school and college instructors can only benefit students, increasing their success and retention in higher education (NCHEMS 2011).

Experts on K–16 and P–20 partnerships espouse the following strategies for successfully transitioning students from high school to college: align high school coursework and exit exams with college entrance requirements; administer diagnostic placement tests no later than the 10th grade and on a recurring basis to identify academic performance deficiencies; create elective transition courses to address identified deficiencies; and provide preparation materials for college placement exams. These strategies minimize the need for remediation prior to students’ transitioning to the postsecondary level (Complete College America 2012; Haycock et al. 1999; Kirst and Bracco 2004; Kirst and Venezia 2001; Kirst, Venezia and Antonio 2004; Mokher 2014). Alignment in P–20 education should be a first step in an ongoing commitment to collaboration and effective communication among all education entities. Aligned programs will have “strong buy-in and commitment from leaders” and established “goals and mandates while specifying an explicit policy framework and timeline for K–12 and higher education to collaborate in improving college and career readiness” (NCHEMS 2011, p. 7).

In addition, to minimize the need for remediation or “college gateway” courses in English and math, it is critical that students and their families have access to college admission and placement requirements as early as possible (Kirst and Venezia 2001, Maryland Higher Education Commission 2014). Underserved student populations are particularly at risk of having limited access to information about entry to higher education. Centrally located “transition centers” could provide information, diagnostic testing, and topic-specific support workshops (Kirst, Venezia and Antonio 2004).

As part of the effort to enhance transparency, administrators from each sector should serve as stakeholders for the other sector to ensure comprehensive representation in the early stages of strategic planning. A strong sense of investment and involvement and a keen awareness of institutional culture are essential to planning and implementing strategic change and achieving credibility throughout the process (Kouzes and Posner 2012; Lowney 2003; Sullivan and Richardson 2011 in Kotter 1996). By creating a place for external stakeholders, both groups can reduce barriers, blend effective programs, and work together to serve students.

A second recommendation is to create a unified student information system that administrators can use to track students both before they enter and after they leave an institution. Attention must also be paid to data systems that monitor student progress across the K–16 continuum. Earlier assessment of student progress will enable more effective intervention strategies and identification of barriers within each respective system. Most of the important public policy and research questions related to this imperative can be addressed through the use of Student Unit Record (SUR) systems (Ewell and L’Orange 2009).

While a shared student unit record system may not be an option for all institutions (particularly those in different states), enhanced data reporting and the sharing of information about trends provide opportunities for transparency. Administrators can become more supportive of the collaborative model if they become convinced, through research or practice, that including outside groups can result in better policy or help fulfill a strategic goal (Mayfield 2001). If administrators collaborate, through reporting, they can understand with accuracy how students are performing academically and can plan efficiently for their transition. Deliberate efforts to make decision making more transparent help campuses mobilize to seize opportunities and prepare contingency plans against potential threats. This is particularly valuable as public entities decrease their financial support. Institutional partners need to work together to make education organizations
more evidence based and agile and to add transparency to the decision-making process (Kahn 2011).

Education is a significant investment. Students today find that navigating the education system is increasingly complicated. In order to provide an accurate road map of all of the options, secondary and postsecondary education administrators must create a joint strategic plan. Connections and communication, partnership programs, and transparent processes will clarify the possible pathways to higher education and provide support at every juncture. By applying these recommendations, administrators can continue to build a smooth road for this transition.

REFERENCES

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We dedicate this article to our fathers, Art Somers and William Neihengen, and to my grandfather, H. Timothy DeConinck, who served their country and taught us firsthand about transitioning from military to civilian life.

The research on female student veterans who attend college is very limited. This article studies 51 undergraduate women veterans and focuses on their college choice and persistence decisions.
Since the end of the military draft in 1973, women have entered military service in greater numbers: Women currently account for 16 percent of active-duty service personnel; by 2035, they will account for 15 percent of the total veteran population (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics 2011). The profile of female veterans differs from that of their male colleagues: female veterans are younger, and more of them (30 percent) hold bachelor’s degrees, compared to just over 20 percent of male veterans (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs 2007). Yet when women attend college after separating from the military, they “seemingly disappear on college campuses” (American Council on Education 2010, p. 6). Not only do they “disappear,” but they also are the subject of alarmingly little research. This article reports on a multiple-method study of the college choice and persistence experiences of 51 female student veterans. In addition to reporting the stories of these women, a female veteran persistence model based on transition theory is presented (Schlossberg 1978; Schlossberg, Lynch and Chickering 1989).

**FEMALE VETERANS AND MILITARY SOCIALIZATION**

The military culture constructs soldiering as a masculine activity, which requires women servicemembers to redefine their gender identity in order to survive (Abrams 1993, Hicks 2011, Iverson and Anderson 2012, Silva 2008, Smith 2012). According to Hebert (1998), female veterans in “a male-dominant setting must learn how to redefine and manage ‘femaleness,’” (p. 21) which creates pressure to be more feminine or masculine. Women soldiers must learn to work within a hyper-masculine culture—one that rewards power gained by dominating peers rather than power derived from expert knowledge and skills (Benedict 2009, Demers 2013, Finlay 2007, Hamrick and Rumann 2012, Lorber and Garcia 2010).

In particular, military culture scorns weakness, including asking for help (Baechtold and DeSawal 2009). Fear of a “perceived weakness [is] exploited by [male] superiors and subordinates,” resulting in “check[ing] overt aspects of femininity at the door” (Smith 2012, p. 31). Upon reintegration into civilian life, “when the structured military community is removed, the individual is forced to again redefine who she is as a civilian, a veteran, a female, and a student” (Baechtold and DeSawal 2009, p. 40). For many female veterans, this occurs in a postsecondary setting, where they struggle to redefine gender and career goals.

To date, only two studies have addressed the transition experiences of post 9/11 student veterans. Employing a multi-campus study of 25 student veterans, DiRamio, Ackerman, and Garza Mitchell (2008) created the first conceptualization of the transition process for veterans, the results of which suggest the need to consider this group a special-needs population due to its unique transition experiences, including challenges in relearning study skills, connecting with peers, and financial concerns (p. 97). Building on this model, Rumann and Hamrick (2010)
examined the transition process of six student veterans in the community college setting and found that it can include self re-identification and assessment “prompted by the perception that, in important ways, they were not the same people they had been prior to deployment” (p. 22).

Both studies used transition theory (Schlossberg 1977, Schlossberg, Lynch and Chickering 1989) to examine student veteran experiences. Further, Ryan et al. (2011) suggest that Schlossberg’s (1977) theory is a particularly effective way to examine student veterans’ experiences because it provides a mechanism by which individual-level strengths and needs can be understood. Similarly, DiRamio and Jarvis (2011) built on the concept of Schlossberg’s (1977) theory as a powerful tool for assisting student veterans in their postsecondary journeys. Recognizing the unique transition experiences of student veterans, DiRamio and Jarvis (2012) introduced an adapted “4 S System” in which each of the components of situation, self, support, and strategies is configured for the “population of students who have served or are serving in the military... elements are particularly germane to the transition of students from the military to college” (p. 12).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
Transition theory provides a model for examining female student veterans’ experiences in higher education. Evans et al. (2010) describe college students, whether traditional or nontraditional, as facing “many changes that can have short- and long-term effects on their lives” (p. 212). The changes that veterans experience in higher education are even more complex as they move through several phases of personal, emotional, cultural, and social transitions and as they reintegrate into civilian and postsecondary settings (Lackaye 2011, Rumann and Hamrick 2010).

As early as 1977, Schlossberg advocated for an understanding of the decision-making processes of adult learners. The role transitions of adulthood, she asserted, “often involve crisis, conflict, and confusion” (p. 77). Schlossberg (1977) conceptualized the decisions of adults in the context of transition and described her model as a way to analyze “human adaptation to transition” (p. 2). Later, Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2012) described transition as an event or nonevent that resulted in a change in relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles. This framework has three major parts: (1) approaching transitions, in which the type of change, individual perspective, and context as well as the impact of the transition are examined; (2) taking stock of coping resources, wherein individuals review their assets and liabilities with regard to dealing with the transition, and (3) taking charge, which introduces the “4 S System,” which refers to the person’s situation, self, support, and strategies, i.e., the variables which influence adults’ abilities to cope with transition (Anderson, Goodman and Schlossberg 2012).

In summary, the use of Schlossberg’s (1977) theory of transition to undergird this study helps to address the paucity of literature on student veterans and their transitions (DiRamio, Ackerman, and Garza Mitchell 2008, Rumann and Hamrick 2010). In particular, the theory facilitates what Smith (2012) describes as “an understanding of adults in transition and [their] coping strategies for better management of the transition process” (p. 37). In addition, the use of transition theory, because it employs a phenomenological approach to data collection and analysis, allows attention to be given to what Rumann and Hamrick (2010) call “personal-level transitions,” the individual experiences unique to this population which are essential for educators and researchers to better understand so they can serve this growing audience (p. 432).

METHOD
Based on this literature review, and using a transition theory framework (Anderson, Goodman and Schlossberg 2012) and a phenomenological approach, this qualitative study examined the experiences of female student veterans. It is part of larger study of the college experiences of these women. While extant studies focused on women veterans at community colleges and four-year institutions, this is the first major research conducted on the campus of a research university.

Two research questions are addressed in this article:
- What influences the college choice of female college student veterans?
- What influences the persistence of female college student veterans?

A social constructionist approach allowed the women to construct the meaning of their experiences through “discussion of interactions with other persons” (Creswell 2007, p. 1)—either other participants or the researchers.
PARTICIPANTS
Participants were recruited through a variety of means. Surprisingly, MRU had no way by which to generate any information on the women students who were veterans. As a result, identifying participants was at once challenging and without precedent. Initial recruitment measures included contacting the student veterans group, the office of veteran services, and faculty and staff members who might serve as gatekeepers to this population. Additional means of recruiting participants included a Facebook page for the study, geo-targeted online advertisements, and the posting of information about the study on related Facebook pages.

Participants were invited to complete the online questionnaire, the final question of which invited participation in an interview and/or focus group. Of the 51 respondents to the questionnaire, thirteen indicated a willingness to continue to participate in the study via an interview and/or a focus group. Upon subsequent contact, only five of the thirteen who had expressed interest in continued involvement ultimately accepted the invitation to participate in an interview. Of the thirteen, three also participated in a focus group.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved all recruiting methods and protocols. At the IRB’s suggestion, the identity of the university and the students are disguised because of the relatively small sample size.

DATA SOURCES
Data were gathered via a demographic questionnaire, individual interviews, and small focus groups. The online questionnaire included four sections: demographics (four questions), military service (eight questions), education (thirteen questions), college experiences (ten questions), and comments (three open-ended questions). Fifty-one women completed the survey. The focus group and interviews allowed for in-depth discussion of the women’s educational and military experiences. Five women participated in the focus group and/or interview. The principal goals of the questionnaire, interviews, and focus group efforts were to determine how female student veterans perceived their campus experiences, how they managed and navigated identity development in the context of higher education, and how they made the most of opportunities presented by their presence on campus.

DATA ANALYSIS
The interview and focus group transcripts were coded according to specific statements about the participants’ experiences that suggested how the women had experienced the phenomena they described (Miles and Huberman 1994, Moustakas 1994). Dedoose software was used to assist with the coding, creating textural and structural descriptions of how the women experienced the phenomena they identified (Creswell 2007).

DATA QUALITY
Several methods were utilized to improve the quality of the data for the study. First, as large a group as possible was invited to participate. Outliers (both in terms of participants and data) were identified. Third, participant checks provided the women the opportunity to read and elaborate upon their transcripts. Finally, quantitative and qualitative data were triangulated as part of an effort to provide a more robust examination of the choice and persistence decisions of women student veterans at MRU.

LIMITATIONS
Every research study has limitations. While a sample size of 51 is large for a study of women veterans, a larger group of participants would have been preferable. Likewise, the number of participants in interviews and focus groups was small. National figures informed an estimate that between 100 and 150 women student veterans were enrolled at MRU. Creswell (2007) indicates that where purposive sampling is used, the number of participants can be small, as long as the sample is not random but is representative.

In addition to the limitation of the small sample size, this study is limited by its exploratory nature. For both of these reasons, the generalizability of the study findings is limited. MRU is a four-year research university, which suggests that it enrolls a different and perhaps more elite group of women veterans than those who participated in previous studies. While scholars have studied women veterans enrolled at community colleges, there is less research on their sisters-in-arms who attend doctoral or research universities. It is hoped that this study will encourage other researchers to more broadly examine the experiences of women student veterans after separation from the military and how those experiences vary by institutional type (if, in fact, they do).
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The Educational System of Kyrgyzstan describes the current educational structure of Kyrgyzstan and serves as a guide to the academic placement of students in educational institutions in the United States. This monograph contains information on both secondary and higher education, grading scales and a directory of post-secondary institutions in Kyrgyzstan. It also covers transitional issues, fraud and academic corruption.

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PHILIPPINES

A study of the educational system of the Philippines from basic to higher education, with information on academic and vocational degrees, and non-traditional education, including Islamic education. Serves as a valuable guide to the academic placement of students in educational institutions in the United States, with information on accrediting agencies and professional education associations in the Philippines.

Item #6537 $85 nonmembers | $60 members (2001)

ROMANIA

A study of the educational system of Romania. Includes an extensive list of sample diplomas, and detailed guidelines for admissions officers in the academic placement of students in educational institutions in the United States.

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An extensive guide to the structure and content of the educational system of Taiwan, from kindergarten through graduate and professional studies. Includes detailed information about schools recognized and not recognized by the Ministry of Education, a vital guide for any admissions officer considering incoming students from Taiwan.

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Item #9027
RESULTS
The results section is in two parts: the first presents the survey results; the second describes the findings about college choice that emerged from the interviews and focus groups.

Survey
Fifty-one individuals participated in the online survey. The majority (69 percent) were between the ages of 23 and 29 years of age, with the remaining population divided between early and late thirties (no participants were older than 41 years). Nearly 80 percent of participants were Caucasian/white; 6 percent were Hispanic or Latina; and 3 percent each were Asian, black, and African American. Nearly half of the sample (47 percent) was single; 38 percent were married; and 12 percent were divorced. Sixty-five percent of participants had dependents.

Forty percent of the women served in the Air Force; 25 percent served in the Army; 10 percent each served in the Coast Guard, Navy, and Marines; and 5 percent served in the National Guard. Location of service varied, with equal numbers having served within the continental United States and internationally; 15 percent served in Afghanistan and Iraq—territories directly involved in Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom. The average length of service was six years; the shortest was three years, and the longest was twelve. Nearly half had been deployed at least once; 40 percent had been deployed twice; and 11 percent had been deployed three or more times. Nearly half of the participants (45 percent) had been actively engaged in combat.

Just over 40 percent of the sample reported that veterans’ education benefits were the primary reason they had joined the military; a desire to gain skills and job experience for a future career were the next most common reasons for joining the military. One-fifth of the sample cited a desire to serve their country through military service, and a similar proportion reported family service as a strong factor in their decision to join the military. With regard to their previous education, enrollment before military service and during deployment varied: 62 percent had attended college before deployment, and one-third of those had earned the equivalent of an associate’s degree before enrolling at MRU. A majority (80 percent) had not enrolled while they were deployed, which is consistent with previous research on veterans’ stagnated education trajectories (Boice 2007, Kleykamp 2007, Steele, Salcedo and Coley 2011). Eighty-five percent of the women reported using veterans’ education benefits, and a similar proportion said that the GI Bill’s education benefits positively influenced their decision to enroll in college. In particular, participants planned to use their veterans’ benefits to complete their undergraduate degree and to augment skill sets learned in the military. Several participants described this intersection of degree completion and education benefits: One described having wanted to “earn a bachelor’s degree, at the very least, utilizing my GI bill,” and another wanted to “finish my bachelor’s degree, which I had begun working toward in 2001, right before I joined the Marine Corps.”

Participants ranked location as the primary factor influencing their choice to attend MRU; institutional prestige and the receipt of GI Bill benefits were ranked similarly in terms of their influence on these women’s choices to attend the university. The program or major offered was the next most influential factor in the women’s college choices. Participants ranked the influence of family or friends as the least important factor in their decisions to attend MRU.

In terms of their perceptions of how connections to the university might have been fostered, participants noted their desire for more mentorship opportunities—with faculty as well as peers—through which they could have gained a better understanding of veteran and student services, acclimated more readily to campus, and connected more easily with other veterans. One participant noted, “Mentorship was a huge reason why I was extremely successful in the [Air Force], and it is one of the aspects of the military I miss the most.” Another participant described the value of veteran peer guidance and suggested that having “a veteran mentor to show me around campus would have been nice.”

Participants noted difficulties connecting to the campus. While two-thirds (65 percent) said that they felt welcome at MRU, 50 percent reported lacking a good relationship with a faculty or staff member, and 35 percent noted that they hadn’t developed a network of supportive friends at the university and that their college life experience was what they had expected it would be. Similarly, nearly two-thirds (64 percent) claimed that they were not affiliated with a campus group (social or academic, formal
or informal), and 41 percent were uncomfortable with their interactions with other students at MRU. One participant said, “It is difficult to be so much older than other students. Forming study groups and making connections to help in classes is very difficult.”

**College Choice**

Three factors had the strongest influence on the women’s decisions to attend MRU: location, institutional prestige, and finances. Value and quality were factors that added nuance and complexity to their decisions.

Location—both state and city—figured in the women’s decisions to attend MRU. Janna noted that MRU was close to her hometown and cited the connection between location and financial benefits as the primary influences in her decision. She described the connection between location and value:

*I wanted to have a lot of value behind my education [given] that I was getting the GI Bill and using that. I wanted to make sure it would take me as far as possible, and [MRU is] a very prestigious university.... [I] felt that was a lot more of a value than going to a community college where some of the instructors weren’t really interested in the students or interested in teaching the actual material.*

Irene also connected her choice to attend MRU with perception of its greater value as compared to a two-year institution:

*So, you’re trying to get as much quality as possible, because whether I’m going to a community college or [MRU], it’s still pretty much the same type of effort, but very different in value.*

Molly’s impression of institutional prestige resulted in her feeling slightly conflicted:

*The prestige is what made me want to apply. I’m struggling about that because I see a lot of my friends online from the military, how they’re parenting and taking classes online. You get more respect if you have a degree from a better institution ...I think that’s what all of the prestige is about.*

In summary, participants’ identification of location as playing the largest role in their decisions to attend MRU was borne out through interviews and focus group conversations. Yet its influence was nuanced, conceptualized via consideration of location along with veterans’ education benefits, which together heightened perceptions of institutional value and degree quality.

**Persistence**

The women expressed certainty with regard to their persistence to degree (i.e., their intention to persist) and high levels of personal agency regarding their commitment to degree completion. Their commitment was deeply rooted in a strong personal locus of control and familial expectations of completion.

Participants were more likely to persist because they were enrolled full time. This corroborated Barnhart’s (2011) assertion that veterans’ persistence was positively influenced by enrollment intensity. Moreover, as Bean and Metzner (1985) note, nontraditional students with children had heightened goal commitment. The 65 percent of participants in the current study who have children are more likely to persist than are their peers who do not have children. In addition, the women in the current study had strong perceptions of their personal capacity, agency, and intention to persist. This corroborates research by Adler et al. (2006) which found that female servicemembers were less adversely affected by the stressors of deployment length than were their male peers. The majority of participants had been deployed, and nearly half had engaged in combat; Adler and his colleagues (2006) suggest that these factors provide a strong capacity for resilience.

Participants’ strong intention to persist could also be a function of the relatedness of participants’ military duties to their academic major or program; a large number of the women were pursuing an academic major closely related to the work they had performed in the military. Confidence in persistence to degree stemmed from contentment with academic major and plans to work in a related career.

**Persistence Model**

Connections emerged between this study’s findings on persistence and those of DiRamio and Jarvis (2011). Factors such as prior educational experience, time to plan, and relatedness of military experience and academic major informed participants’ high perception of persistence. Similarly, an analysis of participant experience using their
adapted 4 S Model produced similar findings regarding the women’s timing of transition to MRU. The analysis also introduced the notion of participant control over situational triggers and issues of timing, which suggests high levels of self-agency, which in turn may positively influence persistence (Bean and Metzner 1985). In this way, the positive influences of prior educational experience, time to plan, and relatedness of military experience and academic major are leveraged by participants’ capacity to control timing. Conversely, the presence of stressors and/or dependents and/or financial anxiety may diminish the perception of control over the situation and may adversely affect persistence.

In addition to situation, other components of the adapted 4 S Model can be integrated into this understanding. In particular, with regard to the component of self, the capacity for resilience (defined as participant-maximizing opportunities via resistance to situational stressors) was augmented by participants’ demonstration of control over situational triggers and timing. Resilience was further strengthened by particular strategies the participants utilized—specifically, seeking information and observing, both of which served to augment their capacity to resist situational stressors. These efforts gained support from various structures—notably, participants’ families and the resources provided by the campus veterans’ center. (A visualization of the relationship is presented in Figure 1.)

In summary, by exerting control over situational triggers as well as issues of timing, the women demonstrated high levels of self-agency, which positively influence persistence, signaled by factors such as the presence of time to plan, prior postsecondary experience, and program affinity with military duties. The capacity to maximize opportunities via resistance to situational stressors (i.e., resilience) is augmented by strategies such as seeking information and observation as well as by supports found in family and campus services.

**IMPLICATIONS**

In addition to new understandings about this population’s demography, the study findings have myriad implications for practice. In terms of college choice, female veterans at MRU approached their decisions via a complex conceptualization of location, which they linked to an optimization of benefits and resources related to family. Given this finding, the university could provide more clarity about family housing and childcare options in its admission materials and recruitment/new student programs in an effort to lessen what participants described as “difficulty finding affordable housing...especially if you have children.”

Baechtold and De Sawal (2009) suggest that female veterans select schools where they are more apt to see other female veterans. At institutions where female veteran enrollment is small, the cycle perpetuates itself. By understanding what characteristics female student veterans seek when choosing a college at which to enroll, institutions could recruit and enroll more women veterans.

Similarly, transitions to the university could be smoother and overall persistence increased if academic advisors understood the positive influence of female veterans’ selection of academic majors related to their military duties. Given the degree to which participants cited their advisors as a source of information, it would be wise to advise counselors of the findings of this and similar studies.

Increasing the flexibility with which courses are scheduled—e.g., creating more evening and weekend options as well as extending options with regard to residence requirements—would help “make working while in school more feasible.” Similarly, institutional engagement could increase as a result of additional and more robust benefits counseling upon admission (most participants said they hadn’t fully understood their options when they first enrolled at the university).

A result of their paucity on campus as well as, for some, intentional distancing, female veterans at MRU do not engage socially with other veterans, male or female. While participants did not describe this as a deficit, several noted a desire to know other female veterans on campus, perhaps through a mentoring program or, at the very least, by “circulating a list.” One participant shared that this “did not seem to happen in my first semester.” These efforts might be facilitated by a campus veterans’ center but more as a function of the center being a convenient place where participants could gather useful information than as a social hub.

A similar approach may prove useful in terms of augmenting academic engagement by this population; several participants in the study noted having difficulty integrating into the classroom. A faculty-student veteran mentoring program may augment levels of comfort in the classroom and dispel the tendency for female student vet-
erans to “disappear on college campuses” and be less comfortable than their male peers at interacting with faculty in the classroom (Baechtold and DeSawal 2009, Smith 2012).

CONCLUSION

The body of research focusing on female service members or veterans, while growing, remains limited. The current study, guided by Schlossberg’s (1977) theory of transition and using a phenomenological research design, allows for close examination of the transitions of female student veterans from the military to a four-year, research university. The findings of the current study can inform faculty, staff, and administrators about the transition experiences of this growing and heretofore underserved population.

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Access to higher education, the affordability of that education, equity related to the inclusion and treatment of students, and the quality of education for those students are often discussed. These topics are facets of higher education that must always be considered, not just when crises arise. Going to college is not for everyone, but for those who do choose to enroll, the education received should be framed within a system that values students and deliberately seeks to be of the highest quality. Educators must recognize the ubiquitous nature of technology and the advantages it offers for learning. Providing financial support for students is another key factor that cannot be overlooked, as many students would not be able to attend college at all without such assistance. As the world continues to grow into a more cohesive global community with an increasingly diverse student population, educators and students alike must treat one another with equal value and respect. We must continually strive to improve the accessibility, affordability, equity, and quality of higher education. Clear and concise plans with defined and measurable outcomes are invaluable tools to guide the collegiate system where it needs to go. However, plans to improve higher education should also be put into action. Educators must recognize that unless plans and deeds are balanced, even the best plans will prove useless. Higher education in the United States must identify active leaders with the courage to trim processes, programs, and even institutions in order to ensure the quality and viability of the college experience.

Higher education in the United States will soon find itself in trouble if patterns of planning and delayed action remain the same in the coming years. The system is already so vastly over-complicated that it is all too easy for students to get lost within it, to make uninformed decisions that prolong their time in school, and to incur massive amounts of debt. Committees are formed and plans are made on a regular basis to address deficiencies in the U.S. higher education system. While regular evaluation of the scholastic sphere is crucial to maintaining student access, affordability, quality of programs, and equitable treatment of the student body, simply reviewing the current state of affairs from time to time is not sufficient. Higher education must actively prepare for its future and for the challenges that future will bring for students. The needs of college-bound students are continually shifting, and educators must make every effort to identify and meet them. Neither the states nor the nation as a whole can afford to approach higher education as “business as usual.” Technology, the economy, and the diversity of the collegiate student body are constantly evolving. So, too, must those in administrative roles within higher education.
Those in a position to enact real change have a duty to do so. The influence of higher education extends well beyond the classroom, so educators and administrators must also take into consideration the needs of community members, local businesses, and the states in which their institutions reside. Brennan and Teichler (2008) posit that “the growth of research interest in higher education is also partly a function of higher education’s enormous expansion in recent decades so that today its character and performance have large implications for all members of society, whether or not they engage directly with higher education” (p. 1). Americans have a stake in the health of the nation’s colleges and universities. Everyone is affected by the presence of higher education institutions, regardless of whether she is attending college, has a family member in college, or simply lives near a university. Preparation and planning must culminate in action and implementation. The future of U.S. higher education depends upon its leaders identifying what is crucial to its success by turning visions into processes. We must collectively take the steps necessary to benefit students and institutions. Processes must be clearly defined yet flexible as the nation and the world blend together.

Maintaining an optimistic view of the future of U.S. higher education can be difficult given the current state of affairs. Within the purview of assessment and planning, it is generally accepted that “there is, of course, much about the future that is unknown, much over which individuals have no control, much which is cause for concern. But the pessimism that clouds much of humankind’s thinking about the future (although the basis for it cannot be ignored) may be best dispelled by deliberate attention to ideas” (Rice 1985, p. 6). While a college education is still valued, the means by which it is obtained has degraded. Scholarly pursuits have, in many cases, strayed from their founding values. Among these values was the belief that by obtaining a college education, a person was guaranteed entry into the upwardly mobile segment of the population. Today, some may argue that it is only the perception of higher education that has diminished. But the reputation of something as integral to American culture as attending college has far-reaching and deep-rooted effects. If the student body—the very group that should be the greatest advocate of pursuing a college education—does not have faith in the system, then something is fundamentally wrong.

Examining the access students have to higher education opportunities can help lay the groundwork for the necessary improvements. The proximity of a community college; clearly defined admission requirements; and even the availability of transportation can determine a student’s access to an education. Whether a member of a person’s family has attended college also often proves to be a deciding factor. The power of tradition—for the student and the institution—can be viewed as both an asset and a liability. History can serve as a guide when education is beset by challenges it has encountered previously. Looking to the past can save time and prevent unnecessary duplication of effort (and outcome). However, it sometimes happens that consulting past actions and resolutions becomes a kind of crutch. “A common element among campuses that fell into the lower than expected support category is that they were entrenched in more traditional practices and messaging in terms of providing institutional service to the state and society at large” (Weerts 2014, 156). What worked in the past may not always work in the present or in the future. Since the founding of the nation’s first institutions in colonial times, America’s response to lack of access has been to establish more colleges and universities. Yet there is a point when such expansion is no longer sustainable, and the system begins to collapse. Having too many options can be detrimental to a student’s academic motivation and progress. A student’s understanding of what is available to him becomes confused, and if it is unclear where to begin, he may never begin at all.

Higher education institutions have a responsibility to their constituents to communicate as clearly as possible what is required both for admission and degree completion. They must also establish practices that achieve a balance between strict but not impossible requirements and transparency of purpose. Newburn (1950) suggests that “democratic living is not necessarily best advanced by indiscriminate mass education, but neither is it promoted materially by an educational program in which the bases of selection are other than the ability and interest of the individual” (p. 179).

Obtaining a college education is a complicated process, and those who choose to do so must possess a certain degree of independence. Students should be held responsible for their own degree progress, but they should also be able to rely on their institutions’ faculty and staff to
provide guidance. A partnership is necessary if success is to be achieved.

A student must begin by choosing an institution that will meet her needs. In addition to considering the accessibility of a campus and the clarity with which it presents its programs and requirements, the quality of the education being offered should be carefully evaluated—especially with so many institutions currently operating in the United States. This evaluation must extend beyond admission requirements to the core curriculum. Program and degree offerings of necessity must change to meet the needs of the world. The economy has made it clear that the types of jobs needed in the United States have changed; the nation needs to retool its education system to ensure that graduates are qualified for employment upon graduation. "As the fate of the nation’s economy has become increasingly tied rhetorically to the quality of the American education system, the rhetoric has become ever more shrill: if we do not move quickly to increase what our children learn in school, our future will be bleak" (Pallas 2011, 213). Certain majors will cease to be offered as they are found to no longer be viable in the world economy. Consider, for example, the disappearance of the home economics degree and the recent proliferation of programs in technical fields. Traditional institutional identity and the historical circumstances under which institutions were founded will continue to influence curriculum, but innovation and adaptation must have their place.

Regardless of programs and majors offered, the cost of college will always be a concern. Even for programs that suggest a lucrative career after graduation, a student must pay for the privilege to prepare for that employment opportunity. For many students, postsecondary education is impossible without some financial assistance. When forming strategic plans for the future, we cannot trust that the state of the economy will remain the same. Those developing strategic plans for higher education should expect that the worst-case scenario—as, for example, the economic recession of 2008—is the most likely outcome. Doing so will provide realistic parameters within which to frame ideas. If the economy behaves as predicted, then higher education will be prepared for it. And if the fiscal climate improves or does better than expected, then education institutions could retain any extra funds for future use or apply them to a current project. California’s original master plan was based on fiscal numbers from 1958 (a questionable baseline given that planning was for a fifteen-year period (Coons et al. 1960). The Master Plan Survey Team would have done better to have proceeded under the assumption that operating costs would continue to increase while state contributions would decrease. No one can know for certain how the economy will perform, but change is inevitable. Educators should always hope for the best and prepare for the worst.

Online education has provided hope among educators. Shostak (2014) claims that “it is possible that the market for postsecondary ‘eLearning’ and for-profit universities may grow by double digits annually over the next five years, especially as a new global middle class—some 1.5 billion people—wants a novel, timely, and elite education” (p.12). Accessible education via the Internet appeals largely because of its convenience for the student. Not every college student is suited to sit in a lecture hall or classroom, nor should every student be required to do so. Just as students are unique in terms of their upbringing and personal views, so too are their educational needs.

Students increasingly can customize their education by way of online resources. Individual courses and even entire degree programs are offered online throughout the world. Such programs have revolutionized higher education in the 21st century. "In a traditional classroom, personalizing education requires very small class sizes, but computers can personalize education for every student" (Gillen 2013, 501). The flexibility and value of an online education are not being debated; it is clear that online education has become an essential part of the scholastic spectrum. Yet reliance on distance education should be measured. Online programming should not be used as a substitute for lagging programming or as a quick fix for larger issues. Swogger (2000) asserts that

one possible effect of distance education is that it will be the medium used to meet the growing student enrollment that is predicted for the next 10 to 15 years. While distance education may present itself to administrators as the perfect low-cost solution to increasing student demand, some academics worry about the ability of distance education to deliver quality (p.12).

Each institution that offers any form of distance learning must carefully review pertinent curricula to ensure that
students are receiving instruction comparable to that offered to students in a physical classroom. The appropriate accreditation bodies must make every effort to regularly review online education options to ensure that students are not being taken advantage of, monetarily and/or in terms of the quality of instruction.

Consider what could be next after online education. Perhaps it will be holographic instruction or even virtual reality. Receiving an education by means of an electronic device that instantly connects people all over the world would have sounded just as implausible to the founders of colleges and universities during colonial times, but technology makes anything possible. A more pertinent consideration is how universities will recruit students to these new types of program offerings. How will students be enticed to choose a particular campus when on-campus experiences are not a fundamental part of the appeal? Will the “ideal” college experience disappear? With fewer and fewer students physically attending higher education institutions, the culture of higher education will need to be strengthened. Universities will be obligated to make a more concerted effort to connect to their students and community through the very mechanism being used to deliver instruction. Community engagement will continue to be a critical factor in an education institution’s vitality. Even if all of a university’s courses were offered online, it would have the capacity to affect the communities it serves. Graduates of distance learning programs—like graduates of traditional higher education program—will seek employment and impact not only the local economy but also society as a whole.

Decisions regarding funding affect collegiate institutions throughout the nation. Tuition and fees as well as programming and resources make this clear.

The reduction in congressional earmarks has already inhibited many specially funded research centers across the country. Budget cuts threaten the fundamental mission of research universities, which is both to generate new knowledge and prepare the next generation of faculty (Dew 2012, p. 8).

Creative programming can help fill the gap between funding and need, but a balance must be struck. Higher education cannot be put on the back burner of budget planning any longer. The quality of U.S. higher education is steadily decreasing as a consequence of inadequate funding. Yet educators and administrators continue to debate just how much funding should be provided. Goldberg and Traiman (2001) assert that

If the United States is to compete effectively in the demanding international economy, and if each person is to contribute to and benefit from the nation’s economic success, the most potent weapons in its competitive arsenal are skill and intelligence. The country cannot rely on history or good luck to provide these tools to the workforce (p. 76).

By the time the full impact of this appropriation strategy is apparent, the security and viability of the United States in the global economy could be irreparably compromised. Not only do faculty need to be prepared to teach the students of the future, but all college graduates must be educated well enough to become good educators themselves.

The level of an institution’s engagement with and commitment to its local area and state may influence its funding. Weerts (2014) theorizes that

a robust outreach and engagement agenda—or its lack—may inform a legislator’s understanding about a campus’s commitment to the state or region and thereby influence that legislator’s support for the institution. In other words, engagement can be an important signaling mechanism to policymakers about the value of an institution to the state (p. 139).

Community engagement is an important practice for all institutions, regardless of funding concerns, but it is all the more beneficial if an increase in funding could result from such efforts. As they partner with their local communities, colleges and universities invest in their reputation. Community members who wish to ensure that their institutions are “the best” often donate. The quality of programming institution-wide will improve as a result of the attention, funding, and overall support the local community can provide.

Diversity of the student body must be a high priority. Serving the local demographic is a starting point, but institutions must be careful to not disproportionately accommodate or ignore underrepresented groups. “Institutionalization is key to continuity of diversity efforts. Institutional and human infrastructures for diversity work.
must be considered by postsecondary leaders” (Davis 2009, 352). Being aware of diversity and of the ways in which it can affect higher education helps educators keep “social context” at the forefront of planning efforts. Racial issues affect students as individuals as well as scholars. Students are the product of their culture, race, upbringing, and a range of other influences and beliefs that accumulate over time and the course of shared experiences. During students’ college years, aspects of their individual diversity will inevitably influence other students. They must be prepared to reconcile who they are with who their fellow students are.

The same is true for faculty and staff. All must understand who they are individually before they can interact respectfully with others in the collegiate community.

Alternatively, or in addition, it can be argued that working closely with members of unfamiliar groups breaks down barriers and disrupts stereotypes, and that increasing racial, sexual, and ethnic diversity will therefore increase overall well-being by fostering understanding and harmony” (Sher 1999, p. 97).

The shift from needing to represent diversity efforts on paper to achieving genuine equity is not quick. Constant effort must be directed toward implementing change; slowly, transformation will take place. The effects of efforts to increase the representation and inclusion of underrepresented groups may not be realized even in the next five to ten years, but they are sure to become clear in the next 20 to 30 years. The value of achieving true diversity and equity will prove well worth the enormous effort it will require.

Not only does diversity help realize social equity at an institution, but many different learning styles emerge and are celebrated when open-minded individuals come together. Bygrave, Asik-Dizdar, and Kaur Saini (2014) assert that “this increased diversity concomitantly puts the onus on universities to integrate intercultural perspectives in the development of pedagogy to suit the learning styles, ideologies, and needs of global students” (p. 200). Teaching the same course the same way each semester is no longer sufficient. The differential composition of an individual class each time it is taught will compel faculty to adjust the ways in which they teach course content. Interaction with each student must also be approached via a culturally proficient mindset. Cultural norms and social cues in college may differ from those with which a student grew up. Diversity extends beyond a person’s cultural and racial background, and this, too, has an impact on higher education.

A new type of “co-ed” is enrolling at today’s colleges and universities: Students are no longer just male or female. Many different gender and sexual identifications must be considered when planning housing arrangements in residential halls and restroom accommodations. And alongside the evolution of sexual and gender identity is ongoing large-scale immigration. There is no way to preclude people from seeking the opportunities they value. “A strategy...to address discrepancies in postsecondary participation rates across race, class, and gender lines included increased collaboration between public and private institutions as well as with K–12 and community colleges” (Davis 2009, 352). Establishing permanent internal institutional pathways of communication and connection regarding the benefits of diversity will serve to promote and support the necessary action. Higher education must use its position of influence to encourage personal equity, global thinking, and partnership.

Implied privilege and unspoken aids for people in a majority group can be overlooked by those who benefit from their group membership. People naturally tend toward those most like themselves. It can be difficult and it can feel awkward to integrate with those viewed as different, especially if individuals do not realize that such efforts are important. Institutions must actually become diverse and not just present aspirational thoughts or plans.

Higher standards are a necessity, lest low ones become self-fulfilling prophecies—prescriptions for personal failure, not only in the classroom but also in life. The standards movement allows the ultimate equity issue to be addressed; that is, aiming for the best for every student regardless of race or economic status (Goldberg and Traiman 2001, p. 75).

As with access, affordability, and quality, putting words into action is crucial to increasing equity. Perhaps the future of higher education will require international experiences. Gaining a broader understanding of the world and becoming a global citizen are certain to benefit the coming generations.

A balance of caution and decisiveness is in order. Administrators should always act with the best interests of
the student body in mind, but they should never lose sight of the true value of a college education. Higher education in the United States has grown so big that control of the system is lacking.

Higher education is no longer suited to contemporary needs. Not only is it socially inequitable, the once-and-for-all education of youth as a preliminary to employment is of decreasing value in an era of rapid scientific and technological change. Merely expanding the system is socially wasteful and results in an undesirable prolongation of formal education and dependence on family and state. A gradual but radical overhaul of the fabric of higher education is needed which will bring to an end its exalted position on the educational ladder (Suchodolski 1974, p. 333).

Reforming higher education to meet the needs of the United States in the future will be difficult, but it will be much more so if no significant effort toward reform is made within the next ten years. If America waits any longer than that, it is certain to be too late to implement adequate change.

The question is: Are the schools doing the job? Are they equipping graduates with the transferable skills required to get and keep the higher paying jobs the economy is producing and to contribute to the civic health of their communities? The answer seems to be an equivocal one: only sometimes (Goldberg and Traiman 2001, p. 86).

Issues that should be addressed but that instead are ignored will only become much larger and potentially catastrophic. Genuine and deliberate change takes time, but higher education leaders must not use that as an excuse for not implementing new ideas or processes. Just because something may be difficult does not mean that we shouldn’t put forth the effort.

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About the Author

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Growing Enrollment with Kindness

By Earl E. Dowling

“While community college enrollment has generally declined by about 2 or 3 percent annually in recent years—due to some extent to the improving economy—some colleges have bucked the trend” (Ashford 2015).

College of DuPage, a large Midwestern urban community college with an enrollment of nearly 30,000 students, has seen significant growth in both its enrollment of full-time equivalent (FTE) students and net credit headcount (Illinois Community College Board 2014). Several aspects of the Illinois Community College Board report are especially significant. Between fall 2010 and fall 2014, enrollment at College of DuPage increased by 6 percent, or 956 FTE. This was at a time when institutions throughout the state were experiencing decreased enrollment.

What made the difference?

Like many community colleges, College of DuPage has been concerned with access and affordability. The “front door” of the College was open for nearly 50 years to area students, families, and residents. However, in March 2011, College of DuPage opened a “second door” to the campus—a door that was always open but not as wide and not as visible. The “second door” is to student service, student success, and student satisfaction. Administration and faculty noted student concerns about getting the “run around” between offices, confusing procedures, cumbersome processes, and not feeling “welcomed.”

Setting aside the traditional organizational chart, the College determined that it needed to focus on providing students with outstanding, consistent service and communication. Faculty, staff, and administrators were charged with reviewing all key service contact points, communications, and processes from the time students are recruited and enrolled through completion of their educational goals, with an emphasis on degree/certificate completion. (See Figure 1.) Particular attention would be given to the following aspects of the student experience: recruitment and outreach, paying the bill, registering for classes, advising and mentoring, and other key processes related to student progress and success (Gallisath 2011).

To set direction, establish a sense of urgency, and ensure institutional commitment, COD’s president established the presidential commission Reconceiving the Student Experience Team, or ReSET. The commission included 23 representatives from the faculty, the staff, and the administrative team. The goals were simple yet complex:

- Increase student satisfaction and retention;
- Enhance college-wide focus on student service; and
- Increase enrollment.
The first question the Commission had to answer was do we focus on growing new enrollments, or do we focus on student success/completion? Culturally, growing new enrollments was the primary consideration. The College added more than 60 certificate and degree programs in direct response to student and local workforce needs. With nearly $1 million in institutional funds designated for attracting academically qualified students, the College was on an “enrollment tear.” Yet the Commission soon came to understand that the College would need to merge the goals of growing enrollments and student success.

The Commission was charged with identifying a solution, and that began with a plan. A white paper (Collins 2011) served as the blueprint for a new beginning of increasing enrollments at College of DuPage. The paper focused on recruitment and retention strategies while transforming the College from a service mentality to a high-performing model. What was needed was a concerted effort to develop an integrated approach to recruitment, retention, and success that would allow College of DuPage to improve its enrollment, retention, and completion metrics.

To transform the College, it was necessary to adopt a laser-like focus on two key concepts: customer service and becoming a high-performing institution. Once the plan was identified, it had to be implemented. (See Figure 2.)

The ReSET Commission (later renamed the Enhanced Student Implementation Plan, or ESEIP) developed 27 student satisfaction recommendations. These were forwarded to the College’s senior management team, which narrowed the focus to ten objectives. For each objective, strategies were identified, timelines were established, and measurable outcomes were put into place. The work of changing the campus culture from being strictly enrollment driven to being “grow enrollment to completion” was under way.

The College community successfully addressed 34 of 54 key strategies of the Enhanced Student Experience Implementation Plan to improve customer service and student success. (See Table 1.)

WHAT WORKED?
- Grew enrollment in special student populations
- Outreach to new and existing markets
- Purchased new student recruitment software
- Developed Campus Central
AACRAO Consulting provides you with expert advice and proven solutions to your toughest enrollment challenges.
Established Enrollment Support Center
Developed and implemented new model for advising
Developed new online student communications and retention platform using Blackboard
Launched “I Am COD” to support student success

WHAT WORK REMAINS?

- Develop processes and information resources for advisors/counselors serving undecided students
- Develop an electronic version of the Student Educational Plan for use when advising students
- Develop and implement a summer bridge program

HOW DID WE DO?

In spring 2014, the College administered the nationally normed Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory Survey to 1,382 students across all demographics. This was the fourth time the satisfaction survey was administered at College of DuPage (surveys had been administered in 2004, 2007, and 2010). The survey includes 70 standardized questions, six questions concerning diverse populations, and 10 College-specific questions. The survey asks students to use a seven-point Likert scale to rate their perception of “importance” and “satisfaction” for each item. The results of the Noel-Levitz survey reflected the outcomes of the College’s commitment to shifting behaviors. For example, satisfaction with academic services; admissions and financial aid effectiveness; campus climate; concern for the individual; responsiveness to diverse populations; and student-centeredness are at all-time highs.

Service excellence is tied with the all-time high achieved in 2004, and ratings for campus support services, instructional effectiveness, and registration effectiveness differ from the all-time high by only 0.01 to 0.02. Most important, students’ overall satisfaction with the College is at an all-time high. (See Figure 3.)

Growing enrollment and increasing student success are not an either/or proposition. Institutions do not have to choose between growing enrollment and student success. The following headline demonstrates how interrelated they are: “COD Reaches Historic Headcount and FTE Spring Enrollment” (PRNewswire-USNewswire 2015).

Table 1. Progress Report

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies completed</th>
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<tr>
<td>90 percent and more completed</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>51–89 percent completed</td>
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<td>11–50 percent completed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Less than 10 percent completed</td>
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![Figure 3. Noel-Levitz Summary Questions: Student Satisfaction Survey](image)

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Exploring the Challenges of Academic Advising for Student Veterans

By Rodney Parks, Erin Walker, and Carol Smith

As troops return to the United States from conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, many student veterans are expected to utilize their education benefits and enroll in higher education (Seaver 2014). A key element in their success in college will be the quality of academic advising they receive (Drake 2011). Student veterans are much more likely than traditional students to drop out of higher education (Ginder-Vogel 2012). Yet little if any research has explored how academic advisors advise student veterans or how they might improve student veterans’ college experience and academic success.

The present study utilized a mixed-methods research design to explore the challenges of advising student veterans. The goal of the study was to determine how academic advisors can help student veterans adjust successfully to higher education. Fifty-one student veterans participated in the quantitative portion of the study; five of the 51 also participated in the qualitative portion of the study. Four themes emerged from the data analysis: recognition, knowledge, research, and education and integration.

Overall, the study found that academic advisors have little understanding of either their student veteran advisees or their military experience; as a result, they often rely on stereotypes of student veterans that can negatively affect the way in which they advise student veterans. This lack of understanding may reinforce the isolation many student veterans experience in relation to peers and faculty members. It is therefore particularly important for academic advisors to educate themselves about military culture so they can more effectively “connect” with student veterans. By promoting and facilitating learning about military culture for all of their constituents, higher education institutions can decrease the isolation experienced by many student veterans and help them integrate more effectively into the campus community.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The return of troops from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan is resulting in greater numbers of veterans enrolling in higher education (Parks and Walker 2014). The education benefits available to veterans are often a significant factor in individuals’ choices to join the military immediately after high school. Benefits available through the GI Bill provide students with financial support for higher education. As of 2009, 564,000 veterans returning from the current conflicts had already taken advantage of their education benefits (Sinski 2012, p.1). The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs reports that the number of veterans utilizing VA education program benefits increased from 400,000 in 2000 to 900,000 in 2011 (Parks and Walker 2014,
This number is expected to continue to increase as the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan draw to a close (Seaver 2014). Given the influx in student veterans attending higher education institutions, administrators should be prepared to understand the complexities of serving this nontraditional student population.

Many universities cater to traditional students; by contrast, student veterans typically are older, are employed full-time, and have had dramatically different life experiences than their younger counterparts. Some studies have identified an 88 percent dropout rate and a 3 percent (four-year) graduation rate for student veterans (Ginder-Vogel 2012). However, these data may be misleading in that it is difficult to determine how many have to drop out because of deployment or a military transfer or how many took longer than four years to complete their degrees because they had to attend school part time, had financial issues, or were responsible for dependents and so were unable to finish their degrees in a timely manner (Zoraya 2014). In order to successfully advise this population of students, academic advisors should be aware of the challenges student veterans face and should be knowledgeable about military life.

Pusser and colleagues (2007) found that the most important factor contributing to college student dropout rates is a lack of understanding of financial aid programs, college courses, and the higher education system. Student veterans often enter higher education at a disadvantage because they have not encountered comparable processes in the military. Student veterans’ success depends largely on their own determination and ambition but also on the availability of assistance to help them understand their benefits, identify alternative scheduling options, and outline a four-year academic plan.

Higher education institutions are structured to meet the needs of traditional students, despite sizable populations of adult and other nontraditional students who enroll (Pusser et al. 2007). As a result, nontraditional students can feel alienated or isolated from university culture. Drake (2011) discusses the importance of academic advising in helping students who enter higher education uninformed. Because student veterans do not have the same needs as traditional students, they often leave their universities without ever adopting a positive student identity. At many institutions, faculty members and administrators lack an understanding of student veterans’ experience—ignorance that can result in such students’ feeling frustrated and alienated. The result may be that student veterans drop out, transfer to another institution, or remain but fail to achieve their academic potential (Rumann and Hamrick 2009). Academic advising may be the mitigating factor that supports nontraditional students’ persistence and success in higher education.

Transitioning from military life to higher education can be daunting. The structured life of the military is extraordinarily different from the sometimes chaotic and confusing higher education experience. While veterans are accustomed to their military superiors telling them exactly what to do and what not to do, higher education is rarely so straightforward and may contribute to veterans’ feeling confused or frustrated (Ellison et al. 2012). Ellison et al. (2012) interviewed 31 veterans and found that younger veterans were largely concerned with educational planning; they voiced concerns about which institution to attend, which degree to pursue, and how to gain admission to the programs in which they wanted to enroll. Many student veterans would benefit from a guide to best practices for choosing classes that will help them complete their degrees (Physioc 2012).

For many veterans, the maturity gained from their deployment motivated them to seek a college degree and enhanced their commitment to completing the degree (Rumann and Hamrick 2010). Yet some have indicated that their time in the military—their deployment, in particular—caused them to lose certain skills so that it was difficult to return to their studies (DiRamoio, Ackerman and Mitchell 2008). Appalachian State University (NC) has a large population of students who had to withdraw due to deployment. When they returned to the campus a few years later, they needed support in transitioning back into the culture, classes, and bureaucracy of the school in order to complete their degree programs (Johnson 2009).

The discipline and teamwork associated with the military make veterans adept at overcoming challenges, with the result that they often perform better than non-veterans when they are faced with difficult situations (Vacchi 2011). That said, one of the most significant challenges student veterans must overcome is navigating the unfamiliar administrative offices and bureaucracy of higher education. Student services offices can help by recognizing that student veterans differ from traditional students yet not
necessarily treat them differently (Vacchi, 2012). Student veterans may also experience frustration as a result of the general lack of transferability of military training and experience to higher education (Cahill et al. 2013). Planning a degree, registering for classes, transferring credits, and paying for college can be challenging processes in and of themselves—and they are areas in which academic advisors can significantly help student veterans.

Many veterans have difficulty interacting with civilians on college campuses. Their experiences are so different from those of the typical student—as well as those of most faculty and staff—that it can be difficult for veterans to connect with or even to feel comfortable speaking to others on college campuses. As a result, veterans may choose to not identify themselves as veterans, to try not to stand out, and to keep their opinions and thoughts to themselves (DiRamio, Ackerman and Mitchell 2008). Moreover, student veterans are more likely than traditional students to be married; to have dependents; to be older; and to require more time to complete their degrees as a result of deployment, attending part time, or taking distance education courses (Radford 2011). These characteristics not only constitute risk factors for failing to complete a degree but also may cause student veterans to feel out of place among traditional students.

Wheeler (2012) interviewed student veterans and found that most felt isolated from others on campus whom they felt did not share their background or academic ambition. The differences between veterans and their peers—and, at times, veterans and their professors—are veteran-specific obstacles to achieving degree completion (Wheeler 2012). However, these risk factors can be addressed in part by informed academic advisors. Support is crucial for veterans during their transition to academic life, and academic advisors are in an ideal position to offer it (Wheeler 2012). Academic advisors are familiar with the faculty and staff on a college campus and can offer advice about classes and degree planning. By recognizing the distinct issues that may confront student veterans and by understanding the student veteran experience, advisors can also suggest proactive methods by which to anticipate and address issues that may confront this student population particularly (DiRamio, Ackerman and Mitchell 2008).

Others’ lack of knowledge about military life may have a significant effect on student veterans’ experiences in higher education. In response to their peers’ ignorance of military life, veterans may associate primarily with other veterans on campus. Veterans have reported people behaving awkwardly around them and not being welcoming because they did not “understand” them or know how to interact with them (Rumann and Hamrick 2010). Furthermore, student veterans often feel frustrated by their peers’ immaturity—for example, when they ask questions such as, “Did you kill anyone over there?” or “Did you see anyone get blown up?” (Rumann and Hamrick 2010, p. 447).

Student veterans also relate their impatience with civilians who believe they have expert knowledge of a war, and they may try to avoid such conversations by avoiding speaking with civilians altogether (Rumann and Hamrick 2010). U.S. civilians hold many stereotypes of military life and personnel, and these are often evident. As a result, many veterans rely primarily on support from other military or ex-military personnel because of their trust in one another (Ellison et al. 2012).

Identifying student veterans is an important first step in helping them succeed in higher education. Yet as a result of the lack of support and understanding extended by campus peers and personnel, many do not want to be identified (DiRamio, Ackerman and Mitchell 2008). Creating supportive and veteran-friendly campuses is vital to encouraging veterans to identify rather than hide their military affiliation (Summerlot, Green and Parker 2009). And although university administrators do not need to have expert knowledge of the military, student veterans can benefit from having an advisor who is a veteran—or, at minimum, someone with some knowledge of military life.

Increasing the retention and enhancing the academic success of student veterans requires greater awareness of veterans on campus and an understanding of military life, veterans’ needs, and the benefits and other factors associated with student veterans’ non-traditional status. Veterans do not need to be treated differently from other students; nevertheless, it is important to recognize that their unique circumstances may justify exceptions to policies designed for traditional students. Zinger and Cohen (2010) found that veterans reported a lack of guidance in registering for classes and completing other administrative processes. Advisors who lack knowledge of the military experience and context may be unprepared to guide veter-
ans in translating their military experiences into academic success (Cahill et al. 2013).

Moreover, academic advisors who work primarily with traditional students may be unaware of how best to support veterans who need to withdraw from classes because of deployment; how to help them negotiate institutional policy regarding military transcripts; how to refer them to appropriate campus resources to discuss military education benefits; or how to ensure that they meet academic requirements to maintain their veterans’ benefits (Diramio, Ackerman and Mitchell 2008). Such knowledge is essential to effectively advise student veterans through degree completion. Furthermore, many veterans return from active duty with physical and/or psychological disabilities, and advisors must be able to refer them to campus resources that can provide appropriate support (Sinski 2012). Such issues may not be addressed when staff do not know exactly what student veterans need.

While many higher education organizations have issued recommendations for improving the academic advising of student veterans, no clear cut guidelines have been issued that specify the resources that must be available on college campuses to serve student veterans. For example, the American Council on Education (2010) noted that what works for one institution might not work for another, so although many institutions look to others for ways to make their campus more veteran friendly, this may not be the most effective approach. Instead, ACE (2010) suggests that faculty and staff who work with student veterans are best suited to determine what should be done to improve student veterans’ success at their institution.

Coll et al. (2009) expressed concern that university advisors, faculty, and counseling centers may not be prepared to provide adequate advising services to student veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. Faculty and staff members’ insufficient understanding of military occupations may prevent them from adequately assisting veterans with degree selection or planning. Working collaboratively with student veterans can help, but accessing outside resources such as the VA may also prove helpful (Cahill et al. 2013). Training faculty and staff to understand veterans’ issues and military culture may also improve the ability of advisors and others to assist student veterans (ACE 2010).

Veterans’ affairs personnel have continuously voiced the need for an individualized approach to advising student veterans. They urge university personnel to recognize that student veterans are a distinctive population of students who need unique resources yet do not necessarily want or need special treatment. Student veterans report that academic advisors and other staff and faculty who recognize students’ personal circumstances or situations are the most helpful (Johnson, 2009).

In some cases, efforts to accommodate these students may inadvertently result in institutions’ lowering their expectations of veterans. Branker (2009) noted that recognizing student veterans as a distinct population in need of unique resources does not necessitate lowering expectations. Nevertheless, student veterans may have some functional limitations, such as a disability, a full-time job that must be maintained while attending school, or other limitations resulting from their military experience. The literature has noted that knowledge of military life and limitations common to veterans is necessary to help veterans transition into academic life (ACE 2010; Branker 2009; Coll et al. 2009; Parks and Walker 2014; Wheeler 2011). Addressing the needs of student veterans and supporting them through degree completion is unquestionably important; but it is also important to treat them as being capable of successfully negotiating the challenges of higher education.

The present study used a mixed-methods design to investigate how higher education institutions advise veterans and how to enhance academic advisors’ effectiveness with student veterans. The purpose of the study was to examine how academic advisors help student veterans determine their degree goals and how well they help student veterans apply their military experiences and training to achieve their goals. The study sought to increase understanding of how student veterans are being served by academic advising staff and to identify ways to improve advisement of these students. Few studies have focused specifically on the academic advising of student veterans, and even fewer have investigated academic advising from student veterans’ perspective. The comments of the participants in this study can help institutions improve advising services for student veterans and clarify means by which to improve higher education services for a population that
has already sacrificed a great deal through its military service and which looks to make many more contributions as college-educated citizens.

METHODS
Participants
Fifty military veterans who currently or previously attended an institution of higher education participated in this study. (Of the original 51 military veterans, one was dropped from the study because he did not complete the first part of the survey.) The majority of participants (41) were male, which accurately reflects the gender distribution of the military. Among the participants, 31 were between the ages of 25 and 34 years, nine were between the ages of eighteen and 24 years, seven were between the ages of 35 and 44 years, two were between the ages of 45 and 54 years, and one was older than 55 years. Most participants (42) identified as Caucasian; four identified as Hispanic or Latino; one as black or African American; one as Asian or Pacific Islander; and two as “other.” Thirty-three participants had been to an active war zone; sixteen had not; and one did not respond to this question. The majority of the participants (30) served in the Army; eight each served in the Marine Corps and the Air Force; and four served in the Navy.

Only one participant was currently on active duty. With regard to the type of institution attended, ten participants indicated multiple types: 46 attended a public institution; eight attended a private institution; six attended a community college; and one attended a tech/trade/vocational/professional school. Three students completed (or are in the process of completing) an associate’s degree; 31 completed (or are in the process of completing) a bachelor’s degree; six completed (or are in the process of completing) a master’s degree; and three completed (or are in the process of completing) a doctorate. The most common program of study among the participants was criminal justice; business, education, engineering, and health care were also represented.

PROCEDURE
The present study utilized a mixed-methods design. The first half of the study was quantitative, using a survey method, and the second half was qualitative, using a semi-structured interview method. The researchers used the literature to inform design of a survey that would accurately assess participants’ academic advising experiences. The survey included three parts: the first solicited demographic information, the second asked about participants’ experiences with their academic advisor, and the third asked participants whether they were willing to participate in the second part of the study.

The researchers contacted colleagues of the primary researcher and asked them to distribute the survey to student veterans they knew. The co-researcher also contacted higher education institutions known to enroll large populations of student veterans and asked them to forward the survey to any who might be willing to participate. Many of the universities did not respond; the anonymous and electronic nature of the survey made it difficult to determine which institutions did respond.

Table 1 abbreviates the questions that were used to analyze participants’ responses in the quantitative portion of the study. (Note that the abbreviations symbolize the questions and are not variables.) Table 1 lists the questions in order as they appeared on the survey. It was also used as a key for analyzing descriptive statistics later in the study.

Of the 50 respondents, 25 initially volunteered to participate in the second part of the study; only five continued to the interview after receiving the informed consent form describing the qualitative portion of the study. The co-researcher conducted two interviews in person, two via phone, and one via email. With the exception of the interview conducted by email, each interview lasted between 30 and 40 minutes. The interviews were semi-structured, with questions sent to the participants beforehand.

The goal of the interviews was to obtain a more in-depth understanding of the experiences of student veterans than the survey could provide. All interviews were transcribed and returned so the participants could review them for accuracy. Once the researchers received the corrected transcriptions, they coded them according to themes identified among the responses. The researchers then compared the qualitative and the quantitative data in order to better understand the student veterans’ experiences with their academic advisors.
### Table 1.
**Survey Questions and Practical Abbreviations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heading</th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prepared</strong></td>
<td>1: How prepared were you to decide what you wanted to study before you enrolled at a higher education institution?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Related</strong></td>
<td>2: Did you choose a major related to your military experience?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inform</strong></td>
<td>3: How well did your academic advisor inform you of possible majors or programs of study?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Choice</strong></td>
<td>4: Did your military experiences affect your choice of major or program of study?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>UnderC</strong></td>
<td>5: How well did your academic advisor understand how your military experiences were related to your choice of major?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Office</strong></td>
<td>6: What office at your higher education institution was responsible for certifying your education benefits?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aware</strong></td>
<td>7a: Were you aware of any institutional policies to grant academic credit for your military education?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Know</strong></td>
<td>7b: If no, how knowledgeable was your academic advisor of possible institutional policies to grant credit?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NoTrans</strong></td>
<td>8a: If you attended more than one higher education institution, was there credit you earned that did not transfer to subsequent institutions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Appeal</strong></td>
<td>8b: If yes, were you aware of any mechanism to appeal the decision not to grant credit?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rules</strong></td>
<td>9a: Was your academic advisor aware of the rules regarding VA benefits?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Helpful</strong></td>
<td>9b: If yes, please rate on a scale from 1 to 9 how helpful this information was to you (1 being not at all and 9 being most helpful).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Skills</strong></td>
<td>10: To what extent do you feel that your academic advisor has the knowledge and skills to advise student veterans?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Import</strong></td>
<td>11: How important is it to you that your academic advisor has knowledge and understanding of your military experiences?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>UnderE</strong></td>
<td>12: To what extent did/does your academic advisor understand your military experiences?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>More</strong></td>
<td>13a: Do you think your academic advisor could have done/can do anything more to help you choose classes or develop an academic plan?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Specify</strong></td>
<td>13b: If yes, please specify:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Satisfac</strong></td>
<td>13c: Please rate on a scale from 1 to 9 your level of satisfaction with your academic advisor with regard to helping you choose classes or develop an academic plan (1 being not at all and 9 being most helpful).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Campus</strong></td>
<td>14a: Did your academic advisor have any knowledge of where to find other veterans’ resources on campus?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>KnowVet</strong></td>
<td>14b: How important is it to you that your academic advisor has knowledge about veterans’ resources on campus?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Veteran</strong></td>
<td>15a: Is/was your academic advisor a veteran?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HowHelp</strong></td>
<td>15b: If yes, please rate how helpful it was to have an academic advisor who was also a veteran.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Impact</strong></td>
<td>16a: Do you think that having an academic advisor who is also a military veteran has an impact on how he or she supports and advises you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PosNeg</strong></td>
<td>16b: If yes, please indicate how positive or negative you think that impact would be/is:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Advise</strong></td>
<td>17a: If your academic advisor was not a veteran, do you feel that he or she made assumptions based on stereotypes of military service?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stereo</strong></td>
<td>17b: If yes, please rate how much of an impact you feel that this has/had on how he or she advises you:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Opinion</strong></td>
<td>18a: Do you think that your academic advisor’s opinions of military service affected how he or she advised you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SDegree</strong></td>
<td>18b: If yes, please rate on a scale from 1 to 9 the degree to which those opinions affected how he or she advised you (1 being not at all and 9 being the most):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Effort</strong></td>
<td>19: How much effort has your academic advisor put into getting to know you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pursue</strong></td>
<td>20a: Have you ever been called to active duty while pursuing your education?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prior</strong></td>
<td>20b: How prepared do you think your academic advisor was/is to assist you with withdrawing from classes prior to deployment?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RESULTS
Quantitative

The majority of participants believed that their academic advisors did not have the skills or knowledge necessary to advise them. (See Table 2.1—particularly responses to the question abbreviated Skills.) More than half of participants (54 percent) assigned scores of 2 and 1, indicating that their advisors had little or no skills or knowledge necessary to advise student veterans. Responses to the questions abbreviated Import and UnderE (see Table 2.1) show that participants believe it is very important for academic advisors to have knowledge and understanding of military experiences; yet 66 percent of participants indicated that their academic advisors had little to no such understanding (Table 2.2, UnderE). In Table 2.2, the row Veteran shows the frequency distribution for how many participants’ academic advisors were veterans themselves; 74 percent were not veterans. Three of the four participants who did have academic advisors who were veterans indicated that it was helpful to have an academic advisor who was a veteran (see Table 3, HowHelp).

Figure 1 presents the campus offices that certify student veterans’ education benefits. The majority are certified by financial aid and registrar’s offices. Responses to the question abbreviated Rules (see Tables 2.2 and 3) indicate that the majority of participants’ academic advisors were not aware of the rules regarding VA benefits. However, nearly all (93 percent) of the participants who had academic advisors who were aware of the rules found their advisors’ input helpful. In Table 2.2, responses to the question abbreviated Aware shows that only half of the participants were aware of institutional policies to grant academic credit for military education. Participants who were not aware of such policies found their academic advisors were of little help. Nearly half (44 percent) found them neither knowledgeable nor unknowledgeable, and 40 percent indicated that their advisors were either very unknowledgeable or unknowledgeable. Responses to the question abbreviated NotVet (see Table 2.2) indicate that most participants had

Table 2.1.
Frequency Distribution of Scaled Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question*</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Frequency of Response Options (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepared</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inform</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UnderC</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Import</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UnderE</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KnowVet</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effort</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The table depicts the percentages of each response option for the questions that had participants scale their opinion on a 1–5 scale, with 1 being the lowest score and 5 being the highest (i.e., 1 being “not at all understanding” and 5 being “extremely understanding”) for various situations involving their academic advisors. The percentages total 100 in each row.

* The questions are abbreviated to one word in the table above. See Table 1 for the list of the question each word represents.
earned college credit previously that did not transfer. However, more than half (57 percent) of the students who indicated that they had earned credit that had not transferred also indicated that they were aware of procedures by which to appeal those decisions.

Table 2.1 presents a semi-even distribution of responses to the questions abbreviated Inform (i.e., how well participants’ academic advisors informed them about possible majors or programs of study) and Effort (i.e., the amount of effort the academic advisor invested in getting to know the student veteran). Table 2.1 also shows that the majority of participants felt that their academic advisors did not understand how their military experiences related to their choice of major (see responses to the question abbreviated UnderC); that their academic advisors did not know where to find other campus resources for veterans (responses to the question abbreviated Campus); and that their academic advisors were neither prepared nor unprepared to help them withdraw from classes prior to deployment (responses to the question abbreviated Prior).

Overall, most participants thought that their academic advisors could not have done anything more to help them choose classes or develop an academic plan (see responses to the question abbreviated More in Table 2.2). However, participants who indicated that their advisors could have done more suggested that they should have knowledge about veterans and how they differ from traditional students; should provide more information about degree programs and applying them to student veterans; and should be knowledgeable about veterans’ benefits and how they interface with institutional policies. (Figure 2 presents participants’ three primary suggestions.)
Table 3.
Descriptive Statistics for Survey Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question*</th>
<th>Valid N</th>
<th>Invalid N</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>V</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prepared</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>1.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Related</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inform</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>2.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UnderC</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>1.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>5.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aware</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NoTran</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.75</td>
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<tr>
<td>Appeal</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpful</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6.13</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>2.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>1.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Import</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UnderE</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specify</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfac</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>5.68</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>4.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KnowWet</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veteran</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HowHelp</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.33</td>
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Note: There were 50 participants in total, however, some participants chose not to answer some questions, and some questions only asked for a response based on the individual’s response to the previous question. This is indicated in the table by the Valid N, Invalid N, and N columns. If the N column is less than 50, then only some of the participants were required to respond.

* The questions are abbreviated to one word headings, as above. See Table 1 for the list of what each heading represents.
A few more participants believed that more information about degree programs and how they relate to student veterans would have been helpful.

Responses to the question abbreviated KnowVet (see Table 2.2) indicate that it is very important for academic advisors to be knowledgeable about resources for veterans on campus. Nearly all participants (93 percent) believed there would be an impact if academic advisors for student veterans were veterans themselves (see responses to the question abbreviated Impact in Table 2.2) and believed that the impact would be positive.

**Qualitative**

The five participants in the interview portion of the study reported substantively similar experiences. Table 4 presents the demographics of the participants by pseudonym. (For the purposes of the current research and the participants’ privacy, the researchers assigned a pseudonym to each participant.) John and Joe had similar experiences of their advisors treating them differently from other students because they were student veterans. Kevin had no trouble with his academic advisor whatsoever. John, Shelby, Robert, and Joe had similar challenges with their institutions as a whole. Joe reported that his academic advisor did not understand that even though he did not need any “special consideration,” he was not a traditional student; he needed his advisor to understand the challenges he faced that traditional students did not.

Kevin had a positive experience with his advisor and did not offer in-depth responses to the interview questions; he had a great academic advisor who treated him with respect and was very helpful. He therefore did not believe that having veteran academic advisors would be more or less beneficial; neither did he believe that anything about academic advising for student veterans needed to be changed. Because of these responses and how different Kevin’s experiences were from the other participants’, the researchers did not include his experiences in their analysis. Kevin’s qualitative feedback was reflective of the quantitative results in that some participants indicated they had a very positive experience and that nothing about academic advising needed to be changed.

The major themes that emerged from the remaining four interviews were as follows: recognition, knowledge, research, and education and integration.

**Recognition**

All four participants expressed similar frustrations that their academic advisors—and higher education institutions in general—consistently failed to recognize that as a nontraditional student population, student veterans should be treated as individuals rather than as a special case. Joe said:

> The [academic advisor] has treated me fine…just like any other student…. I might have had to ask them specific questions or things…I think they are used to dealing with traditional students who are younger going to school full-time. So having to explain my situation, being older and having to work and other challenges too, they don’t always get that.

Joe felt frustrated that he consistently had to explain to his advisors that he could not take certain classes because of the times they were offered. The other partici-
pants shared this frustration as well as Joe’s desire not to be treated as a special case.

Robert reported that his advisor was unable to understand the difference between acknowledging his circumstances and treating him as a special case and believed that his advisor placed too much emphasis on making college “easy” for veterans. Rather than helping them identify their genuine interests and succeed in their chosen programs, Robert’s advisor pushed him and other student veterans into easy classes. Robert explained:

At the time I was interested in biology, and [my advisor] was...adamant that I not pursue biology because I wouldn’t be able to get enough classes, that the classes were only offered during the day, and that [it] wasn’t going to be a program of study that I had any chance of completing. Even though my counter-argument was that...I planned on just going part time and then when I got out of the military I would go to school full time... he was able to convince me that that was not in my best interest and that pursuing this degree in criminal law that happened to have a whole bunch of military people all in the same class—we really weren’t even very diverse as far as a class goes—just to try to push them through to get their degree.

Shelby discussed a violent relationship while she was in the military as well as the harassment she experienced from her superior and how these impacted her in college and today. She did not want to be treated differently be-
cause of the psychological disabilities that resulted from her devastating personal experiences, so she tried to hide them. She explained:

I actually had a service dog, though not what you would initially think of for someone who has never been to combat. I wanted to get married and chose the wrong guy…this led me into an abusive relationship. I had a service dog but with therapy I tried to move forward maybe a little too quickly. I didn’t want the stigma of people wondering why I had one as well as my veteran status. In an educational environment you have to be very open to discussing things, and I wasn’t yet, so I tried to hide it by going without him. It’s been tough. Stress levels from my anxiety and depression from [interpartner violence] and holding a full-time or even a part-time job and attending [the university] aren’t very conducive to success.

John’s academic advisor treated him very well but tried to convince him not to go into marketing allegedly because he did not believe that veterans could be creative. His advisor warned him that he would not make any money in marketing. All four participants believe that academic advisors need to recognize that nontraditional students encounter challenges that traditional students do not. Yet they also voiced a concern that advisors would put them into a “robot veteran” box and fail to treat them as distinct individuals (as they would traditional students).

Knowledge

Another pervasive theme was that most academic advisors are not veterans and therefore lack knowledge of military experience—knowledge that would be valuable in advising student veterans. John, Robert, and Joe experienced their advisors’ lack of knowledge about the military in a variety of ways, the most common being stereotypes their advisors held about military personnel that affected how they advised their student veterans. When speaking to him about his passion for marketing, John encountered his academic advisor’s ignorance: “The only negative stereotype my advisor held was that all military guys make great business operation guys, and we’re not that creative. That generalization pissed me off, and I told him so.”

Robert had a bit more difficulty with his advisor’s stereotypes about military personnel:

[H]e thought we were all stupid...he never thought we were educated enough to choose our own classes, to really know how to advise ourselves, ...so there was a degree of superiority and making sure that we walk this very narrow line, and it’s almost like he...put so much structure in it, it’s almost like it matched the military structure. The problem is that the structure he put in it was rather harmful.

Joe found his advisor supportive of his changing his major from engineering to business, but he voiced his anger that the reason his advisor supported the change was because he believed it would be easier for him:

[I]t was frustrating. I really liked my advisor, but I could tell that he...thought I was an idiot even though I got average grades. He said, “It’s probably better that you are moving to business, because you aren’t ready for engineering.” I thought that was insulting. I chose engineering because of what I did in the military—my job I did in the military—and he is telling me I’m not ready for it? I sort of got the idea that he thought that because I was a Marine.

John wished his academic advisor had more knowledge of military life:

I absolutely don’t believe that my advisor had an understanding of military personnel. It was almost laughable as he attempted to help me with my resume and translate my military skills and abilities learned from my experiences into an understandable business resume.

He believed he would have had a much easier time with a veteran as an academic advisor. Shelby had a similar experience:

Having a veteran advisor would make me feel like someone was on my side. In the beginning I felt like I had to fight everyone to get things done and square away paperwork, find all the answers on my own, which is fine, but there isn’t a supportive network here for military folks.

None of the participants’ academic advisors was a veteran, and although some reported that they received good advising, they nevertheless believed that having a veteran as an academic advisor—or at least having an advisor who
had more knowledge about military personnel and military life—would have been beneficial.

Research

All of the participants believed that academic advisors who advise student veterans should do some research on military life and that they should research the experiences of the specific veterans they advise. Joe and Shelby both stated that academic advisors should get to know their student veterans and become familiar with their military experiences. Joe suggested that academic advisors should speak to veterans, ask what they needed to know about military life, and then research that information. Shelby said, “Get to know [us]. We have skill sets! Just talk to us!”

John’s academic advisor did not research military life. As a result, John felt that his academic advisor was constantly trying to get him to take classes and do things that he would have understood John did not want to do if only he had done some research or tried to get to know John better. John offered this advice:

Do your research on what the student veteran did in the military, and ask what he did or did not like about his job function. Ask about interests and hobbies and what our passions are. Don’t think you can stick a round peg in a square hole, because before we were veterans, we were people too.

Robert was much more vocal about advisors’ need to research military life before advising student veterans. His advisor was knowledgeable about transferring credits and awarding credit for military experience because he often worked with military personnel. Robert noted, “While he was used to working with a lot of military people, [my advisor] really had no knowledge about...what it was to be in the military.”

Robert continued:

If the institution has the ability to put veterans in advising roles, that is helpful because it’s not so much about what questions to ask as what questions not to ask. At least when they ask questions they have the ability to show empathy because they know what that was like to actually have served.... If they are not veterans, they have to be able to show empathy and not sympathy. You know, they have to be able to say, “Gosh, I can’t imagine being in your shoes” and really be able to connect on a deeper level instead of saying, “Gosh, that’s just terribly sad.”

If there’s that person who can connect with them, who encourages a veteran to open up more.... And it’s gotten worse over the years, so they don’t have the time to develop a relationship with the veteran, so it only comes across as being very dry, very mechanical, and then if they’re trying to push you in a direction that you don’t want to go, then you just don’t trust them.

Education and Integration

To various extents, all participants believed that higher education institutions as a whole should educate the campus community about military life and encourage academic advisors to help student veterans integrate into the culture of higher education. All participants reported that connecting with non-veterans was difficult because of non-veterans’ ignorance about military life.

Joe and Robert both discussed peers’ as well as instructors’ lack of knowledge about military personnel and how this led them to isolate themselves from non-veterans on campus. Joe said:

In one of my first classes in college, I was sitting in class, and I don’t know how but I guess this girl knew I was in the Marines because she asked me out of nowhere if I had ever killed anyone. I didn’t answer her; I sort of just walked out, but how stupid can you be?

Robert cringed at similar questions that were often directed at him as his haircut alerted many of his peers to his veteran status:

There’s always this discomfort ... that they are going to judge you. Some people don’t like the military, so you’re always walking this fine line. I even tell people today that I don’t put my military experience on my resume anymore—that I wait and then bring it up depending on whether or not I feel that the committee would be open to knowing that I spent those years in the military. Because there are a lot of people who judge military service negatively or think that we all have PTSD and that we’re gonna go crazy or be problematic in the office. And it’s really a negative stereotype for some people out there.

And then you always have this fear they’re going to ask you that question—“Did you kill anybody?”—and that’s just such an awkward question. Because if
you say no then the very next question is, “Did you see somebody get killed?” So there’s no escape from having to relive those memories of the time that you served.

I think about my haircut: Everybody knew I was in the military. So if you’re just coming out of the military—or you’re still active duty but you’re trying to take college classes—you open yourself up to people asking those questions, and you know the other students think that you’re some kind of freak on campus because you’re not part of the fraternities and the sororities, and a lot of time you’re not the traditional age. So you don’t really fit socially, and then you have an advisor who doesn’t make you fit academically because you’re not pursuing a degree that you feel is worthwhile to pursue.

Shelby felt that she had very positive experiences interacting with non-veterans as long as she did not identify herself as a veteran. Most people did not know she was a veteran, and she liked it that way. However, she did state that it would have been helpful to her success and happiness on campus if her institution had promoted knowledge about military personnel.

John said that institutions should promote greater knowledge about veterans and help connect veterans to student organizations. All participants believed it would be beneficial to have an academic advisor who was also a veteran, but they primarily wanted people on campus to know more about the military.

DISCUSSION
The qualitative and quantitative results of the present study demonstrate that student veterans believe they can succeed in higher education; however, they also believe they would have a much easier and happier experience if their academic advisors were also veterans—or at least were more knowledgeable about where to find other veterans and resources for veterans on their campuses. Student veterans are a unique population of nontraditional students, and the academic advising of student veterans should cater to each individual student’s needs rather than reflect a singular policy for all student veterans. Robert’s academic advisor directed all of his student veteran advisees into criminal law. Rather than recognizing these students as unique individuals with varying skills, interests, and needs, he assumed that all student veterans must be directed to what he believed to be the easiest program of study.

In a study conducted at Appalachian State University, Johnson (2009) found that when student soldiers on reserve were deployed, the university was prepared to handle the students’ withdrawals and other academic needs because it allowed academic advisors and other administrators to employ individual policies (rather than one blanket policy) for each student. Making a connection with each individual student veteran and advising on a case-by-case basis further eased the Appalachian State student veterans’ reenrollment when they returned from deployment (Johnson 2009).

The 51 participants in the first part of the present study were enrolled in 28 different academic programs; only half of the participants reported that their military experiences had influenced their choice of major. These results reflect the diversity of this student population and demonstrate why a blanket advising policy for student veterans is not likely to be the most effective or useful approach. That said, student veterans also encounter many shared risk factors that threaten their degree completion.

Robert’s experience demonstrates how academic advisors may push student veterans into inappropriate fields of study in an effort to ensure or at least facilitate student success. However, efforts to help student veterans should not include treating them as ignorant, incapable, or “special cases.” Joe and John were able to stay on their chosen academic paths despite feeling pressure to pursue certain majors because of their status as veterans. Academic advisors are in a prime position to influence student veterans; it is therefore crucial that knowledge of their nontraditional status not translate into lowered expectations (Branker 2009).

The literature suggests that academic advisors who understand the complexities of military life and are knowledgeable about campus resources for veterans are vital to student veterans’ success (Parks and Walker 2014, Wheeler 2012). The results of the current study support these findings. Most of the participants indicated that their academic advisors had little or no understanding of how their military experiences impacted their choice of major or program of study. They reported that their advisors lacked knowledge of institutional policies that grant credit for military experiences; had little or no knowledge of the rules governing VA benefits; had little or no understanding of their advisees’ military experiences; were un-
aware of resources available to support student veterans on campus; and invested little if any effort in getting to know them. Participants in both the quantitative and qualitative sections of the study highlighted these concerns.

All four participants in the qualitative section of the study specifically identified knowledge of military life and military personnel as important issues. Robert and Joe noted, for example, that academic advisors’ knowledge of military experiences would help student veterans feel more comfortable speaking with them. Participants in DiRamo, Ackerman and Mitchell’s (2008) study likewise noted that as student veterans, they needed their academic advisors to understand and have knowledge of military personnel and culture and to be able to direct them to veterans’ resources both on and off campus. The findings from Rumann and Hamrick’s (2010) study were similar, although student veterans in their study also perceived themselves as more interdependent than civilians and reported that civilians were awkward around them and did not understand them.

In both sections of this study, participants were adamant that while it may be preferable for academic advisors to be veterans, it is not essential; nevertheless, advisors should conduct research in order to enhance their understanding of military experiences, VA benefits, and veterans’ resources. Because veterans often have trouble navigating unfamiliar university bureaucracies, many believe they would benefit from having an academic advisor who could help them do so (Vacchi 2012). Shelby specifically noted that because her academic advisor had no idea how to help her, she had to contact a veteran outside of her university to get answers to her questions about VA benefits. The majority of the original 50 participants in the current study noted that academic advisors’ knowledge of the military and of resources available to assist student veterans was important to them, yet many reported that their academic advisors lacked such knowledge. Academic advisors can easily seek this information in order to better advise their student veterans.

The current study suggests that educating higher education staff and faculty about military experience and integrating student veterans into the campus community are the most important factors in helping student veterans succeed. Academic advising is important to student success because advisors are in a unique position to help students identify a program of study suited to their interests and abilities; to create a plan for students to graduate on time; and to identify campus and community resources to help them overcome the unique obstacles and challenges they face. The majority of student veterans who responded to the survey believed that their advisors’ opinions and beliefs about the military had an impact on how they advised them. John, Shelby, Robert, and Joe would have benefitted if their advisors had more accurate knowledge of military personnel and held fewer stereotypes.

LIMITATIONS

The mixed-methods design of the present study decreased the number of limitations that would be present in a study that relied on quantitative or qualitative methods alone. However, some limitations could not be avoided. For example, the response rate was low despite the number of surveys sent electronically. This is a common limitation of quantitative studies that utilize a survey method (Johnson and Turner 2003). Nevertheless, the anonymity provided to survey respondents likely facilitated responses; veterans typically prefer to interact and discuss their experiences with other veterans and do not feel comfortable discussing their experiences with non-veterans (Zinger and Cohen 2010). The open-ended questions included in the survey yielded many vague responses or no responses at all; data analysis would have been incomplete if these responses had been included (Johnson and Turner 2003). Nevertheless, an interview can yield more extensive and comprehensive data than a survey (Johnson and Turner 2003). Inclusion of the qualitative section of the study thus helped the researchers learn more about the military experiences of those student veterans who were willing to share them. That said, in the interview section of the study, many of the participants might not have been forthcoming or honest about their experiences either because of the lack of anonymity inherent in an interview (Johnson and Turner 2003) or because of the co-researcher’s non-veteran status. It is difficult to know whether and to what extent the participants’ responses were affected by the presence of the non-veteran co-researcher; however, the co-researcher did inform the participants that the primary researcher is a veteran and invited them to contact him directly if they would feel more comfortable speaking to him.
CONCLUSION
The results of the present study are consistent with the literature, which indicates that student veterans desire a stronger connection with their academic advisors; assistance in being connected with other student veterans; and mentoring or other assistance from veterans who understand their experiences and challenges. It also confirms previous findings that student veterans need information about VA benefits as well as referrals to campus offices that administer these benefits, and it reinforces the importance of higher education staff and faculty learning more about military life and experiences (Pellegrin 2013; Physioc 2012; Rumann and Hamrick 2009). Given the key role of academic advisors in college student success (Drake 2011), helping student veterans succeed in higher education should begin with improving the ability of academic advisors to effectively serve student veterans.

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THE WAR ON LEARNING: GAINING GROUND IN THE DIGITAL UNIVERSITY
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In The War on Learning, self-described digital rhetorician Elizabeth Losh contends that postsecondary institutions in the United States have willingly adopted commodity solutions to instructional technology (i.e., learning management systems) when they would be better served to have invested resources in new practices of digital literacy. In this highly academic and technically specific book, Losh states that online learning platforms, interfaces, and codes require “knowledge of technical specifics as well as practical pedagogical application” (p. 8) but err too often on the side of profit and bottom-line efficiencies that undervalue intellectual development and scholarly participation.

Losh argues that “instructional technology shapes interaction, mediates communication, participates in social relations, and amplifies the message of the instructor” (p. 5). Technology, therefore, is far from a neutral transmitter of information. Rather, it reflects biases and hidden assumptions that both influence and are influenced by classroom instruction. Three critical theoretical frameworks guide the discussion: (a) object-oriented ontology; (b) media archaeology; and (c) feminist theory, as related to boundary objects, infrastructure, and situated interactions (p. 3).

Losh identifies her intended audience as college and university presidents but acknowledges that they tend to focus on grand visions for institutions rather than granular details of instructional technology. However, consistent with the findings of Chopp, Frost, and Weiss (2014), she notes that college presidents “have to make decisions on a daily basis about where resources are invested—and when, how, and why and for whom” (p. 15). This challenge becomes more difficult as instructional technology increases rather than decreases costs.

COMPETITION AND CONFLICT VS. COOPERATION
Losh proposes that in the current era of “socially networked computing,” academic and popular forms of instruction should converge to support a “life-long culture of inquiry, collective intelligence, and distributed learning practices” (p. 18). Instead, higher education has created an environment that emphasizes competition and conflict over cooperation (p. 27). By way of example, Losh describes a “war on learning” in which faculty members use technology to “command and control” while students use technology to “game the system.” She suggests that stake-
holders in higher education must find common ground with one another to realize the full potential of the digital technologies they use every day.

In an especially powerful example of conflict, Losh discusses a series of YouTube videos in which students exhibit techniques for cheating on exams. Media outlets seized upon these “cheating videos” as an example of how students are using technology to undermine or “game” the educational system, yet Losh points out that beyond the ethical issues of cheating, the students in these videos demonstrate mastery of key concepts and proficiency with knowledge transfer. More to the point, she suggests that these “cheating videos” raise two critical questions for educators to consider:

What’s wrong with the education system that students can subvert conventional tests so easily?

What’s right with YouTube culture that encourages participation, creativity, institutional subversion, and satire? (p. 23)

Losh suggests further that when instructors use meaningful learning activities and develop exams that require students to apply knowledge rather than simply memorize and restate course content, learning assessments can become “virtually uncheatable” (Lang 2013, p. 61).

ADJUSTING TO THE NEW NORMAL

A number of academic reformers have proposed disabling Internet connections or prohibiting the use of electronic devices in order to create classrooms free from distraction. Yet Losh argues that such an approach to classroom management is unreasonable: “It may be possible to ban laptops and lock down desktops, but as computing devices become even smaller, with smart phones that are impossible to ban, a return to the analog classroom seems like a quixotic fantasy” (p. 72).

In this persistent tug-of-war between traditional forms of instruction and information technology, Losh suggests that the current debate need not be either/or. In fact, she describes successful teachers as individuals who can manage multiple channels of communication at the same time. Pragmatic bridge building between instructors and students is critical at a time when the “gulf between a culture of knowledge and a culture of information is only getting wider” (p. 46).

Losh believes that in addition to using technology, students must prepare for and make sense of emergent, technology-enhanced instruction. She recommends that students receive more rhetorical training in appropriate uses of classroom technologies. She states, “Those [students] who lack digital literacy and competence in digital rhetoric could find themselves economically and professionally disadvantaged, deprived of social capital, alienated from critical social networks, and unable to collaborate or solve problems effectively” (p. 89).

COMMERCIALIZATION OF EDUCATION

Losh expresses concern that online commercial platforms in education (e.g., Blackboard, Desire2Learn) are marketed and adopted for use by universities on the basis of current trends in higher education rather than the quality of their content and ability to facilitate authentic learning. These corporate products “cannot be altered by the educational consumer as the primary vehicle of informational content that shapes curricula” (p. 143). For many, this limitation contradicts the promise of an “open system” in which users can “reuse, revise, remix, and redistribute” resources (p. 138).

Distance Education

While innovations in instructional podcasts and “coursecasts” are evolving, Losh notes that relatively little has been done to conceptualize them as a distinct rhetorical genre separate from a live lecture performance. She observes, “Instructional technology often imagines teaching as a delivery system rather than an interpersonal relationship” (p. 97). Reducing the instructional process to the mere delivery of information diminishes the experience and discredits the role of emotions in the process of teaching and learning—which, she says, is fundamental to the human experience (p. 134). In fact, Losh suggests that many distance learning courses are more like traffic school tutorials than dynamic classroom experiences that encourage discussion and debate (p. 109).

MOOCs

One of the most visible, recent developments in large-scale distance learning in higher education is Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)—courses delivered electronically, and usually free of charge, to massive audiences...
via the Internet. Losh describes MOOCs as “command-and-control” course management systems that promote “efficiency in learning” (p. 158) rather than dynamic and individualized learning experiences.

Despite widespread praise for the use of MOOCs in higher education, discussion of if and how such a delivery system may disrupt the foundations of traditional education is emerging. Losh notes that despite the rapid expansion of MOOCs, “there has been surprisingly little empirical study of the student experience in MOOC education” (p. 127). The most vocal critics of MOOCs argue that such courses are homogenizing American education and limiting academic freedom that promotes diversity of opinion. Ultimately, Losh reminds the reader that online distance education options are essentially experiments in which failure is still a distinct possibility (p. 127).

**BLURRED LINES**

Losh also addresses the issue of technology and plagiarism in *The War on Learning*. In the highly competitive and digitally connected college campus environment, she describes online services which allow students to purchase term papers (e.g., WeTakeYourClass.com). She also cites the Center for Academic Integrity, which found that students believe “cut and paste plagiarism—using a sentence or two (or more) from different sources on the Internet and weaving this information together into a paper without appropriate citation—is not a serious issue” (p. 158).

To address issues of misappropriation and plagiarism, many campuses use plagiarism-detection software (e.g., Turnitin) that uses an algorithm to scan student papers for previously published information or academic work. Losh, however, describes mounting criticisms among certain factions of university faculty regarding the use of such software. While some faculty members argue that enforcing academic standards and policies would be untenable without the assistance of a monitoring system, others see it as a violation of student privacy and an issue that may have implications regarding ownership of intellectual property and due process (p. 163).

Losh suggests that the use of plagiarism-detection software pits faculty and students against one another. Citing Purdy, Losh notes that “technology and writing have become so tightly enmeshed (that) the technological character of written discourse is in danger of becoming invisible” (p. 158). That is to say, the questions of fair use and acceptable text practices have become less clear as the two media have converged. These issues become even more complicated when “collective and collaborative authorship is so important in the academy and valued in the professional world” (p. 159). Losh believes that more work needs to be done to promote a holistic approach to information literacy among students.

Losh also notes that the increase in the use and presence of digital technology on college campuses amplifies the largely unseen infrastructure that enables user connectivity and places greater demands on its continuous maintenance and improvement. She describes the ubiquitous use of mobile technologies and suggests that universities benefit from the “blurring of work and leisure” (p. 178). She states, “The on-call availability of faculty and students on smart phones strengthens the extractive capacities (output) of the university as an institution” (p. 178). This argument, however, assumes that productivity increases simply because more individuals are available to connect with one another outside of class or regular office hours. This is a bold assertion that may or may not be true.

**ALTERNATE REALITIES**

Losh describes a number of digital innovations that have been developed to extend the classroom into virtual worlds; the most recognizable is Second Life (SL). In SL, individuals interact with one another through avatars or graphic representations of themselves. The author states that while there are a few notable examples of well-rendered and educationally salient environments, the challenges of SL and similar software seem to outweigh the benefits. In many cases, students come to SL with disparate skills and abilities and frequently have difficulty manipulating the avatar to perform simple operations. Losh compares such an experience to “teaching a class of preschoolers who were likely to wander off or succumb to strange bouts of fidgeting” (p. 193).

In addition to virtual environments, the author notes the ongoing debate in higher education regarding the “gamification” of learning or applying gaming principles to the instructional process in order to engage students in learning course content. While games may stimulate responses to extrinsic rewards (e.g., points, badges), they frequently diminish intrinsic motivation for learning. According to
Losh, one of the most significant challenges to educational online games is that they underestimate students’ willingness to commit to difficult intellectual work (p. 205).

Losh notes that games, like other forms of media, have tremendous potential to enrich human experiences, encourage critical thinking, and test hypotheses (p. 217). However, to be effective, they must allow users to “alter inputs to infer how different influences, catalysts, or factors may play a role in the outcomes” (p. 218). Losh recommends that instructors in higher education move beyond extrinsic “rewarding” to help students develop the efficacy they need to solve real-world problems.

MOVING FORWARD
Ultimately, Losh suggests that the educational enterprise is still a human endeavor; for that reason, educators and administrators have to make intentional decisions about how and why technologies are used. Specifically, university faculty members should engage in the very human process of teaching and learning rather than blindly incorporate the newest, most exciting technology tool or application that may or may not support student learning.

Losh identifies a number of simple principles that can be used to guide pedagogy and decision making:

- Faculty should treat students the way they would like to be treated with regard to digital technology. For example, faculty should be discouraged from using “intrusive technologies” (e.g., digital countdown quizzes, monitoring tools in learning management systems to track student activity) and spying on students’ social network profiles.

- Faculty and students should use the same tools for learning. Rather than requiring expensive but inefficient instructional technologies (e.g., clickers, licenses for learning management systems), students should have access to and instruction in the use of digital resources that are frequently limited to faculty research (e.g., 3D modeling labs, geographic information systems, robot-
ics). Separation of technologies only reinforces the notion that “students are second-class citizens who only deserve non-faculty gadgets” (p. 226).

Technology in the classroom can make education feel more special. Losh identifies unique ways to use digital technology to enhance rather than replace classroom instruction (e.g., hackathons, Wikistorms). She notes that working in teams and producing multiple drafts of a concept are critical experiences, yet “students mostly gain competence in these areas outside of the classroom” (p. 232).

Educators need to think beyond the novelty of devices. “The worst reason to implement a new instructional technology is because it is new. Yet newness is the most common reason that educational gizmos get adopted in the first place” (p. 237). Simply stated, students need models that have been tested, not fads.

SUMMARY

The War on Learning is a provocative account of the largely unexamined topics of instructional technology and digital literacy in higher education in the United States. The content and source material in this book are well-referenced and theoretically rich, but the extensive use of end notes disrupts the flow of the text. Also, the author does not fully articulate the questions that guide her discussion until the last chapter of the book. She asks, “How can we influence the digital university to be more inclusive, generative, just, and constructive?” (p. 224). Knowing these questions in advance would have established a context for digital technology and communicated the author’s own biases and assumptions from the outset.

Individuals who are unfamiliar with the topic may have difficulty deciphering the vast lexicon associated with digital technology. Further, Losh’s highly specialized knowledge and unnecessarily complicated writing style make the text difficult to read and understand. Undoubtedly, digital literacy and instructional technology will continue to play an increasingly important role on college and university campuses, especially as educators strive to meet the needs of a digitally oriented student population. This book, however, seems better suited to individuals who already have extensive experience with the subject matter. Therefore, The War on Learning may have limited appeal to a broader audience.

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About the Author

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MINDS ON FIRE: HOW ROLE-IMMERSION GAMES TRANSFORM COLLEGE

CARNES, M. C. 2014. CAMBRIDGE, MA: HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS. 387 PP.

Reviewed by Matthew Fifolt, Ph.D.

In Minds on Fire, Mark Carnes, professor of history at Barnard College-Columbia University, suggests that higher education in the United States is not “all wrong” but rather “only half right” (p. 13). The current pedagogical system, characterized by rational, hierarchical, and well-ordered structures, often overlooks the equally important aspects of the human experience related to “emotion, mischievous subversion, social engagement, and creative disorder” (p. 13). Carnes suggests that active-learning pedagogies, such as Reacting to the Past and other historical simulations, resonate deeply with students and allow them to lose themselves in the experience (p. 312).

For this investigation, Carnes interviewed more than 90 students enrolled at 30 colleges and universities over a four-year period to learn more about the motivational power of role-immersion curricula. Carnes notes that role-immersion courses are designed to promote in-class, interactive engagement. In fact, unlike many of his contemporaries who see online courses as the future of higher education, Carnes envisions role immersion as transforming traditional classroom pedagogies such that students will actually want to come to school (p. 15).

Carnes observes that historically, U.S. higher education has struggled to engage undergraduate students in academic pursuits. In fact, recent findings reveal that students continuously demonstrate high levels of academic disengagement (Arum and Roska 2010) and low levels of motivation and interest (Bowen, Chingos and McPherson 2009). Further, faculty members, driven by a system that
rewards scholarship over teaching (Bok 2013), continue to
finds ways to “free themselves from the ‘burden’ of under-
graduate instruction” (p. 21). Researchers have described
this phenomenon as an educational stalemate in which
students do as little as possible to receive the highest pos-
sible grades while faculty members focus on their research
in order to earn promotion and tenure (Arum and Roska

Consistent with the findings of Cox (2009), Carnes
argues, “Colleges underachieve because the predomi-
nant modes of instruction are inadequate learning tools”
(p. 29). Despite calls for reforming the curriculum to in-
clude more active-learning pedagogies (Bok 2013, Johans-
on and Felten 2014), Carnes identifies three primary
obstacles: (a) lack of resources to reward innovative teach-
ing, (b) faculty preference to cling to professional con-
ventions, and (c) student apprehension of active-learning
approaches (p. 29). However, Carnes’ development of
Reacting to the Past, which he describes as “innovation by
accident,” marked a significant shift in his thinking about
classroom teaching and student learning.

Frustrated with his own lecture-style class in the mid
1990s, Carnes reformatted his seminar for first-year his-
tory students to include classroom debates. He noticed
that given the latitude to shape the scenarios, students
came to embody the personas of historical figures and thus
drew other students into the “game.” Carnes reflects, “Stu-
dents grew more comfortable with their assigned roles and
philosophical assumptions. They argued with conviction
and force. Their [student] papers in support of oral argu-
ments were informed by texts I had not assigned” (p. 34).
Students immersed themselves in history. The seeds of Re-
acting to the Past had been planted.

SUBVERSIVE PLAY
For more than 200 years, college students have created
play worlds separate from the formal structures of colleges
and universities as a way to subvert “existing social hier-
archies and cultural assumptions” (p. 43). Carnes suggests
that student behaviors and activities often are driven by
competition. And although they may be perceived as an-
tithetical to institutional structures, they are merely thinly
veiled actions “behind masks of metaphors, secrecy, and
make-believe” (p. 46).

Beginning with literary and debating societies of the
late 19th century, Carnes provides a brief overview of
subversive play on college campuses to demonstrate the
prevalence of student competitions over time. By the early
20th century, fraternities and football stood as “the twin
pillars of student life” (p. 52). By the 1980s and early 1990s,
subversive play was dominated by competitive drinking
games and binge drinking. More recently, students have
reported extensive involvement in online gaming and en-
gagement through social media. Carnes reminds readers
that even Facebook, now accepted as part of everyday life,
started out as subversive play when “undergraduate Mark
Zuckerberg hacked into Harvard’s information system,
uploaded thousands of pictures of female students, and
invited viewers to judge which were the hottest” (p. 57).

Carnes argues that the more faculty and administrators
attempt to eliminate these activities or to warn students of
their dangers, the more appealing they become. Con-
sequently, subversive play is frequently driven further un-
derground. The author concludes that as long as students
are engaged in and consumed by social competitions, their
minds can never truly be engaged in academic pursuits.

DISRUPTING THE ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT
While Reacting games are held in academic settings,
Carnes suggests that when college instructors allow sub-
versive play worlds to exist in which students assume the
identities of their characters, “the walls of authority seem
to dissolve” (p. 65). The author describes Reacting games
as dynamic representations of historical events that are
more similar to complex and rapidly changing puzzles
than debates or exercises in role playing (p. 72).

Because students are responding to their peers in char-
acter, anything can happen at any moment. Students use
historical texts and writings to support their arguments
in oral presentations and writing assignments. Through-
out the game, the instructor functions as guide and game
master, providing rapid feedback on assignments and
prompting individuals or coalitions with notes, tips, and
recommendations of additional resources. As students
play, it is the game master’s prerogative to introduce new
(and actual) historical developments—action that fre-
quently results in dynamic shifts in power. Thus, the con-
clusions of Reacting games do not always mirror actual
historical outcomes. Carnes explains that at the end of
the final game session, the instructor guides students in a
discussion about similarities and differences between the
outcomes of the game and historical reality.

According to Carnes, Reacting games serve as a bridge
that enables students to engage in the life of the mind;
participation compels students to seek resources and to
partake in authentic and meaningful learning experiences.
One student said, “The game was fake; we all knew that.
But the goal—influencing your peers, making your voice
heard, saying something worth hearing—that was very
real” (p. 78). Role-immersion classes change students in
fundamental ways. “By internalizing different selves and
ideas, these students asked themselves more questions
about who they were and what they believe” (p. 122)—the
ultimate definition, according to Carnes, of developing
critical thinking skills.

SUCCEEDING BY FAILING

Consistent with other findings, Carnes notes that many
of the students in the current generation are paralyzed by
fear of failure (Chambliss and Takacs 2014, Cox 2009).
Despite outward displays of self-confidence, they secretly
harbor deep feelings of anxiety and self-doubt that can
be activated at the first self-perception of academic inade
quacy. Frequently, these students become so risk averse
that they avoid any situation that might expose their
doubts or uncertainties. Because Reacting games are de
signed to replicate historical reality, “failure” for some stu
dents is inevitable, eliminating some of the anxiety that
otherwise might accompany academic pursuits and class
room learning. Carnes has observed firsthand how role
immersion games have taught students not only how to
deal with failure but also how to grow because of it.

Carnes recounts one Reacting game in which a stu
dent’s power base began to unravel. The game master of
this particular course described the look on the student’s
face as “a combination of discouragement, bewilderment,
and amusement” (p. 344). Upon reflection, the student
indicated that the most important lesson she learned from
Reacting was that life is full of uncertainty, and failure is
always a possibility. Fear of failure should never deter an
individual from pursuing an academic task. In describing
active-learning pedagogies, Johansson and Felton (2014)
suggest that it is the job of faculty and staff members to
“help students experience the appropriate amount of chal
lange at the appropriate time...stretching the student into
discomfort without tearing him [or her] apart” (p. 21).

BUILDING COMMUNITY

Carnes describes various engagement initiatives that col
lege and university instructors have developed in order to
retain first-year students, including learning communities
and first-year seminars. The problem with these initiatives,
he says, is that they tend to attract like-minded individu
als. Rather than “forcing” interactions, Carnes recom
mends involving students in role-immersion courses. He
notes that Reacting scenarios foster community by creat
ing “complex and intellectually demanding competitions”
(p. 198); he illustrates this rich web of social relationships
through social network analysis. Further, he argues that if
bricks-and-mortar institutions are to survive, “the college
classroom must itself become the focal point of intellectu
ally vital communities” (p. 201).

ADVANCING INTERDISCIPLINARY LEARNING

Perhaps Carnes’ strongest argument for role-immersion
pedagogies is that they fulfill the interdisciplinary man
date of general education. Specifically, role-immersion
courses engage students in learning, enhance the develop
ment of higher cognitive skills, foster more creative think
ing, increase student sensitivity to ethical issues, and lead
to a greater tolerance of ambiguity (Chopp, Frost and
Weiss 2014). Further, Carnes suggests that Reacting games
can encourage faculty members to collaborate with col
leagues in other academic departments.

In Remaking College, Hill (2014) notes that the oppor
unity to work across departments—or disciplines—can
appeal to faculty members’ core motivations, including
autonomy, community, recognition, and efficacy. Some
faculty members have reported that Reacting games have re
vitalized their scholarship (Carnes 2014, 280). In response
to critics of Reacting to the Past, Carnes argues that role
immersion courses are not intended to replace but rather to
complement traditional curriculum. Role-immersion and
traditional pedagogies differ from yet support one another.

SUMMARY

Carnes does a commendable job of sharing the successes as
well as some of the pitfalls of Reacting courses —including
suggestions for how to deal with reticent student partici
pains and “ slackers” who fail to complete assignments or study the texts upon which their roles are based. Despite these challenges, Carnes argues that students in Reacting courses (as compared to those in many traditional courses) cannot hide from their instructors or from one another. Rather, Reacting courses compel students to engage with one another. According to the students he interviewed, positive peer pressure encourages students to work harder to prepare for these courses than they had for any in which they had previously enrolled. Yet students repeatedly emphasized that preparing for Reacting courses never seemed like work.

Carnes articulates the benefits of Reacting games throughout the book, but listing them may have helped the reader. A bulleted list of benefits might include the following:

- Reacting to the Past:
  - Promotes critical thinking and authentic learning
  - Requires student engagement and participation
  - Provides an alternative to less productive forms of subversive play
  - Builds student communities around common goals
  - Allows students to ‘fail’ in safe environments
  - Fosters empathy and encourages deep reflection
  - Teaches consensus building and skills to both lead and follow
  - Promotes interdisciplinary and creative thinking

Carnes’ well-defended arguments of role immersion as a legitimate pedagogical tool should be attractive to faculty members and administrators who are searching for new and effective instructional methods with which to engage undergraduate students. Prospective college students and their parents might also be interested in reading this text as a primer to best practices in college teaching and learning. Although the background story of Reacting to the Past is interesting and important to the narrative, it is the stories of students embodying various roles from the Ming Dynasty, the French Revolution, Athens in 403 BCE, and more that make Minds on Fire an engaging and worthwhile read. One student said, “The instructor was like the GPS: he mapped out options, but we had to decide both the destination and the route” (p. 302). Carnes suggests that this sentiment perfectly captures the type of engaged learning that, indeed, sets students’ minds on fire.

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About the Author
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COLLEGES THAT CHANGE LIVES: 40 SCHOOLS THAT WILL CHANGE THE WAY YOU THINK ABOUT COLLEGES
POPE, L. (REVISED BY OSWALD, H. M.). 2012. NEW YORK: PENGUIN BOOKS. 340 PP.
Reviewed by Matthew Fifolt, Ph.D.

In this fourth edition of Colleges That Change Lives, Hilary Masell Oswald continues the work of author and education reformer Loren Pope, who passed away in 2008, by shining a light on institutions that are focused specifically on educating undergraduate students. From the outset, Oswald echoes Pope’s belief that the college experience should change students’ lives. Further, she argues that compared to the academic experience at large flagship and Ivy League institutions, liberal arts colleges are frequently better for students because faculty members are rewarded for the quality of their teaching as well as for conducting research.

Oswald notes that most of the faculty members she interviewed had chosen to teach at liberal arts institutions for one of two reasons: (a) they had earned an undergraduate degree at a similar institution and found it to be a
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powerful and formative experience or (b) they had been students or teaching assistants at large universities and found the teaching and learning experiences to be unsatisfying. Across the 40 liberal arts institutions featured in this book, faculty members demonstrate a commitment to and talent for teaching and mentoring undergraduate students.

Oswald describes liberal arts institutions as places where community matters, values are central components of education, and learning is collaborative rather than competitive (p. 4). The author divides the institutions into six geographic regions and provides key statistics—including admission requirements, acceptance rates, typical financial aid awards, and more—at the end of each summary.

INSTITUTIONAL RANKINGS VS. INSTITUTIONAL FIT
Oswald ensures Pope’s legacy by encouraging students to select institutions based on “fit” rather than “ranking.” In order to find the right fit, she recommends that students be introspective and move beyond the popular—but inaccurate—college ranking systems. She observes that most ranking systems use input factors such as incoming student SAT scores, class rank, and professor salaries. These factors, however, have little or nothing to do with the education process.

To demonstrate the absurdity of rankings, Oswald compares the quality of a college as measured by the grades and scores of the freshmen it admits to the quality of a hospital as measured by the health of the patients it admits. In both cases, the inputs are not nearly as important as the outcomes. The author recommends that students who are interested in a more accurate depiction of engagement and learning seek more salient information, such as institutional scores on the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA), a standardized measure of critical thinking, analytical reasoning, problem solving, and communication skills.

THE LIBERAL ARTS ADVANTAGE
Consistent with the findings of Chopp et al. (2014), Oswald contends that a liberal arts education equips students with the skills necessary to be adaptive learners. Rather than training students for job-specific skills, a liberal arts education “builds nimble minds and creates independent thinkers” (p. 9). Chopp et al. (2014) argue that students who pursue a liberal arts education develop higher cognitive skills, increased sensitivity to ethical issues, and greater tolerance of ambiguity (p. 5). Additionally, Oswald notes that a liberal arts education helps students develop the skills employers want—including effective communication, critical thinking, analytical reasoning, and more, as reported in a 2009 survey of private-sector employers (AACU).

INSTITUTIONAL OVERVIEW
For the 40 institutions identified in Colleges That Change Lives, Oswald describes unique program offerings and distinctive campus cultures as well as curricular and co-curricular programs and services that reflect high-impact educational practices (Kuh 2008). Research suggests that these practices benefit college students from many backgrounds and increase student retention and student engagement rates (AACU 2015). While Oswald does not frame the discussion in terms of high-impact educational practices, such teaching and learning designs accurately depict many of the featured institutions’ strengths; several are cited in this review as examples of best practices.

First-year seminars and experiences. At McDaniel College (MD), all freshmen enroll in faculty-led thematic courses that emphasize critical thinking, writing, and analytical skills for college-level work (p. 87). Similarly, at Guildford College (NC), all freshmen take a First-Year Experience (FYE) course designed to establish and inform the academic and ethical expectations of each student (p. 127). These introductory courses typically emphasize critical inquiry, collaborative learning, and information literacy (Kuh 2008).

Writing-intensive courses. For students at Millsaps College (MS), writing skills are emphasized at all levels of instruction and across the curriculum. According to Oswald, each student submits a writing portfolio of work from different classes for evaluation by faculty members. If a student’s work does not meet minimum standards, faculty members may either require or recommend additional instruction (p. 144). Across institutions, faculty members consistently discuss writing as a foundational skill for success.

Undergraduate research. Oswald describes Clark University (MA) as combining the best characteristics of a liberal arts college with the best characteristics of a research university. She suggests that Clark students,
working alongside teams of scholars on major research grants, develop an accurate understanding of the pace of discovery as well as the types of questions asked and methodologies used to conduct real laboratory science.

- **Diversity/global learning.** According to Lewin (2009), study abroad is frequently cited as one of the most transformative learning experiences that college students can have. At Juniata College (PA), faculty and administrators believe so strongly in the value of studying abroad that even health sciences students, whose programs typically allow few elective courses, can study abroad for a full year and still finish the professional school prerequisites in time to submit their applications.

- **Internships/experiential learning.** At Lynchburg College (VA), every student has access to hands-on learning opportunities through Experiential Learning Grants (ELGs), which waive the cost of up to three credit hours for internships, faculty-student research, study abroad, or community-based research during summer and winter sessions. Of all of the high-impact educational practices, internships are the most ubiquitous at these 40 institutions; students frequently completed one or more prior to graduation.

- **Capstone courses and projects.** At Reed College (OR), students develop a senior thesis based on an experimental, critical, or creative problem. Similarly, at Allegheny College (PA), students complete a series of seminars between their freshman and junior years that culminates in a senior comprehensive project for which they conduct original research in their major field. At the conclusion of their projects, students submit a substantive paper and sit for an oral defense.

**SUMMARY**

Oswald does an excellent job highlighting the holistic approach of liberal arts education in general as well as the innovative practices of 40 institutions in particular. In addition to the high-impact educational practices referenced above, the author describes academic environments in which students and faculty members interact with one another frequently and have a shared sense of purpose. One student at Hope College (MI) calls this a “game changer”: “Every professor I’ve had cares about me” (p. 204). The theme of institutions fostering a caring community echoes throughout the book.

Oswald’s clear and precise writing should appeal to a wide audience. That said, there is a great deal of redundancy among the institutions. Thus, rather than reading the book cover to cover, it may be better for readers to explore colleges by region and then review their statistics (as, for example, their admission criteria and availability of financial aid). Because Oswald does not include tuition and other costs, students and their families may also want to visit college websites to learn more (a list is included as an appendix).

Despite its readability and ease of use, *Colleges That Change Lives* is not without its shortcomings. Perhaps the most egregious is the author’s failure to identify how these 40 institutions were chosen for inclusion in the book. Other than geography and some perceived benefit to students, no mention is made of the criteria used to include or exclude institutions. Because a number of them are introduced by a brief sentence or two by Loren Pope, it appears that several schools were carried over from previous editions whereas others were either added or removed. Yet Oswald provides no information about how or by whom this process was carried out.

Further, at the beginning of the book, Oswald mentions that she spoke with scores of faculty members and students to gain insights into their perceptions of their institutions’ unique qualities. Again, she makes no mention of how she selected interviewees, captured their responses, or corroborated these findings with her own observations. Because this book is intended to be a guide for prospective students and their parents, it may not have been the author’s prerogative to include these details. However, in the absence of substantiated, empirical evidence, her claims about the educational value of these institutions are little more than her own opinions supported by carefully chosen quotes of students, faculty, and staff.

Oswald lauds the academic achievements of the graduates of these institutions, citing the number of national awards they receive (e.g., Goldwater, Fulbright, Rhodes) and the disproportionate number who go on to earn advanced degrees. However, she circumvents the fact that students who attend residential liberal arts institutions typically are from families with greater financial resources (Hill et al. 2014). So it should come as no surprise that graduates of liberal arts institutions are exceptionally well-
prepared for graduate studies and well-poised for prestigious national awards.

Even though Oswald points out that many of these schools accept students who demonstrate potential through written essays in lieu of standardized test scores, current students’ average reported high school GPAs demonstrate that admission might still be out of reach for a vast majority of potential applicants. Further, given the relatively small enrollment of many private liberal arts colleges—as well as the requirement of many that students attend full time and reside on campus—enrollment may not be a possibility for students whose life circumstances differ from those of the typical traditional-age college student. These observations, along with national policy changes regarding financial aid, validate Mettler’s (2014) critique of the widening economic disparity and class division in higher education.

In many ways, Colleges That Change Lives reads more like an expanded version of a college promotional packet than a fair and balanced institutional review. While Oswald identifies some of the challenges of living and learning within a small community of scholars, she provides an exceptionally one-sided perspective that might mislead students and families as higher education consumers. Nevertheless, Colleges That Change Lives’ presentation of best practices in teaching and learning, regardless of institutional type, may serve as a reasonable starting point for students to begin exploring college options.

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**CHILLING THE MELT**


“Summer melt” refers to high school graduates who have been admitted to a college but who fail to matriculate in the fall. Losing students in this way is especially costly to colleges and universities, which spend considerable effort reviewing the credentials of applicants and reserving seats for them in their incoming classes. It is also a significant loss for students, who have devoted the better part of the previous year visiting colleges, completing applications, compiling letters of recommendation, filling out financial aid forms, and securing housing. Depending on the selectivity of the college, enrollment officers anticipate that anywhere between 2 and 15 percent of the entering class will fail to matriculate, despite having paid a sizable deposit (usually a minimum of $250).

For many years, college admission officials never gave “melt” a second thought. It was treated as a regular part of doing business and was understood to be a largely predictable source of enrollment variation. In recent years, however, some institutions have reported increases in the number of students who fail to register for classes. Identifying the causes of this trend has become a popular topic at conferences.

The most widespread theory is that students are applying—and being admitted—to more colleges than ever before. But rather than pledge their allegiance to a single institution on May 1 (the national decision date for freshman admission), students are submitting deposits to multiple schools as they await decisions about their wait-list status or play one school off another in negotiating a better financial aid package.

Of course, sending deposits to multiple colleges is a breach of admission etiquette. Some applicants manipulate the system to engineer whatever advantages they can and justify their actions in the name of capitalism or entitlement. But that’s not the primary story of concern. Sum-
mer melt is much more about students from low-income backgrounds and others unfamiliar with the unwritten and unspoken process of higher education enrollment.

This is why *Summer Melt: Supporting Low-Income Students through the Transition to College*, by Benjamin Castleman and Lindsay Page, is so important. It serves as a corrective to the current narrative about the causes of—and solutions to—the problem of non-matriculating students. The book is far from a polemic; rather, it reads a little like a “how to” (or, in this case, how not to) manual. Researchers at the University of Virginia and the University of Pittsburgh, respectively, Castleman and Page offer practical advice—based on empirical research—about the ways in which high schools, colleges, and community service agencies can help students make the transition from secondary school to college.

In Part 1, Castleman and Page provide a detailed look at the phenomenon of summer melt. They stress that although national data are unclear, surveys conducted by the U.S. Department of Education indicate that approximately 85 percent of the high school students who are admitted to a college ultimately enroll. When these survey data are broken down by income status, however, it is clear that far more students from low-income groups than their wealthier peers fail to matriculate. Data also suggest that compared to students who live in the suburbs, those living in rural and urban areas are less likely to attend college even once they are admitted.

The reasons that students fail to enroll in college are predictable: lack of money and insufficient understanding of the college-going process. Many students are almost completely unaware that their letter of admission represents only the start of a complex process culminating in their enrollment in the fall. Not surprisingly, first-generation college-goers have the greatest difficulty negotiating the process from beginning to end. Without family members or peers who can help, many students’ financial aid award letters are left unread, housing deadlines go unheeded, and requests for final transcripts are ignored. When August arrives, many of these students are surprised to learn that they have no place to live and no money to pay for college.

Castleman and Page note that the financial aid process is the biggest obstacle to enrollment for prospective students. Many—especially those who lack access to college counseling—have virtually no idea how much it will cost to attend college. Financial aid award letters are often difficult to understand, and the rules concerning college loans are mysterious if not opaque. Castleman and Page detail the circumstances of a student who almost missed the opportunity to enroll because she transposed two numerals on her FAFSA, with the result that she was determined to be ineligible for aid. Ultimately, the student’s advisor identified the error, but correcting it was stressful and threatened to derail the student’s college plans.

Even the most ardent student advocate might argue that students smart enough to go to college ought to be able to successfully negotiate the enrollment process. Castleman and Page debunk this idea, noting that teenagers are not particularly good at managing their time or responsibilities during the summer. The authors state than even “high school graduates from more affluent backgrounds often are not any better at managing and completing this complex array of summer tasks—they just have more help” (p. 47). Affluent high schools are more likely to employ college counselors who alert students to deadlines and other elements of the enrollment process. Compared to counselors at public schools (assuming, of course, that they have any college counselors), those at private schools devote twice as much time to college advising.

The lack of expert advice is exacerbated by the fact that poorer students more often must justify their need for financial aid. Castleman and Page reveal that approximately one-third of all FAFSA applicants are asked to provide additional evidence of their income and that, ironically, low-income applicants are more likely to be flagged for follow-up because their income profiles tend to vary compared to those of middle- or upper-class families. Income verification is an important and necessary public accountability mechanism, but it often amounts to little more than an additional obstacle for students who are unfamiliar with the college enrollment process and who do not have adults in their lives who can help them successfully complete it.

The second part of *Summer Melt* describes effective techniques for mitigating melt. The authors assert that colleges and universities can play a significant role in connecting more effectively with their newly admitted students, but they believe that high schools and community organizations are better positioned to have a positive impact on
the problem. Castleman and Page state that “summer melt begins in February”—when students begin to receive their admission acceptance letters and must respond to a flurry of inquiries from the colleges and universities at which they have been accepted. For students who attend well-resourced high schools or who have college-educated parents, the spring semester of their senior year in high school is a key period for completing a great many tasks associated with the transition to college. Of course, it is also a key period for students who attend poorly resourced high schools, but they are less likely to complete the necessary tasks because of the scarcity of good advice and counsel. Unless a student’s parents insist that he check his e-mail or “call the college,” students simply do not know what they do not know. Providing assistance during the summer months when schools are closed is one way in which community organizations can play an important role.

The authors highlight low-cost interventions that provide students with the information they need to successfully negotiate the transition from high school to college. This includes sustained text messaging strategies, which might cost as little as $7 per student. Other interventions include the use of Facebook and other social media to keep students focused on the college-going goal. The authors also found that interventions such as the provision of peer advisors and other types of summer advising, although more expensive than texting, spur positive results.

The strategies described in Summer Melt are not game changers. Although their impact is statistically significant, it is modest; increases in college-going rates typically are no more than a few percentage points. However, even this is important for students who otherwise might not transition successfully to college; it highlights the need for colleges and universities to be better partners with high schools and other community agencies to address the complexity of the college enrollment process. The authors suggest that postsecondary institutions adopt the U.S. Department of Education’s “financial aid shopping sheet” as a means of standardizing financial aid information so that students and families will be better able to respond in a timely and accurate way. But colleges and universities can do more: They need to take responsibility for the way in which they request information. One of the significant lessons noted in Summer Melt is that the current generation of students is far less likely to check e-mail on a regular basis—and yet most colleges and universities use e-mail as their primary mode of communication.

No single means of communications is perfect; some students will never understand what they need to do next. But Castleman and Page argue that a coordinated approach is likely to reach the very students most at risk of failing to matriculate in college—and that such an approach need not be complex or expensive. It is a hopeful message for a group of students who have already done the hard work of preparing for higher education. Like most American teenagers, they just need one final kick in the butt.

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