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### Student Service Members/Veterans Programs in Erie County Colleges and Universities: Analyzing Programs for Removing Barriers and Facilitating Identity Transitioning

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Student Service Members/Veterans Programs in Erie County Colleges and Universities:  
Analyzing Programs for Removing Barriers and Facilitating Identity Transitioning

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In partial fulfillment of requirements for PAD 690 Masters Project

SUNY Buffalo State

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**Abstract**

Student Service Members/Veterans (SSM/Vs) served their nation in times of peace and in war and in doing so, are eligible for various educational benefits. To assist the SSM/V in adapting to their new role as a student and civilian, most postsecondary educational institutions offer services specifically tailored to the SSM/V population in order to support and assist them in completing their academic program. These services could include navigating benefit programs, financial aid, orientation programs and disability services as needed. In this transformative mixed methods study, a content analysis of the public websites of the schools was first conducted to determine the SSM/V programs and services provided by the schools. Next, SSM/Vs from five participant schools in Erie County NY were invited to take a web-administered questionnaire which was designed to test for satisfaction levels with services provided, to gauge satisfaction in their personal transition from military life to student/civilian life, and how likely they are to complete their current academic program. While the study found no statistical significance among these factors, there was a statistically significant positive correlation between satisfaction levels of the services provided by a school's Veteran Service Office and transition satisfaction. Because many respondents did not seem aware of some of the key services offered on their campuses, and at the same time results point to the desire for a highly active Veteran Service Office, the author recommends that postsecondary institutions ensure that their Veteran Service Offices are staffed appropriately to undertake the outreach needed for its SSM/Vs. While doing so will entail additional costs, colleges perceived as "veteran-friendly" will likely find that more SSM/Vs will be interested in studying at these campuses.

**Keywords** College, disability, identity, nontraditional, Post 9-11 GI Bill, student service members, student support, transition , veterans

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## **Chapter I: Introduction**

### **Introduction**

America, as a nation, owes it to the men and women of our armed forces to ensure they are provided with the tools necessary to succeed in combat and in life after their service. To increase the quality of life for those who have served their nation we have to look at several indicators that lead to a good quality of life. One major indicator is maintaining stable meaningful employment in a chosen profession and the ability to earn a livable wage. Data show that the most successful way to increase the prospects of finding meaningful employment is through achieving higher levels of education, typically either a postsecondary degree or certificate (Cate, 2014, p. 2).

During the course of their military service, veterans learn leadership skills and gain valuable life and job experience. After their enlistment or commission is complete, they find themselves having to distinguish themselves from their peers who are also looking for work. As many forgo formal education to pursue their military careers, they may find themselves experiencing difficulty finding meaningful employment as compared to their military career.

The expectation service members have as they leave the military is that employers are focusing their recruiting efforts on veterans or that their military occupation will directly translate into marketable job skills. This expectation can sometimes set them up for a disappointing reality. Many veterans are coming home to find that it is more difficult than they had anticipated finding a well-paying job in the post-recession economy, and they are facing the fact that by 2018, up to 63% of all jobs paying at least \$35,000 a year will require postsecondary education (The Council for Adult and Experimental Learning, 2013, p. 4). Without a college

degree or postsecondary educational certificate, veterans are less able to compete with other job seekers who have credentials for decent wages and sustainable careers (Cate, 2014, p. 2). While the unemployment rate for veterans is slightly higher than the national average, for veterans who suffer from physical disabilities or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), research has shown that their odds of being unemployed increases by 150% (Barnard-Brak, Bagby, Jones, & Sulak, 2011, p. 30).

The Department of Veteran's Affairs (VA) spent \$12 Billion on educational programs for Veterans in 2013. Two million SSM/Vs are expected to enroll in a postsecondary education program between 2001 and 2020 to expand their career opportunities, increase their likelihood of higher pay and stability, and expand their knowledge and skills (Cook & Kim, 2009, p. vii). Another benefit of enrolling in a degree program is that it facilitates the transition from soldier to civilian. Although there are many benefits to pursuing higher education, it can be difficult for SSM/Vs to transition into civilian life, navigate the paperwork for financial aid, class enrollment and student services, and ultimately complete their degree/certificate program.

The Student Veterans of America (SVA) concluded in their groundbreaking *Million Records Project* (2014) that only 51.7% of veterans attending postsecondary educational institutions complete their degree or certificate program. Student service members/veterans (SSM/Vs) face several unique barriers to completing their degree programs not generally faced by other populations such as service-connected disabilities, ongoing military service, non-traditional student status, and other mental health issues. Many postsecondary educational institutions, along with the Department of Veterans Affairs and other veteran service organizations, offer programs designed to aid SSM/Vs in their journey to degree completion. It is

apparent, however, that not all programs are created equal and many times vital services are not immediately available to those that need them.

Many terms are used in the literature to describe veterans and military service members attending postsecondary learning institutions. In this study, “veteran” will be a general term for people who have served in and left the military. “Service member” refers to any current member of the military who is still serving on active duty or in the National Guard or reserve components. The term "Student Service Member/Veteran" (SSM/V) is used to describe current and former military personnel attending a college, university or vocational/certificate program as it is the most inclusive of other terms such as "student veteran," which excludes those who attend school but are currently serving in a reserve or National Guard capacity (Barry, Whiteman, & MacDermid Wadsworth, 2014, pp. 31-32).

### **Statement of Problem and Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this project is twofold: first, to identify and examine current barriers that SSM/Vs face when beginning or returning to college after a period of military service; and, second, to evaluate the programs provided by colleges and universities to facilitate the transition from soldier to civilian and degree completion. This transformative embedded mixed methods design involved a mix of qualitative and quantitative sequential data collection within a transformative (social justice) framework (with SSM/Vs considered a marginalized group).

The first data collection phase of this multiphase project began with a content analysis of the SSM/Vs' programs offered by 11 colleges and universities in Erie County. Phase 2 consisted of a web-administered survey of SSM/Vs at the five participating colleges and universities. Phase 3 consisted of follow-up interviews with SSM/Vs. Interview participants were drawn



from a random sample from those survey respondents who had indicated a willingness to be interviewed. Interviews focused on the satisfaction level student service members/veterans have of programs available through their schools and other veterans' agencies.

### **Significance of Study**

The study results will be made available to postsecondary educational institutions in Erie County. By providing needed services and addressing barriers to program completion, postsecondary institutions can increase the chances that SSM/Vs will persist to degree completion. Not only is this a service to our SSM/Vs, it benefits colleges and universities by both attracting SSM/Vs to Western New York and expanding the diversity of the student body.

## Chapter II: Review of Related Literature

### Introduction

Between 2001 and 2020, over two million service members/veterans are expected to enroll in postsecondary educational programs utilizing the Department of Veterans Affairs educational benefits at the projected cost to U.S. taxpayers of 10.5 billion dollars a year (Cook & Kim, 2009, p. vii; McCaslin, Leach, Herbst, & Armstrong, 2013, p. vii). VA Benefit programs such as the Montgomery GI Bill and Post 9-11 GI Bill, along with the Vocational Rehabilitation Program and various other programs designed for veterans, allow our nation's veterans to pursue higher education at little or no cost. It has been a successful program - where over half (51.7%) of the veterans who begin a postsecondary education program persist to degree completion (Cate, 2014, p. iv).

This literature review begins with an overview of the VA educational benefits available from the introduction of the *Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944* to the modern Post 9-11 GI Bill and the Chapter 31 Vocational Rehabilitation Program. The second section examines the characteristics of the modern student service member/veteran (post 9/11) and the ways in which they may differ from their civilian student peers. The third section documents the challenges veterans face as they transition to student and civilian life in terms of the following specific challenges: academic, identity, transition support, financial aid, dealing with physical and mental disabilities, and deployment/mobilization of SSM/V currently serving in the National Guard and Reserves. The fourth section reviews the literature on programs successes and identifies exemplars for other postsecondary educational institutions to remove or reduce barriers to

program completion. This review closes with an identification of services and programs which the literature suggests are still lacking in colleges and universities.

## **Review and Critique of Literature**

### *Post 9-11 GI Bill Background*

For over 70 years, the GI Bill provided financial support and scholarship to help veterans attend college and vocational training. *The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944*, known as the original GI Bill, is largely credited as the driving force that established the middle class of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the reason that colleges and universities became more accessible to the average American (Cate, 2014, p. 1; O'Herrin, 2011, p. 15). The original GI Bill of Rights was responsible for 2.2 million veterans attending college after WWII and some 5 million others obtaining a vocational certificate. In 1984 the GI Bill was updated and expanded to become the Montgomery GI Bill (Alvarez, 2008). Veteran benefit programs that offer funds for education and training are the largest of all federal student aid programs (Angrist, 1993, p. 637).

In 2008 Congress passed the Post 9-11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act, which is most commonly referred to as the Post 9-11 GI Bill (O'Herrin, 2011, p. 15). This benefit provides 36 months of tuition assistance to cover the full cost of tuition at the "In state" rate. For students attending an institution at least half time, a living expense stipend is provided monthly (Callahan & Jarrat, 2014, p. 37). Up to \$1000 a year is available for books and supplies. Perhaps the biggest addition to the benefit is the option for a service member to transfer their educational benefit to a qualifying family member, either their spouse or children (McGrevey & Kehrer, 2009, p. 92).

In the first year the Post 9-11 GI Bill went into effect, more than 500,000 SSM/Vs applied for the benefit and over 300,000 SSM/Vs and eligible family members used the benefit to attend postsecondary educational programs. In 2011, it is estimated that over \$10.5 billion a year in benefits was provided annually (McCaslin et al., 2013, p. vii; Steele, Salcedo, & Coley, 2010, p. 2).

Studies of post Korean War GI Bill users reported that veterans who used the GI Bill reported annual earnings of 10% more than veterans who did not use the program. These studies were replicated in the 1990s and reported that for every 1.4 years of educational benefits used, veterans earned 6% more than their counterparts who did not use educational benefits (Angrist, 1993, p. 637). Despite these advantages, the average recipient of GI Bill benefits (prior to the Post 9-11 GI Bill era) attended college for less than half of the 36 months the benefit provides. Only 6% used the full 36 month benefit (Field, Hebel, & Smallwood, 2008; Ryan, Carlstrom, Hughey, & Harris, 2011, p. 55).

The current Montgomery GI Bill and Post 9-11 GI Bill are not the only Veteran Administration programs that pay for postsecondary education. The Vocational Rehabilitation Program, known as the Voc. Rehab program or Chapter 31 Benefits, is administered by both the Veterans Health Administration and the Veterans Benefits Administration and provides employment and educational services to certain service disabled veterans and family members who meet eligibility qualifications (McGrevey & Kehrer, 2009). This program also pays for the full tuition costs, books and materials, and a stipend for living expenses.

In addition to the obvious incentive to draw ambitious men and women into the armed services, GI educational benefits also contribute to economic growth: a cost benefit analysis of

spending on VA educational benefits found that for every dollar the federal government spent on GI Bill educational benefits, there was a return of eight dollars in the form of additional income taxes paid by the veteran (Persky, 2010, p. 17). Naturally, veterans earning a higher income will have more disposable income (state and local sales tax revenue) and be able to afford a nicer home (property tax); thus, local and state revenues are also positively affected by the higher income college-educated veterans earn.

#### *Post 9-11 Student Service Member/Veteran*

The latest generations of veterans are different from their counterparts from the World War II, Korean War and Vietnam War eras. Since the end of the draft in 1973, the US Military has been a 100% voluntary force. The men and women who serve our country do so out of civic duty, a sense of patriotism, need for a different environment, and for educational opportunities. Many veterans who served after September 11, 2001 have done so in search for justice as well (Hassan, Jackson, Lindsay, McCabe, & Sanders III, 2010, p. 31).

The military offers opportunities to those who may not have had many options open to them to begin with. When faced with a future of high unemployment rates and rising college costs, many young Americans consider a military enlistment as both a path to a steady job with college benefits and social and economic mobility (Moore, 2012, p. 1). Many SSM/V initially chose service over college because they felt ill prepared for a four-year education or they simply were not attracted to careers requiring college preparation. Therefore, the military was an attractive alternative to a lifetime of low paying, low skilled jobs (Branker, 2009, p. 62). It is also possible that some individuals feel they are simply not made for college success and choose a military career as an alternative. In the course of their enlistment, however, these SSM/Vs found

the drive, determination and discipline to consider college, or training and certification in a skilled trade (Moore, 2012, p. 21).

Community colleges nationwide enroll more than 50% of the SSM/V population, making them a gateway for many veterans seeking transition into a civilian lifestyle (Persky, 2010, p. 18). Reasons many veterans choose community colleges vary: they are less intimidating, have more flexible schedules and some SSM/Vs need to build basic knowledge and skill sets before they can tackle a four year program (Alvarez, 2008). Under the Montgomery GI Bill, SSM/V's tended to choose two-year colleges or vocational training programs due to lower tuition as compared to colleges and universities offering the baccalaureate. With the passage of the more generous Post-9-11 GI Bill, which includes the cost of living stipend, the trend is moving to more SSM/Vs choosing to begin their studies at four-year colleges and universities (Durdella & Kim, 2012, p. 111; Field et al., 2008).

Four-year college programs could be difficult for many veterans to get into as many feel that they lack the grades or standardized test scores schools required to gain admittance, especially many prestigious private colleges and the public ivies. Some may have lacked purpose and direction in high school and as a result their abilities were not reflected in their academic performance. After separating from service, some veterans may still be haunted by poor past school performance, but now have the discipline and motivation to succeed in their studies (Alvarez, 2008). Nevertheless, many SSM/Vs may even view the best colleges and universities as off limits. SSM/Vs from humble beginnings tend to think that highly rated programs are out of their league, even if they have the grades and financial resources to gain admission (Alvarez, 2008).

There are several characteristics of the Post 9-11 SSM/V that distinguish them from the “traditional” student. SSM/Vs have several years of occupational experience, and have an in-depth knowledge of teamwork, personal sacrifice, perseverance, and have formal training in leadership skills. Many have valuable cross-cultural experience from traveling to foreign countries, working as part of international partnerships, and working with a variety of people in a diverse workforce (Hassan et al., 2010, p. 32).

The ultimate goal of any veteran leaving military service is a successful transition into civilian life. The process of adapting a civilian identity or even re-adapting for those in the Reserves or National Guard who deploy and re-enter civilian life, is a complex undertaking and can be very difficult for some people as they try to reconcile who they were in the military and who they want to be as a civilian (Jones, 2013, p. 13; C. B. Rumann & Hamrick, 2010, p. 435). Keven Jones, (2013, p. 12) a veteran of the Marine Corps and identity formation researcher noted in his study of student veterans in transition, “Those who end their military service are leaving more than just a job; they are leaving a way of looking at themselves, and all that that entails, good and bad.” In the military, service members are trained to fit the role and image of a highly disciplined warrior, one who can follow orders, and will not question authority. While this identity is valued in the military, it often runs counter to the SSM/V’s new identity as a student and civilian (Branker, 2009, p. 60; Jones, 2013, p. 12; Vacchi, 2012, p. 17).

After years of being immersed in a highly hierarchal social structure where most decisions involved outside forces or decision makers, it can be difficult to learn how to function without the strict structure of military rules and regulations. For example, it could be difficult to make the seemingly simple decision of what clothes to wear each day after years of having to

wear a prescribed uniform for different functions. Since there is no set standard across the military branches for transitional services as service members leave the military, and possibly a lack of command support for these programs, many SSM/Vs feel unprepared for the transitions ahead as they leave the service (Cook & Kim, 2009, p. 22). Under what circumstances a SSM/V left the military can have an effect on how they perceive their situation in school as well: those who planned for and looked forward to going to school need less support than those who were forced to leave the service (Ryan et al., 2011, p. 56).

As SSM/Vs leave active duty military service, they also leave behind significant benefits that could add to the stress of transitioning to civilian life. These benefits include a stable income and a guaranteed place to live. They have to sign up for and deal with the additional expense of their own healthcare, and many must learn to shop and cook as they will be without dining facilities. In addition, they leave behind a support system of peers and “family” (McCaslin et al., 2013, p. vii). Because of this, SSM/Vs find themselves making simultaneous transitions in work, their individual identities, and interpersonal relationships (Jones, 2013, p. 12).

There can also be difficulties that arise due to gender roles inside the military and how a woman is perceived by their peers in the service and after their service. Because women make up a smaller percentage of the military, some female SSM/Vs may have become accustomed to operating in a predominantly male environment – so, for example, women veterans may question their mannerism or feel they need to change themselves to fit in, such as acting more feminine and swearing less (Ryan et al., 2011, p. 60).

Cory Rumann (2010), in conducting interviews with SSM/Vs on identity transitioning issues, found that the majority of his subjects mentioned frustrations with civilian students and



the amount of complaining they do about trivial things, their lack of effective coping skills, and how nonchalant they are about things such as current events, studying, and schoolwork. SSM/Vs have discipline and respect drilled into them to the point where it becomes part of their identity and may have negative reactions to those who do not share their same level of respect. One respondent stated his “training led him to feel personally offended when civilian students spoke over the instructor during lectures” (p. 30). His training and conditioning to respect and protect those perceived as his “superior” caused him to personally internalize the disrespect (Moore, 2012, p. 30). Another summed up the feeling of frustration with civilian students and the way they deal differently with difficulty by stating “People should just pull the lettuce off instead of bitching about getting lettuce on a burger” (C. B. Rumann & Hamrick, 2010, p. 443).

The majority of SSM/Vs fall into the category of non-traditional student. Traditional students are under 23 years old and live on campus in dorms, off campus (often supported by their parents), or still at home. They tend to hold part-time jobs or do not work while school is in session and are generally unmarried. Non-traditional students on the other hand, are usually over the age of 24, hold full-time jobs, finance their own education and do not live with their parents (Callahan & Jarrat, 2014, p. 39; Radford, 2009, p. 17). Because the majority of student services and social organizations are geared toward traditional students, their non-traditional status further separates the SSM/V from their peers and further impedes their ability to transition successfully into their new role as a student veteran and civilian.

SSM/Vs tend to be more selective with how they spend their time outside the classroom and place a greater emphasis on programs that they find essential to academic success, dedicating less time to relaxing and socializing. Yet by not investing time into social or leisure

activities, SSM/Vs are missing out on chances to build relationships with their civilian peers, and integrate themselves back into the general population (Cole & Kim, 2013, p. 13). Because SSM/Vs spend less time on campus they are less likely to spend time in social areas such as the student union, as a result, they are less likely to be encouraged to attend or even see advertisements for social events held on campus – therefore they feel less connected to student social life in general (Cole & Kim, 2013, p. 7).

SSM/Vs are also more likely than the traditional student to have a combat-related disability. It is estimated that up to 40% of SSM/Vs enrolling in college suffer from some form of disability – ranging from the obvious, such as amputations, to the “invisible wounds” of war like PTSD or Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBI). (Approximately 15-25% of returning combat veterans report having received a diagnosis of PTSD or cognitive disorders due to blast related TBI.) (McCaslin et al., 2013, p. vii; Ostovary & Dapprich, 2011, p. 64; Widome, Kehle, Carlson, & Laska, 2011, p. 389).

SSM/Vs also have a higher risk of participating in risky behaviors. Though risky behaviors are prevalent among America’s college students, there is a higher chance a SSM/V will use tobacco, abuse alcohol, abuse prescription and illicit drugs, and display other unsafe health risk behaviors compared to non-veteran students. SSM/Vs diagnosed with PTSD or TBIs are at an increased risk for unsafe behaviors including increased involvement in violent altercations (Widome et al., 2011, p. 388).

There are several theoretical models available to study transitioning from one stage in life to another. One developed by Livingstone et al. (2011, pp. 320-321) – the *Student Veteran Academic and Social Transition Model (SVASTM)* – describes re-enrollment management for

SSM/Vs returning to college. It shows that while SSM/Vs may experience academic challenges initially after enrolling, the social transitions can be more problematic. The cornerstones of SVASTM are military influence and “invisibility.” The military influence is generally what causes a SSM/V to increase the emphasis on academic success, particularly their need to excel and overcome obstacles. The “invisibility” hypothesis suggests that many SSM/Vs do not wish to draw attention to themselves or their service within the campus community; consequently, SSM/Vs are more likely to seek support from other veterans or family members rather than take advantage of campus-based support services (Livingston et al., 2011, p. 326).

Another theory that can help shape programs in higher education is Astin’s Involvement Theory, which argues that students develop academically when they invest more time and energy into their college experience. Based on this theory it can be hypothesized that when colleges are successful at increasing SSM/Vs involvement in social and academic programs, SSM/Vs will have higher GPAs (Durdella & Kim, 2012, p. 113).

### *Challenges Transitioning to Civilian Life*

SSM/Vs, especially those who are attending a postsecondary educational institution for the first time, face many of the same challenges that traditional civilian students face. There is the fear of the unknown; the anxiety of being in a new place with new people, new rules; and, the anxiety of being away from their family and social support network (Callahan & Jarrat, 2014, p. 39).

### Academic

SSM/V academic performance is lower compared to their civilian counterparts, despite their comparatively higher level of maturity, motivation, and discipline (Barry et al., 2014, p. 37).

SSM/V also achieve lower levels of degree attainment, both in frequency and level of education (Durdella & Kim, 2012, p. 122). In an analysis of the University of California's Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES) and student's GPAs, Durdella and Kim (2012) found that SSM/Vs tend to have both lower GPAs and lower levels of sense of belonging than do civilian students. There appears to be a positive relationship between participation in after class academic events, hours spent on campus, and GPA. Having a sense of belonging is a critical component of college students' experiences, and intention to persist, and can have an effect on the GPA of a SSM/V (Durdella & Kim, 2012, p. 110).

One possible negative result of the SSM/V experience in higher education is that not all of them are able to complete their programs, but there is a lack of explanatory empirical data. Cabrera et al. (1993) advanced a model for studying persistence in students. His "Integrated Model of Student Retention" identifies six explanatory variables – academic integration, social integration, institutional commitment, goal commitment, finance attitudes, and support from family and friends (Van Dusen, 2011, p. 6).

### Identity

SSM/Vs have difficulty relating to their peers in classes, especially recent high school graduates. There is sometimes such a vast difference in age and life experience that it can be very difficult to form relationships with the younger students (Steele et al., 2010, p. 4). There are generally two narratives that the general civilian population attributes to combat veterans: either the seasoned warrior hero poised to become the next generation of national leaders or the troubled veteran who is haunted by wounds both physical and invisible (Moore, 2012, p. 8). Many SSM/Vs are worried about how they are perceived by their peers due to their service or possible combat

experience. Fear of a negative stigma causes some to repress their veteran identity which can make it more difficult to reconcile their identity during transition (Hassan et al., 2010, p. 32; Radford, 2009, p. 18; C. B. Rumann & Hamrick, 2010, p. 446).

In order to facilitate the transition to a civilian lifestyle, some SSM/Vs try to shed their military identity in order to avoid awkward conversations and looks. The socialization strategy of “blending in” is used to help make the SSM/V feel as if they are no different than their civilian student counterparts. They might grow their hair, change their dress and mannerisms and become quiet and neutral in class, rarely if ever bringing attention to their service (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008, p. 88). Some others may blend in, not as a coping strategy, but simply as a way to close the door on that chapter of their lives so they can move on.

### Transition Support

In general, SSM/Vs lack the same amount of social and emotional support that civilian students enjoy. The support they do seek out generally comes from other service members, as their experiences tend to match up better and rapport is easier to build through shared experiences (Barry et al., 2014, p. 37). In the military there was a focus on shared accountability and a system of teamwork where the service member had a “battle buddy”— someone for whom the service member is held responsible for the personal actions, training and general day to day duties and vice versa. While transitioning, SSM/Vs often miss the battle buddy system, where they feel someone will always have their back and keep them from failing (Moore, 2012, p. 25).

To facilitate the SSM/V in building a support structure, schools should provide opportunities for SSM/Vs to meet and network. In its comprehensive study of veterans programs on campuses, the American Council on Education’s (ACE) found that there is a lack of

recognized veterans clubs or organizations on campuses – only 65% of the campuses had an active student service member/veteran organization (McBain, Kim, Cook, & Snead, 2012, p. 22). These organizations are places where SSM/Vs can feel comfortable with themselves and their role as a veteran while being in the presence of people with similar backgrounds with whom they can identify and offer and receive help through the transitioning process (Jones, 2013, p. 12).

Many SSM/Vs feel as if the military did not do an adequate job preparing them for the eventual transition to civilian life (Cook & Kim, 2009, p. 22). Each branch of service is required through legislation to provide their exiting members with counseling through a “Transition Assistance Program” (TAP). While each branch provides the service, it differs by branch in quality and support from commanders. This can cause difficulties for campus administrators who would not know what services were offered to which SSM/Vs (McGrevey & Kehrer, 2009, p. 91). In military TAP, the focus is on translating job skills and writing resumes, but there seems to be little focus on preparations for life in postsecondary education. [At the time of this writing, the armed services are developing a new program called Transitions Goals Plans Success (GPS) which will have an optional two-day course on higher education (The Council for Adult and Experimental Learning, 2013, pp. 8-9)].

### Financial Aid

The most frequently mentioned problems facing SSM/Vs are problems with financial aid and payments from the VA. Though the Post 9-11 GI Bill pays full tuition and a living stipend, delays in the payment of these benefits can cause the SSM/V to be responsible for up-front costs. This can lead to unnecessary loans to be taken, or in some cases, even the dropping of courses (Cook & Kim, 2009, p. 25). The process of certifying the benefits each semester for the GI Bill is

quite “bureaucratic” with several offices needing to sign off before payments can be released (Radford, 2009, pp. 2-3). In addition to the GI Bill, there are other programs and scholarships available to SSM/Vs. *The Higher Education Relief Opportunities for Students (HEROES) Act of 2003* gives additional financial protections to active duty, National Guard, and reserve component service members who received federal financial aid (McGrevey & Kehrer, 2009, p. 90). However, the process to participate in these scholarship programs can be cumbersome for the student and their participating postsecondary higher education institutions (Callahan & Jarrat, 2014, p. 39). SSM/Vs often must first discover the scholarship opportunity on their own, establish eligibility based on differing requirements, and produce documentation of service—and in some cases disabilities—and file prior to deadlines. These requirements can translate into delays in the award, such that it may not arrive in time to pay the college tuition bill.

Another financial issue that affects SSM/Vs receiving educational benefits through the Montgomery and Post 9-11 GI Bills is that the benefit caps out at 36 months of benefits, regardless of how many credit hours were attempted during that time. For SSM/Vs going to school on a part-time basis or who need to take remedial courses, it may take longer than 36 months to complete their degree requirements (Munitz, 2013, p. 133). (The time limit does not apply to Chapter 31 Vocational Rehabilitation programs.)

Additionally, service members that get mobilized and deployed during the semester face the possibility of losing scholarships if they have to drop courses or take a pass/fail grade (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009, p. 6). In other cases, the VA may overpay an institution and recoup the overpayment from the student veteran, which can result in a suspension of the cost of living stipend and/or debt collection notices (Steele et al., 2010, p. 3).

### Disabilities

Many colleges and their Disabled Student Services (DSS) offices may not be prepared to effectively accommodate students with the types of disabilities that combat veterans suffer from such as partial or multiple amputations, PTSD, TBI, cognitive impairments and other disfigurements (Vance & Miller, 2009, pp. 21-22). SSM/Vs with disabilities face numerous challenges as they adapt to academic and civilian life. Due to advances in armor technology and medical services, including advances in combat first aid such as tourniquets and chitosan bandages, veterans are surviving injuries that would have killed service members in the past, many of whom are surviving with poly trauma injuries, such as amputations, perforations, and Traumatic Brain Injuries (Ostovary & Dapprich, 2011, p. 64).

Students with disabilities in general often have lower academic scores and less confidence in their abilities and prospects of completing their programs (Cate, 2014, p. 5). SSM/Vs suffering from disabilities tend to report feelings of increased isolation, which in turn can increase barriers to integration in social, educational, and occupational settings (Ostovary & Dapprich, 2011, p. 65). They may also miss classes or be distracted during classes due to pain, other physical symptoms, side effects of medications, or continuous need for medical appointments.

Of all reported disabilities student veterans are diagnosed with, 90% are reported to be psychological, medical/health issues, mobility and learning disabilities, with psychological disabilities making the majority of the diagnosis. In a 2007 study, the Department of Defense Task Force on Mental Health found that of veterans that redeployed from overseas combat operations 43% had anger issues, 27% reported significant depression, and 24% reported



problems with alcohol abuse (Ackerman et al., 2009, p. 13). It is estimated that only 50% of all veterans diagnosed with mental health disorders, will seek treatment from a professional mental health care provider (McCaslin et al., 2013, p. viii; Vance & Miller, 2009, p. 18).

TBI—another “invisible wound” from which veterans are increasingly suffering—can occur when a person receives a severe blow to the head either by a blunt force or a concussive blast such as one caused by an explosion. TBI can result in cognitive impairment and learning disabilities along with reoccurring headaches and nerve damage. It can also change a person’s behavior and affect cognition and memory (Cate, 2014, pp. 6-7; Vance & Miller, 2009, p. 26). SSM/Vs suffering from PTSD or TBI report the feeling of always having to struggle with the material, as if they have to work harder than the other students in order to retain the knowledge (Alvarez, 2008).

SSM/Vs try to hide or minimize the symptoms of their PTSD/TBI due to social stigma. As a result, they sometimes fail to disclose the disability to the campus disabilities office that is committed to helping them (Ostovary & Dapprich, 2011, p. 65) and many SSM/Vs do not identify themselves as having a disability to the DSS office until after a serious academic or other related issue manifests itself (Shackelford, 2009, p. 37).

There is also a tendency to overlook female SSM/Vs in DSS programs because of the misconception that women do not play a combat role in contemporary war. In 2005, female service members made up 14% of the military and although they were barred from direct combat occupations, they served in support positions that routinely put them in harm’s way such as combat medic, military police and convoy operations (Ostovary & Dapprich, 2011, p. 64). They

suffer the same types of polytraumatic injuries and have a higher risk of injuries, PTSD, or depression caused by sexual assault in the service.

In 2009, less than 37% of colleges and universities had staff trained specifically for treating veterans with disabilities, but by 2012, 55% offered services for physical disabilities and 35% for brain injuries and other non-visible disabilities (Cook & Kim, 2009, p. viii; McBain et al., 2012, p. 8). While this is an improvement, DSS offices need to be prepared to refer student veterans to outside agencies if they are unable to offer accommodations to wounded students. Accommodations might include offering more courses online or in hybrid format, so certain mobility and anxiety issues may be alleviated (Vance & Miller, 2009, p. 25).

Military and the VA's standards for determining disability for the purpose of disability claims or separation from the service are different than the standards that define a person with a disability under the *American with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973*. In some cases SSM/Vs who were denied disability compensation benefits would still be eligible for reasonable accommodations for their conditions (Shackelford, 2009, pp. 40-41). Because certain disabilities may take time to develop, many SSM/Vs may not even know that they are suffering from a qualified disability as the symptoms begin to manifest.

### Deployment and Mobilization

SSM/Vs serving in the National Guard and the Reserves are also having difficulty navigating the administrative process of dropping courses or postponing their academic programs due to mobilizations or deployments (Cook & Kim, 2009, p. viii). During peacetime, Reservists and National Guard members generally drill one weekend a month, two weeks a year, but when the

nation is at war, they are subject to deployments to combat zones that last up to 15 months (C. B. Rumann & Hamrick, 2009, p. 27).

Other SSM/Vs who are not currently enlisted can still be affected by operational requirements. Just because a service member leaves active duty does not mean their contractual commitment is over because the commitment to service is for eight years. The balance of the eight years is spent on Inactive Ready Reserve Status where the SSM/V can still be activated for service. Advisors should be aware of the process and policy the school has regarding having to withdraw from courses due to military requirements (Ryan et al., 2011, p. 59). Counselors speaking with SSM/Vs should also counsel SSM/Vs on the Service Members Civil Relief Act and the protections that will cover them while they are gone and when they return (McGrevey & Kehrer, 2009, pp. 90-91). However, because this issue affects a smaller percentage of the student population and the time between leaving a college campus for deployment and the time the student returns to his or her studies can be measured in years, it is difficult to judge the effects of these mobilizations on the educational outcome of the student service member/veteran (Cate, 2014, pp. 54-55). Consequently, one of the conclusions reached by the Student Veterans of America in their *Million Records Project* was that these veterans will require more time to complete their program in addition to the time lost due to the mobilization.

When a SSM/V's deployment is complete, their re-entry into their educational program can be delayed by the need to wait for a new academic term to begin. Unresolved issues from before the deployment such as needing to finish a project before deployment, make up exams, or other personal issues that has since turned into problems also will need to be addressed before the proper attention can be given to any new pursuits (C. B. Rumann & Hamrick, 2009, p. 29).

SSM/Vs who deploy while in school, face the added challenge of being away from campus and the academic discipline they have cultivated, which can suffer through disuse (Barry et al., 2014, p. 37).

### *Program Successes*

Colleges and universities constantly seek to improve their services and endeavor to provide SSM/Vs with the support needed to complete their degree/certificate programs. As a way to assist veterans in choosing a college or university that offers quality services to military service members and veterans, Military.com, a trusted website for the military community, created the “Military Friendly” approval system. This label allows potential students to identify if a college campus has a focus on providing veterans with a quality education and transitioning services (Cook & Kim, 2009, p. 23).

One of the requirements to be labeled a “Military Friendly” campus is that the college or university must be a member of the Service Member Opportunity Colleges (SOC), which is a consortium of 1800 colleges and universities nationwide that are flexible in awarding transfer credit for military service and college level credit examinations such as College Level Examination Program (CLEP) exams, Defense Activity for Nontraditional Education Support (DANTES) exams, DANTES Standardized Subject Tests (DSST) and Excelsior College Examinations (ECE) (Persky, 2010, p. 84). Therefore, one benefit of attending an SOC member college is that they readily accept transfer credit from other SOC partner schools, facilitating educational opportunities for deployed or displaced service members (C. Rumann, Rivera, & Hernandez, 2011, p. 54).

In making a successful “soldier to student” transition a priority in postsecondary education, colleges and universities are demonstrating a commitment to the SSM/Vs and making a statement about how important the population is to their campus and the community. In order to help coordinate services on campus, 71% of postsecondary education institutions have dedicated SSM/Vs’ programs and Veterans Service Offices (VSOs) on campus. This is a considerable improvement from 2009 when only 49% of campuses reported dedicated offices (Cook & Kim, 2009, pp. vii-viii; McBain et al., 2012, p. 47). Many postsecondary educational institutions are also identifying administrators, faculty, and staff who have military backgrounds to serve as advisors to student groups and to share their own experiences with current SSM/Vs and offer advice on transitioning strategies (Callahan & Jarrat, 2014, p. 40; Cook & Kim, 2009, p. 28).

To help ease the difficulties of transitioning to student life, SSM/Vs need to establish a social support system on campus where they can feel at ease knowing that there are others who share a common background and experiences. In addition, postsecondary educational institutions need to prove to the SSM/Vs that they are important and valued members of the campus community. The proliferation of SSM/V specific orientation programs is a step forward for many campuses. For many SSM/Vs, the orientation program is their initial introduction to the campus and can set the tone for how they feel they are supported at their school (O’Herrin, 2011, p. 16).

Student veteran organizations on campus are another way for SSM/Vs to connect with and identify peers who share their experiences. Peer groups are an excellent avenue for SSM/Vs to debrief military experiences, discuss difficulties in transitioning, and network with other students who share similar life experiences.

In 2008, a national coalition of student SSM/V campus organizations called the Student Veterans of America (SVA) was established to develop new groups on campuses and to advocate for SSM/Vs on the state, local, and national levels (Burnett & Segoria, 2009, p. 55). Colleges and universities can also develop programs for SSM/Vs to help them in their transitions such as an introductory or foundations course for SSM/Vs. Many campuses now even offer specific meeting places or lounges for SSM/Vs where they can feel relaxed knowing they are in a safe environment with their peers (Holloway, 2010, p. 15).

The Supportive Education for the Returning Veteran (SERV) program includes educational courses offered as “for veterans only,” where SSM/Vs can choose to learn in an environment where they can feel accepted and able to express themselves without feeling like an outsider (Munitz, 2013, p. 54; O'Herrin, 2011, p. 18). The courses serve as a stepping stone to ease the transition from military to civilian learning. Another component of SERV is a three-course program—which has been adopted by approximately 350 colleges and universities—that focuses on leadership, resiliency, and empathy designed to train SSM/Vs to teach others these valuable skills (Callahan & Jarrat, 2014, pp. 39-40).

Though it is a continuing issue for student SSM/Vs to navigate dropping courses due to military obligation, progress has been made to ease the process and accommodate the needs of the SSM/V. Approximately 82% of all postsecondary institutions now have an established policy concerning refunds of tuition for SSM/Vs facing military activations or deployments (McBain et al., 2012, p. 8; C. B. Rumann & Hamrick, 2010, p. 454). Institutions are also permitting more flexibility in how SSM/Vs complete their courses based on their military commitments such as a hold on current course work for completion at a later date.

Some services can be offered to student SSM/Vs at little or no cost to the school, such as a priority registration program for SSM/Vs, which many institutions have adopted (Burnett & Segoria, 2009, p. 55). Administrative policies concerning deploying and returning SSM/Vs serve to make it easier for them to persevere in their programs and are mandated by law. *Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008* ensures that all SSM/Vs be readmitted after a deployment without a change in their academic status as long as the absence is no longer than five years (McBain et al., 2012, pp. 19-20).

Many institutions have partnered with local VA hospitals and veteran service organizations to provide services for student SSM/Vs on campus grounds (O'Herrin, 2011, p. 17). Mobile clinics bring services to schools, such as mental health services, smoking cessation programs, and even a traveling companion animals program. Providing services on campus increases the likelihood of seeking treatment because it reduces barriers to service based on transportation issues, and the stigma associated with going to a VA hospital (McCaslin et al., 2013, p. ix).

Additionally many institutions offer broad campus programs, such as mental health services, and do not need a completely separate veterans program. Many veterans may not even want to be separated from regular students any more than they are and prefer to integrate into the campus as a “traditional” student (Cook & Kim, 2009, p. 2). A majority of schools have in-house mental health counseling services and 84% of colleges with a veteran’s service office report having staff in their counseling centers trained in treating PTSD. In addition, over 95% have counseling services for depression and anxiety issues (McBain et al., 2012, p. 21).

One example of a collaborative effort between colleges and universities and VA healthcare is the San Francisco VA Medical Center's City College of San Francisco Veterans Outreach Program (VOP). The program is funded and staffed through a partnership with the local VA medical center and the Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership (VITAL) program. The VOP provides VA services on campus such as VA healthcare enrollment, educational services, mental health treatment, social work services, and referral services. This program can serve as a model to other institutions for delivery of services and requires minimal campus resources (McCaslin et al., 2013, p. ix).

Possibly the best way to ensure that the right services are provided to all SSM/Vs is to have it mandated at the national or state level. For example, former governor of California, Arnold Schwarzenegger, established "Troops to College," which directed that all California's publically-funded schools (California Community Colleges, The California State University, and the University of California) needed to increase the enrollment of SSM/Vs and to make educational programs more veteran friendly. As part of California's Troops to College program, the state established a website with links to resources and information about the program itself and the many colleges and programs California has to offer SSM/Vs. The state sent promotional materials to every military installation in the state and established "Campus Veterans Support Teams" who are trained to deal with the challenges SSM/Vs face as they enroll in classes and beginning their academic program. The state ensured that each campus has an active student veteran organization to serve as informal support networks for SSM/Vs. California also streamlined the transfer credit system so that SSM/Vs know what previous military experience or previous courses or examinations will count for college credit, and they encouraged alumni



organizations to offer additional services to SSM/Vs and their families (Reed, 2008). By requiring the publically-funded schools to establish critical programs and maintain a certain level of services, SSM/Vs could expect that they will have the support needed to complete their degree/certificate programs.

Thanks to the continuing efforts of institutions, local VA services, community collaboration and other veteran services organizations, SSM/Vs are earning their degrees at a pace consistent with their non-veteran peers (Cate, 2014, p. v). The SVA with the assistance of the Department of Veterans Affairs, the National Student Clearinghouse, the Lumina and Kresge Foundations conducted the first ever empirical study of educational outcomes of SSM/Vs called the *Million Records Project*. By studying the records of 898,895 SSM/Vs over a period of 10 years, they have concluded that student veterans are completing their programs at an acceptable rate of 51.7% (Cate, 2014, p. iv).

### *Areas to Improve*

But while vast improvements have been made in regards to the services offered to SSM/Vs and the quality of those programs, there is always room for improvement. Therefore, higher education institutions should conduct needs assessment and student satisfaction studies prior to investing into programs that may not be effective or needed/wanted (O'Herrin, 2011, p. 16).

One area that has a great need of improvement is the offering of veteran specific orientation programs, which less than 20% of postsecondary educational institutions offer (Cook & Kim, 2009, p. 8). Because veterans do not necessarily transition out of active service in time for traditional orientation sessions they can miss the introduction to the campus and services in

which other students participate. This can result in a feeling of disorientation during this complicated point in a veteran's life (O'Herrin, 2011, p. 17). Barry (2014, p. 39) asserts that SSM/Vs would benefit from an orientation program that includes a "crosswalk" explanation of the ways military and campus life are the same and what ways they are different, along with strategies to navigate the new environment. California's Citrus College offers a "Boots to Books" course for credit, which assists SSM/Vs in their transition from military service and deployments. It works on interpersonal skills, stress management, and academic areas like note taking and study preparation (C. Rumann et al., 2011, p. 53).

A campus's veteran services office should collaborate with the campus Disabled Student Service (DSS) office and other agencies in the community that offer veteran specific services (Burnett & Segoria, 2009, p. 54). Representatives from the institution's financial services office should also be present to discuss options for those students who are experiencing financial hardships while waiting for VA payments. A representative from the Registrar's office should be invited to discuss ACE credit, and what to do in case of deployments/mobilizations, and last but not least, a representative from the local VA medical facility should be present to provide enrollment services (Cook & Kim, 2009, p. 14).

It may not be enough to introduce the services – disability researcher Mary Vance (2009, p. 19) points out that the traditional way of identifying students in need of services is based on self-identification and due to perceived stigma, many SSM/Vs will underreport their needs. There should be an effort on the program coordinator's part to identify those who could benefit from their services and provide some form of outreach to them. For example, a SSM/V who has PTSD may know that they have a disability recognized by the VA but they may only think of a

DSS office providing services for mobility disabilities, and may miss out on help to which they are entitled (Vance & Miller, 2009, p. 23). Others may not see themselves as having a disability or think that their lack of VA disability rating translates into a lack of disability recognized by the campus.

Building on the idea that a local VA representative should be present at orientation, the benefit of having a VA representative present to provide outreach services can have innumerable effects on the student veteran population. Lesser known programs can be discussed, like the VA's smoking cessation program and alcohol/substance abuse programs and the VA's Move Fitness program (Widome et al., 2011, p. 391). For campuses further than 50 miles from a VA medical center, a mobile outreach program should be established via a partnership with the VA, the campus, and local non-profits to provide services on campus or provide transportation to the medical center from campus to make it easier to link SSM/Vs with programs that may have been difficult to access due to distance (McCaslin et al., 2013, p. x; Vance & Miller, 2009, p. 23; Widome et al., 2011, p. 388).

It is tempting for colleges and universities to try and separate veteran services into two separate areas with different organizations in charge of service. They could assume that health and "veteran" issues should be handled by another entity while the campus focuses on the academic and "student" issues. This model could be detrimental to transitioning as there is a lack of needed integration of services which could create a holistic approach to educational services and transitioning (C. B. Rumann & Hamrick, 2009, p. 30). Administrators could identify the special challenges faced by SSM/Vs and consider how similar challenges were addressed in the past – perhaps there are already services available that with slight modifications would be

beneficial to the population? If there were not already similar services, the question must be answered, why not? (Branker, 2009, p. 61)

Most campuses already have support structures in place that can be utilized by the SSM/V population with minimal adjustments or additional training. There are already disability services, mental health counseling, financial aid offices, academic counseling, and other systems in place. By understanding the difference between the civilian students and the SSM/Vs and recognizing the specific challenges they face, campuses can identify how they need to adjust their current programs without the need for a separate but equal system for SSM/Vs. If schools proactively seek partnerships with government agencies and local veteran non-profit services, schools can reduce the costs borne by the institution and ensure targeted services are provided (Vacchi, 2012, p. 19).

The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning has issued several reports outlining how to increase the quality of services to SSM/Vs on campus. One of the main themes running through these reports is the necessity of providing additional training to faculty and staff on the specific needs of the SSM/V population. The ability to recognize the signs of disabilities and how to adjust their teaching to accommodate those disabilities would make them feel more welcome in class and help SSM/Vs succeed in their programs (The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, 2013, p. 9). Support staff in financial service offices and the registrar's office would also benefit from training on financial aid options open to SSM/Vs, so that they can better assist them as they navigate the process of funding their education (Steele et al., 2010, p. 5). It is also useful for professors to recognize that some topics and points of view concerning

military operations and service members expressed during instruction could be taken as an insult to certain student veterans (Radford, 2009, p. 18).

Data indicate that the feelings and pre-conceived notions of veterans or war in general among the staff and professors at a postsecondary educational institution can affect their efficacy when it comes to teaching student SSM/Vs or handling their issues (Barnard-Brak et al., 2011, p. 34). By providing teacher efficacy training to faculty, institutions could reduce the personal opinions of teachers that may undermine the quality of instruction given to SSM/Vs, but also enhance the ability of college personnel to work with SSM/Vs suffering from disabilities from combat. In addition, focus should be made not on the potentially negative aspects of military service, but on addressing the strengths of the SSM/Vs. Many instructors will find that providing the opportunity for SSM/Vs to share their life experiences will enhance the instruction (Hassan et al., 2010, p. 32).

Another unresolved issue is the level of services provided to SSM/Vs who have to put their education on hold due to military obligations. Although 82% of institutions identified in the 2012 *Soldiers to Students II* study have established policies concerning tuition refunds for military deployments and activations, this leaves nearly 20% of postsecondary institutions who do not (McBain et al., 2012, p. 8). McBain also found that only 28% of institutions had an expedited re-enrollment process for those SSM/Vs who had to fulfill their military duties. A program to ensure the SSM/V can pick up where they left off in their program needs to be in place so they do not fall into the trap of having to wait extra semesters until the class they needed to complete becomes available again (C. B. Rumann & Hamrick, 2010, p. 444).

Institutions must develop better systems to identify students with military backgrounds and experiences and identify potential obstacles to SSM/Vs completing their educational goals. They must also find ways to measure the effectiveness of programs for the SSM/V population (Callahan & Jarrat, 2014, p. 41). In order for faculty and staff to be able to know who in the school is a SSM/V, it would be important to add military status to the student unit record; in this way, professors could at least be aware or sensitive to a particular student's needs or special circumstances and Veteran Service Officers can be sure they make contact (DiRamio et al., 2008, p. 94).

Livingstone et al.(2011, p. 328) recommend schools form task forces to assess their current student SSM/V programs and seek ways to improve them. These task forces should include all stakeholders: SSM/Vs, VA certifying officials, school's Veteran Service Officers, veteran faculty, student affairs officers, counselors, mental health professionals, admissions, registrars, financial aid officers, and the campus disabilities office. Furthermore, postsecondary educational institutions with significant student veteran populations should consider forming a think tank or "community advisory board" with members of the Department of Veterans Affairs, the local veterans' service organizations such as the Disabled Veterans of America (DAV), the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), and school services such as the campus Veteran Service Office, career centers, financial aid offices and advising services (Burnett & Segoria, 2009, p. 56). These boards could form working relationships with each other and the student veteran population to identify issues affecting the veterans and find solutions using a collaborative community approach.

## Summary

SSM/Vs have earned their educational benefits through their selfless service to their nation. They have earned our continued respect and our commitment to assist them to transition from a warrior to a productive working member of society. Research has shown that SSM/Vs with degrees or vocational certificates earn more than those without and therefore contribute skilled labor and tax revenue to local communities (Angrist, 1993, p. 637; Persky, 2010, p. 17). By ensuring the success of the American SSM/V, we are also ensuring that our tax dollars are being spent in a responsible way on a worthwhile investment.

Table 1, below, provides a summary of the main challenges uncovered in the literature review along with possible remedies. The contents of this summary table will be used to guide the development of instruments to evaluate the services available to SSM/Vs at colleges and universities in Western New York.

*Table 1 Summary of challenges faced by SSM/Vs and possible ways to address them*

Identified Challenges	Ways to Address Challenges
Lower academic scores and levels of degree persistence than civilian peers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer SSM/V specific Academic Advisement</li> <li>• Offer a tutor service on campus</li> </ul>
Identity issues and not being able to identify or form relationships with civilian peers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide for an officially recognized SSM/V peer group on campus such as <i>Student Veterans of America</i></li> <li>• Sponsor events with broad appeal to bring SSM/Vs and civilian students together in a social setting.</li> </ul>
Lack of Transition Support Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have a designated Veterans Service Office and Veterans Service Officer who will be a POC for SSM/V related issues</li> </ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer a SSM/V specific orientation program for new and transfer SSM/Vs</li> <li>• Offer transition courses for credit to teach essential transitioning skills.</li> </ul>
Financial aid and VA benefit issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer VA benefit assistance and financial aid assistance to SSM/Vs</li> <li>• Offer scholarships to SSM/Vs to cover expenses not covered by the VA.</li> <li>• Offer a tuition deferment plan to SSM/Vs awaiting benefit payments from VA</li> </ul>
Disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure the school has a Disabled Student Service office that can provide support to SSM/Vs</li> <li>• Provide mental health counseling services</li> <li>• Ensure service providers have training in issues that are common in SSM/Vs such as PTSD, amputation/mobility issues, TBI, and depression</li> </ul>
Deployments and Mobilization interrupting program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plainly state deployment policy for withdrawing from courses.</li> <li>• Offer assistance in preparing SSM/V for prolonged absence from program.</li> <li>• Offer expedited or preferential registration policy for SSM/Vs returning from deployment or mobilization</li> </ul>
Transfer Credits not being granted based on military service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Become a member of the Service members Opportunity Colleges consortium</li> <li>• Plainly state American Council on Education transfer credit policy in regards to awarding credit for military service or credit granting tests.</li> </ul>

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SSM/Vs feel like they are not a welcomed population on campus

- Market themselves as “Military Friendly” and include SSM/Vs in the promotional materials for the school.
  - Hold SSM/V celebrations on campus such as a Memorial Day or Veterans Day event.
  - Provide training to Educators and staff on SSM/V issues to foster better understanding and empathy
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### **Chapter III: Methodology**

#### **Statement of Hypothesis**

The literature reviews suggests three hypotheses to determine the relationship between programs schools provide and the outcomes of satisfaction with transitioning and desire to complete their academic/vocational programs. The first hypothesis studies the broader relationship between program availability and the SSM/Vs transition satisfaction. The literature review suggests a positive relationship between number of programs offered and SSM/V satisfaction.

H<sub>A1</sub>: There is a positive relationship between the number of SSM/V programs a college or university offers and the student service member/veteran's satisfaction level in transitioning from Military to student/civilian life.

H<sub>01</sub>: There is either a negative or no relationship between the number of SSM/V programs a college or university offers and the student service member/veteran's satisfaction level in transitioning from Military to student/civilian life.

In line with previous studies, the second hypothesis predicts that if the college has more programs to serve SSM/Vs, the latter will report greater degree persistence.

H<sub>A2</sub>: There is a positive relationship between dedicated SSM/V services and SSM/V's desire to complete their degree/vocational program.

H<sub>02</sub>: There is either a negative or no relationship between dedicated SSM/V services and student service member/veteran's desire to complete their degree/vocational program.

The last hypothesis focuses on the postsecondary institution's Veteran's Service Office (VSO). Specifically, this hypothesis assesses the extent there is a relationship between satisfaction levels with the campus VSO and overall SSM/V student satisfaction with the transition from military to student life.

H<sub>A3</sub>: There is a positive relationship between the satisfaction levels of a campus's VSO services and the SSM/V's satisfaction level in transitioning from military to student/civilian life.

H<sub>03</sub>: There is either a negative or no relationship between VSO service satisfaction levels and SSM/V's satisfaction levels in transitioning from military to student/civilian life.

### **Design of Study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the services and programs provided by postsecondary education institutions in Erie County to support their SSM/V population. The study will utilize a transformative embedded mixed methods design to test the three study hypotheses (Creswell, 2014, p. 221). Veterans are considered in this context to be a "marginalized" group within a mainstream campus culture organized to satisfy the educational and social needs of the "traditional" student. The transformative embedded mixed methods design is also appropriate

because this study's finding could point to needed changes in the campus services and programs offered (to an heretofore marginalized group) and serve as a potential call for action on behalf of the SSM/V population (Creswell, 2014, p. 238).

The methodology is both mixed and embedded for two reasons: first, both qualitative and quantitative methods are used to collect data; and, second, the data collection is nested within a *participant-observer* design, which is a qualitative methodology for collecting and interpreting data. As an active duty Army enlisted service member for almost nine years with three combat deployments completed, the researcher has extensive experience with the transition from military life to student and civilian life. He attended SUNY Buffalo State for his undergraduate degree and served as an acting president of Buffalo State's Student Veterans of America chapter. In this leadership capacity, he has had experience working with student government and administrators in the establishment and funding of a peer group for SSM/Vs. Therefore, all aspects of the data collection should be understood as *embedded* within the participant-observer methodology.

The study of campus services and programs was initiated with a *content analysis* (qualitative) of the websites of all Western New York (WNY) colleges and universities in order to ascertain their degree of "veteran friendliness." These findings were then embedded (inform) the core data collection—a *web-administered survey* to SSM/Vs matriculated at WNY colleges and universities. A follow-up qualitative *interview* portion provided depth and further detail to the quantitative (survey) results. The principal goals of the interview phase were: first, to understand the SSM/Vs experiences with campus services and for guidance as to services or programs those services their campuses should provide (but currently are not available); and

second, to ensure SSM/Vs would have the opportunity to voice their unique perspectives on the challenges they face and the services and programs available to them.

### **Sample Selection**

A content analysis was conducted of the veteran's services website for the 15 accredited postsecondary institutions in Erie County offering specific veteran services. Erie County was selected due to the proximity to the researcher and the recent focus New York State government, particularly Governor Andrew Cuomo, has placed on the region in terms of economic development and the role of colleges and universities in this effort. (See, for example, New York's Regional Economic Development Councils at <http://regionalcouncils.ny.gov/>.) Of these 15 schools, four of them were disqualified because their public websites had no mention of veteran services other than the fact that they accepted VA educational benefits.

The content analysis focused on 14 measures emphasized in the literature as positive indicators of student service member/veteran support and three additional measures (indicated with an \*) the participant-observer researcher felt demarcated the college or university as "Military Friendly" to perspective students. Table 2 provides a summary and Table 4 (below) contains the results of the content analysis.

*Table 2 Content analysis measures for school websites*

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presence of Veterans Service Office</li> <li>• Provides VA Educational Benefit Assistance?</li> <li>• Is it a Service members Opportunity College?</li> <li>• Are SSM/Vs Displayed in Marketing Materials? Pics of SSM/Vs on Website? *</li> <li>• Is There a Specific SSM/V Orientation Program?</li> <li>• Is the Deployment/Re-entry Policy Stated?</li> <li>• Does the Website Have a Link to Mental Health Services?</li> <li>• Is there a SSM/V Peer Organization on Campus?</li> <li>• Does the School have a SSM/V Guidebook? *</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listed Veterans Service Officer? POC?</li> <li>• Scholarship and Veteran Opportunities</li> <li>• Listed as “Military Friendly” on GI Jobs Website?</li> <li>• Is the ACE Military Experience Transfer Credit Policy Explained? *</li> <li>• Is SSM/V Specific Academic Advisement Available?</li> <li>• Are Transition Services or Courses Offered?</li> <li>• Does the Website Have a Link to Disability Services?</li> <li>• Links to Outside SSM/V Resources?</li> </ul>
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Table 3 lists the 11 schools that met the criteria of the study and were contacted for the purpose of population sampling.

*Table 3 Schools selected for population sampling*

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SUNY College at Buffalo	Erie Community College - SUNY	University at Buffalo- SUNY	Canisius College
Bryant & Stratton	Daemen College	Medaille College	Hilbert College
D’Youville College	Trocaire College	Villa Maria College.	

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The sampling consisted of a multi-stage random probability sampling of the SSM/V population of the 11 selected schools selected for study.

Stage One consisted of a cluster sampling of SSM/Vs in Erie County via the list serve of the SSM/V population provided by the Veterans Service Office of the schools and included men

and women within the age range of 18-65, which is the expected age range for student service members/veterans to attempt a postsecondary education. The specific inclusion criterion was that all respondents were student service members/veterans. The specific exclusion criterion was anyone who had not served in the US armed forces, either on active duty or in the National Guard or Reserves. Based on an estimate of 10-20 SSM/V respondents per school, an *n* of between 100-200 SSM/V was expected, though if response rate were higher it would give a better overall picture of how the SSM/Vs perceive the programs and would be more conducive to generalization of study results to the population.

Over the course of contacting the selected schools, it became apparent that it would not be possible or practical to sample from each school. Specifically, one private for-profit college had only 3 SSM/Vs enrolled in the Fall 2015 semester and another private school required a completely new Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval application through their institution, which was estimated to take close to 2 months to complete. Several other schools, after already responding that they would participate, failed to distribute the survey as promised and failed to respond to communications from the researcher. The colleges and universities that distributed the survey are as follows:

SUNY Buffalo State

Erie Community College - SUNY

Daemen College

University at Buffalo - SUNY

Hilbert College

Stage Two consisted of a proportionate stratified random sampling of respondents willing to participate in a follow-up interview. From the original survey, respondents who indicated they would like to participate in the five-question interview were consolidated into a list and a proportionate stratified random sample of those respondents was contacted based on the proportion of respondents collected from each school for the follow up interview. For example, if 20% of total respondents were enrolled at Buffalo State, then 20% of the follow-up interviews would be generated from Buffalo State. A random number generator –based on a numbered list of email addresses –was utilized for random selection of the stratified samples.

Through the process of soliciting schools to participate in the study it became apparent that there were many challenges to conducting a study involving the Veterans Service Offices (VSOs) of several institutions. Difficulties could be grouped into three categories: overworked or unfocused administrators; combative or defensive administrators; and, each postsecondary institution insisting on its own IRB approval. The researcher discovered that four of the sample selected had a “designated” Veterans Service Officer, but whose work assignment included areas other than SSM/V issues. For example, at one college the Veterans Service Officer was also the disability services officer, the financial aid liaison and the special programs officer. In this instance, the individual explained that he/she was only in the VSO every other week and only for a few days as essentially the job focused on certifying veterans benefits at the school and not administration of SSM/V programs.

There were also instances of incorrect information on campus websites. Several websites listed outdated points of contacts. In one case, the listed point of contact had left that institution almost 11 months prior to this study. In another case, the email address for the program



administrator was listed incorrectly (returning an undeliverable email message). In today's world where most students use the internet to research a potential college or university or search to get answers to their questions, it would seem imperative that the websites contain the most up-to-date information.

At two postsecondary institutions, there were administrators that seemed not only uninterested in participating in the study but even combative to a degree. An administrator at one campus even went as far as to imply that if a SSM/V felt their school was not doing enough for them that it was somehow the fault of the SSM/V. The researcher thought it might be possible that some of these institutions of higher learning were experiencing difficulty in providing services for their SSM/V population and were concerned that the study would reveal these shortcomings. These are typical hurdles faced by an independent researcher conducting quasi-program evaluation studies.

In addition, the study ran into several hurdles with respect to Institutional Review Board (IRB) certifications. After receiving IRB approval at SUNY Buffalo State, only two colleges accepted that IRB approval as sufficient evidence that all steps to protect their college's participants were taken. Each school had different requirements, which added 2-3 weeks per school to the process of gaining approval to disseminate the survey tool. There appears to be no reciprocity agreement between schools when it comes to IRB approval, causing student researchers to jump through multiple hoops to gain access to study participants. (IRB approvals are not even recognized among SUNY schools.)

### **Data Collection Methods**

A 45-question survey was created and administered via Qualtrics. The URL was sent to the SSM/Vs through the campus listservs. The survey collected demographic information, which was useful in creating an overall picture of the SSM/V population. There are also questions discussing specific services, usage of the services, and Likert scale satisfaction of service questions. The survey also contained several open-ended short answer questions allowing the respondent to elaborate on a previous answer or share a thought. The survey included a question asking if the respondent would be interested in being contacted for a follow-up interview and a place to submit their email address for further contact. The survey was sent to the VSOs at each school asking for their expert opinions and input on the questions asked. Their recommendations were integrated into the final survey tool. The survey was also piloted with faculty and other individuals connected with SUNY Buffalo State's MPA program. The survey tool can be found in Appendix A.

After obtaining IRB approval from the researcher's host institution, the administration of the survey began. A list of those who wished to be contacted for a follow-up interview was compiled and a random sample of respondents was selected. Contact with selected respondents was made to set up a time/location to meet or if they preferred, a copy of the questions was e-mailed to them so they could answer at their leisure and submit when completed. The five question follow-up survey is listed in Appendix A.

**Data Analysis**

*Statistical Analysis*

Descriptive Statistics

A content analysis was conducted of the websites for each postsecondary institution in Erie County. (See Table 2, above.) Table 4 (below) includes the programs offered by the postsecondary institutions (as listed on websites) as of May 2015.

Table 4: Veterans Services as Found on Campus Websites – May 2015

	SUNY Buffalo State	Erie Community College	University at Buffalo	Canisius College	Bryant & Stratton	Daemen College	Medaille College	Hilbert College	D'Youville College	Trocaire College	Villa Maria
Has Veteran Service Office?	x	x	x	x		x			x	x	
Veteran Service Officer, POC?	x	x	x	x		x		x	x	x	x
VA educational Benefit Assistance?	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Scholarships & Vet Opportunities?	x			x	x	x	x		x	x	
Is it a SOC School?	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Recognized as GI Jobs "Military Friendly"	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
SSM/Vs displayed in materials? Pics?	x		x		x	x	x		x	x	
Transfer Credit Policy (ACE) Clearly Stated?											
Specific Veteran Orientation Program?	x										
SSM/V Specific Academic Advisement offered?			x			x			x	x	
Deployment/Re-entry Policy Stated?											
Transition Services or Courses Offered?											
SSM/V Peer Organization on Campus?	x		x			x		x	x		
Links to Disability Services?										x	
Links to Mental Health Services?						x				x	
Links to Outside SSM/V Resources?	x				x	x			x	x	
Does the school have a SSM/V Guidebook?	x										

One should note that an omission does not mean that the program is not offered at that institution, but that the program was not mentioned on the website at the time the analysis was conducted.

Based on the analysis of the literature and the analysis of the websites, the schools with the best websites from a SSM/V services standpoint are:

1. SUNY Buffalo State
2. Daemen College
3. D’Youville College
4. Trocaire College

Of the original 15 schools selected to participate in the study, only five agreed to participate in the survey portion of the study. In total, 68 SSM/Vs responded to the survey and completed it. Table 5 illustrates the breakdown of participants by school. (See Appendix B for the Qualtrics report.)

*Table 5 Number of Respondents by School*

School <sup>1</sup>	SSM/Vs Per NCES*	Responded	% of Response	Response Rate of SSM/V
SUNY Buffalo State	146	24	35%	16%
Erie Community College	N/A	12	18%	N/A
University at Buffalo (UB)	212	13	19%	6%
Daemen College	41	9	13%	22%
Hilbert College	34	10	15%	29%
Totals	433	68	100%	16%

The demographics of the SSM/V population in Erie County is generally in line with the studies consulted for the literature review: 76% identified as male, 22% are female and only 1% identifies as transgender or “other.” The ethnic composition was: white (78%), African

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<sup>1</sup> The numbers of SSM/Vs at each school are from the National Center for Educational Statistics. The most current data available is from the 2013-2014 academic year. Erie Community College does not have data listed on the NCES for 2013-2014.

American (7%), Mixed Race (7%), Hispanic or Latino (4%), Native American (1%), and Pacific Islander (1%). As expected the age range of SSM/Vs is greater than the average age of the “traditional student.” None of the respondents were within the 18-22 years old range, the 23-27 years old range had the highest percentage of individuals at 24%, followed by 33-37 year olds with 21%, 38-42 year olds at 12%, and 21% of the respondents were in the 43 or over age category. Almost three-quarters of the respondents are undergraduate students, with the balance pursuing graduate studies. Two percent had either graduated or indicated a status of “other.”

In addition, reported marital status reflects the age range with 32% being single, 43% being married and 25% being separated or divorced. An overwhelming majority reported living off campus either as a homeowner or renter (82%), which can explain why so many report insecurities about having their benefits paid on time. None of the respondents reported living on campus.

While current numbers of enrolled SSM/V at each school for fall 2015 were not available, each school is responsible for annual reporting of the number of enrolled students using veteran’s benefits to fund their education to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2015). The most current numbers on the NCES website are for the 2013-2014 school year. Barring major fluctuations in SSM/V enrollment, data from the previous year should provide a reasonable estimate of the current percentage of SSM/Vs.

Referring to Table 5, it can be seen that SUNY Buffalo State had the highest number of respondents with 24, which is estimated to be 16% of the SSM/Vs on campus based on the previous year’s NCES number of enrolled benefit recipients. University at Buffalo had 12

respondents, which was 6% of their SSM/V population. Erie Community College (EEC) also had 12 respondents, but their profile on the NCES website indicated zero benefit recipients enrolled in 2013-2014 (one would assume it's a n/a rather than zero), so it is not possible to estimate EEC's response rate. Private colleges had noticeably lower numbers of reported benefit recipients, but higher response rates. Daemen College had 9 respondents, which is estimated to be 22% of the SSM/Vs on campus. Hilbert College had the lowest reported number of enrolled benefit recipients and the highest response rate, which was 29%.

Almost all respondents of the survey (94%) indicated that they would find it helpful and would utilize if offered, a "Quick Reference Guide" that outlined the benefits and services available both on and off campus to SSM/Vs. At the time of this study, only SUNY Buffalo State offered such a guide to its students. Ninety-three percent of the respondents stated that their school had a dedicated VSO on campus. The most used services were attaining assistance with veteran's educational benefits, general college information and guidance, resolution of VA payment issues, bursar deferrals based on expected VA payments, and referrals to outside agencies. Overall SSM/S are satisfied with the services provided by the VSOs with 75% reporting they are either satisfied or very satisfied with their service, only 7% reported being dissatisfied.

When asked in question 16 if they considered their campus military friendly or not, 58% reported yes, 10% reported no, and 31% were neutral. Among the reasons cited in the open-ended response of question 17, the factors contributing to the military friendliness of a school fell into 4 general categories;

1. Competent VSO Staff willing to go the "extra mile" to make a SSM/V feel like they are a priority (41%).

2. Having a veteran's lounge located on campus and having other Vets around (31%).
3. Friendly professors who try to understand the SSM/V experience and work with the SSM/Vs on dealing with SSM/V issues such as service requirements and disability issues (21%).
4. Having a separate SSM/V orientation program (7%).

Of the 10% of respondents saying that their campus is not military friendly, respondents noted difficulty in working with members of school administration in trying to expand services, uninviting VSO offices that are cramped and shared with multiple other offices so they feel like they have no privacy in discussing their issues with the Veteran Service Officer, not having any SSM/V events sponsored by the campus, and having an office on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of a building with little indication that it exists. In general, the feeling is that while services exist they are not advertised or seemed uninviting to the SSM/V population.

When asked if their campus gave their military experience and DANTES/CLEP tests the correct amount of transfer credit based on ACE guidelines, 42% were unsure, 40% said they received the correct credit and 18% reported that they did not receive the credits earned.

The next portion of the survey dealt with SSM/V specific orientation programs. Thirty-two percent of respondents reported that their school had a SSM/V orientation program, 11% said their school did not, and 58% reported that they did not know if their school had an SSM/V orientation program or not. Of the 32% who said they did have a program, 67% of them attended the SSM/V orientation. Of those students who attended the orientation, 71% claimed it was useful or very useful, with only 14% having a negative experience with it.

In regards to disability services, respondents were asked, "If disabled, do you utilize the Disability Service on campus?" Thirty-six percent reported that they did not utilize the disability service office. Reasons for not using the services offered varied, but fell along the narratives of

the SSM/V feeling that while they are disabled, they do not want to be seen as different or “broken” to their peers. Others did not know what services were offered or that their disability could be addressed by the office, and many disabled SSM/Vs felt like they did not need help at this time, but would utilize the office if their needs change. Of those who do use the office, 67% report receiving the assistance they needed while 33% found their services lacking.

While student peer groups are recognized as a way for SSM/Vs to be linked to others with similar backgrounds and experiences in trying to transition to civilian life, only 63% of respondents said that they knew that their school had a SSM/V peer group, such as the Student Veterans of America, on campus. When asked if they are currently a member of such a group or are considering becoming a member, 23% responded yes, 40% were undecided and 37% responded that they either were not or had no interest in becoming a member. Of those that are members of a SSM/V formal peer group, 40% indicated membership was useful or very useful in facilitating their transition from service member to civilian, 47% had a neutral view on it and 13% reported membership to be “useless.”

When asked if their campuses had a dedicated SSM/V mental health program, only 2% responded yes. On the other hand, only 14% responded no, and 84% responded that they are not sure if their school provides its SSM/V population with a mental health program tailored to the needs of the SSM/V. This finding suggests that SSM/Vs are unaware of the mental health services at their disposal. In addition, when asked if they felt confident that if they found themselves in a situation where they needed mental health services, that their school’s mental health office would be able to give them the service and support that they would need, only 24% of the respondents indicated that they were confident or very confident they would receive what



they needed, while 39% were not confident and 38% indicated that they were neutral: thus, 77% of the respondents are not solidly confident that their mental health needs can be addressed on their campus.

When asked how satisfied they were in their personal transition from Service member to civilian they were, 61% indicated that they fell on the spectrum of “Satisfied”, while 19% were “Dissatisfied” (see Table 6.).

*Table 6: Transition Satisfaction Rates*

Answer	Response	%
Very Dissatisfied	5	8%
Dissatisfied	3	5%
Somewhat Dissatisfied	4	6%
Neutral	12	19%
Somewhat Satisfied	11	18%
Satisfied	20	32%
Very Satisfied	7	11%

Table 7 tabulates the results of the question, “How likely are you to continue your current degree/vocational program to graduation/completion?” Here, an overwhelming 95% indicated that they were likely to complete their program, with only 5% saying they would not.

*Table 7: Degree Completion Persistence Rates*

Answer	Response	%
Very unlikely	2	3%
Unlikely	0	0%
Somewhat Unlikely	1	2%
Undecided	0	0%
Somewhat Likely	1	2%
Likely	4	6%
Very Likely	53	85%
Already Graduated	1	2%

Finally, respondents were asked to rate the following services on how much impact they have on their ability to complete their degree program. On a scale of 1-10 with one being the most impact and 10 being the least, the services were ranked as follows.

1. Financial aid assistance and access to military scholarship programs.
2. A dedicated Veterans Service Office.
3. Student Service Member/Veteran orientation program.
4. Assistance with the ACE Military Experience Transfer Credit Policy.
5. Access to Student Service Member/Veteran specific academic advisement.
6. Student Service Member/Veteran program website with links to outside support services.
7. Transition services or courses geared toward the Student Service Member/Veteran population.
8. A peer Student Service Member/Veteran group on campus.
9. Deployment/Redeployment policy and support services.
10. Access to mental health professionals and disability services on campus.

### Inferential Statistics

This section tests two of the study's three hypotheses of this study (see above).

#### Hypothesis 1:

H<sub>A1</sub>: There is a positive relationship between the number of SSM/V programs a college or university offers and the student service member/veteran's satisfaction level in transitioning from Military to student/civilian life.

#### Hypothesis 2:

H<sub>A2</sub>: There is a positive relationship between dedicated SSM/V services and student service member/veteran's desire to complete their degree/vocational program.

Table 8 summarizes the data set utilized for the testing of Hypotheses 1 and 2 (Survey questions 38 and 39) and the analysis of school websites (summarized in Table 4, above).

Table 8: Data Set for Hypotheses 1 and 2

School Name	Number of SSM/V Programs	Transitional Satisfaction Rate	Program Completion Persistence
SUNY Buffalo State	11	62%	96%
Daemen College	11	55%	89%
University at Buffalo	8	62%	100%
Erie Community College	5	63%	91%
Hilbert	5	63%	100%

Table 9 shows the results of the Pearson Correlation Coefficient utilized to test these hypotheses.

Table 9: Correlation Based on Number of Programs

		Correlations		
		Program#s	TransSat	ProgramComp
Program#s	Pearson Correlation	1	-.663	-.296
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.222	.629
	N	5	5	5
TransSat	Pearson Correlation	-.663	1	.640
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.222		.245
	N	5	5	5
ProgramComp	Pearson Correlation	-.296	.640	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.629	.245	
	N	5	5	5

A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between the number of SSM/V programs a school offers and the satisfaction level respondents report in their transition from military to civilian/student life. A moderate negative correlation that was not significant was found ( $r(3) = -.663, p > .05$ ). *Transition Satisfaction is not related to the number of SSM/V Programs offered at a school.*

In addition, a Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between the number of SSM/V programs a school offers and the percentage of respondents indicating they plan of completing their academic program. A weak negative correlation that was not significant was found ( $r(3) = -.296, p > .05$ ). *Degree completion rates are not related to the number of SSM/V programs offered at a school.*

Because the study results failed to attain statistical significance, we failed to reject the null hypotheses. There is no statistically significant relationship between dedicated SSM/V services and SSM/V satisfaction levels in transitioning or their desire to complete their academic/vocational program.

Since the number of programs does not have a statistically significant effect on transition to civilian and student life or on the number of students who report they will complete their academic program, is there any effect? If not the number of programs, then perhaps the quality of the programs has an effect? The next step of this inferential phase of the study was designed to test whether the entity designated to serve SSM/Vs – the Veterans Service Office – has an impact on transitioning satisfaction?

Hypothesis 3:

H<sub>A3</sub>: There is a positive relationship between the satisfaction levels of a campus's VSO services and the SSM/V's satisfaction level in transitioning from military to student/civilian life.

Table 10 (generated from questions 15, 38, and 39) summarizes the data set utilized for testing hypothesis 3. Table 11 contains the results of the Pearson correlation.

*Table 10: Data Set for Hypothesis 3*

School Name	Satisfaction Rate for VSO	Transitional Satisfaction Rate	Program Completion Persistence
SUNY Buffalo State	73%	62%	96%
Daemen College	50%	55%	89%
University at Buffalo	77%	62%	100%
Erie Community College	84%	63%	91%
Hilbert	88%	63%	100%

*Table 11: Correlation Based on VSO Satisfaction Rates*

		Correlations		
		VSOSAT	TransSat	ProgramComp
VSOSAT	Pearson Correlation	1	.964**	.623
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.008	.261
	N	5	5	5
TransSat	Pearson Correlation	.964**	1	.640
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.008		.245
	N	5	5	5
ProgramComp	Pearson Correlation	.623	.640	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.261	.245	
	N	5	5	5

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between the level of satisfaction SSM/Vs had with their school's Veterans Service Office and transitional satisfaction levels. A strong positive correlation was found ( $r(3) = .964, p < .01$ ), indicating a significant linear relationship between the variables. *We accept the alternative hypothesis: SSM/Vs satisfied*

*with their school's VSO tend to more satisfied in their personal transition from military to civilian/student life.*

Likewise, A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between the level of satisfaction SSM/Vs had with their school's Veteran Service Office and desire to complete their academic program. A moderate positive correlation that was not significant was found, ( $r(3) = .623, p > .05$ ). Thus, VSO satisfaction levels are not related to degree completion rates.

### *Interview Results*

In order both to offer a richer interpretation to the quantitative data discussed in the previous sections of this analysis and to provide the opportunity for SSM/Vs to articulate their views in the study, a qualitative interview was included in the research methodology. The interview consisted of five questions. The questions were distributed ahead of time with the option of the respondent being able to pick how the interview was conducted so they felt as comfortable with the process as possible. Thirty-seven respondents volunteered to be interviewed. Of those 37, 19 were selected to participate in the interviews and of this number, 13 SSM/Vs participated. The majority chose to complete the questionnaire through a telephone interview or through an email exchange. The results follow.

#### **1. What was/is the biggest challenge for you in transitioning to civilian life?**

The respondents were for the most part in agreement that the number one challenge they faced was dealing with the difference in environment and in the people with whom they interacted on

campus. There seemed to be a “culture shock” of finding oneself in an environment with disparate values, pace of life, and levels of personal discipline.

The lack of structure and new set of choices they were expected to make made it difficult to navigate the process of enrolling in school and tasks such as signing up for health insurance. One respondent said, “It was easier in the service because you knew if you were taking a course, it was all laid out for you, it was by the numbers, you will do this module first, this one next, and so on. Now I find out I signed up for a course I wasn’t supposed to yet because the foundations for it are in a course I didn’t take yet. That didn’t happen in the Army.” Others had difficulty in dealing with peers they felt didn’t care about school or were disrespectful. This finding corroborates previous findings (see literature review, above) and indicates there is still some work to be done in facilitating integration with civilian classmates.

## **2. In regards to your postsecondary education, what is/was your biggest barrier to program completion?**

Financial stresses and uncertainties remain a barrier to program completion mainly because of the lag time between a campus certifying a SSM/V’s benefits and the VA paying out those benefits. This is mainly a problem during the first semester, but the effect can ripple through the rest of the SSM/V’s time in school. The other biggest hurdle was dealing with other students and feeling disconnected from them. For example, one respondent did not join a study group for a class in which they were experiencing difficulty, stating: “All I knew was that I couldn’t sit in the same room with them and listen to them jabbering about other stuff. I couldn’t relate and I just felt they saw the look on my face when they were talking and thought I was a freak.”

Another had to deal with students who had what the SSM/V felt was a “romanticized” version of war in their minds that came out in their interactions. The SSM/V found it was difficult to be able to control his/her temper around students who weren’t hostile, just misguided about the SSM/V’s experiences.

**3. What service do you believe if offered, would provide the most benefit to transitioning into student and civilian life?**

The SSM/Vs who responded were incredibly proud of their service and mentioned a feeling of longing or emptiness for something meaningful to do. Not all were from the WNY area and mentioned that it would have been wonderful if the schools could have helped link them with organizations where they could be of use. Some mentioned wanting to have something they could do to assist the local ROTC in training future officers, something that could connect them to their service and the need to assist in a meaningful way. Others wished there were some sort of volunteer program that partnered with a veteran’s group providing assistance to other vets in the area.

Another major theme centered on providing training to advisors and professors in SSM/V issues and in dealing with them. If possible, SSM/Vs would like to receive advisement from professors who are also former service members and can speak to their experiences. One respondent had a positive experience with an advisor who had been in the military. He/she was able to explain how the SSM/V could schedule their classes and take advantage of extra programs so they could graduate early and still have enough benefit left to earn a graduate certificate as well.



#### **4. What services do you feel should be offered in a Student Service Member/Veteran specific program?**

The respondents nearly unanimously mentioned the need of a school sponsored SSM/V peer group on campus. And those that did have a peer group expressed mixed feelings as to how much support their group received. Respondents from one of the public colleges/university and one of the private schools had only positive things to say about the groups their schools sponsored. Others reported mixed experiences often saying something to the effect of their school has a group, but the only support it receives from the school is that they let them meet there.

The respondents felt that financial backing of peer groups would allow them to create programs that can have a more meaningful impact on their SSM/V population such as outreach events that offer something to entice SSM/Vs to come and see what the group can do for them. It would also allow the group to try and host retreats where SSM/V can get together off site and work through any barriers to transitioning they may be facing together.

Other services mentioned were courses that were geared toward SSM/Vs that offered credit and dealt with transitioning. Some schools require a foundations' course that teaches skills in college success, basic research, and "life." These courses could be replaced by a SSM/V specific course that discuss a different set of success skills, such as how to relate with others or how to navigate a system that lacks the structure their service provided.

As a participant observer at SUNY Buffalo State, as an SSM/V, and an officer in the Student Veterans of America chapter on campus, I can make a general remark on the funding of student groups. Funding is generally expected through formal recognition by a student

government association. Mandatory student participation funds are paid by each student and pooled by this student government association, which then doles out funds to “recognized” participant student groups. Often, the student government group requires student groups to participate in student government campus events, attend administrative meetings, and compete for funds and other resources with other student groups. The rules required to obtain recognition and be eligible for an annual budget is very much along the lines of a traditional student who lives on campus.

These requirements may work for groups populated by the younger generation of traditional students, but are not always reasonable based on the unique qualities of the SSM/V population. Limited time on campus and possible aversion to the dictates of traditional (young) students makes it difficult to coordinate participation with student government events. If dedicated funding for an SSM/V peer group on campus was provided through a partnership through an administrative office on campus such as a student affairs office or through the VSO, SSM/V peer groups would have greater freedom to operate based on the needs of the group. Certainly the “rules of the game” for acknowledged clubs and budgets are not SSM/V friendly and should be addressed.

#### **5. What if anything, could your school do to make your campus more “Military Friendly”?**

This question also received responses that varied based on the SSM/V’s home campus. While all respondents felt their schools were military friendly, responses indicated some campuses were more military friendly than others. For those campuses that did not provide a veteran’s lounge, respondents expressed a desire for their campus to have a place for them to feel safe and accepted in, a place where they could meet other veterans who shared their experiences, and just

have the opportunity for a place to be away from the general student population. One respondent reported that his/her campus had an unofficial lounge, but that it was all the way on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of the student union, and was shared with other student groups.

One campus received many complaints about the office space the VSO used, describing it as drab and uninviting, too cramped, and shared with too many other offices that did not have similar missions. Respondents said that if they had a dedicated area for SSM/Vs to go to for assistance, they would feel more comfortable with actually using it. For the most part, these students felt uninvited in the offices that were there to assist them, not by the people who work there, but by the look and feel of the offices themselves.

The majority of respondents mentioned that the best thing a school could do to be more “military friendly” was to have staff and professors trained in dealing with SSM/V issues and who do their best to assist them in the transitioning from military life to being a student and a civilian. SSM/Vs truly appreciate the support they receive from these staff members and professors and feel that the personal attention they have received had the most impact on their perception of military friendliness.

## **Chapter IV: Discussion**

In order to ensure that all participating institutions receive some benefit from this study, individual results will be shared with each school in a private and respectful manner. These results will be redacted for personal identifiable information and will help schools in evaluating their SSM/V programs.

This study finds that while the number of SSM/V programs a school offers does not affect the quality of transitioning to civilian/student life or the degree completion persistence, the

quality of the services does. This makes sense because the services provided are intended to address the barriers SSM/Vs face in transitioning, so the better a school provides these services, the less a barrier the issues become. Overall the satisfaction level of services provided by postsecondary educational institutions in Erie County is high and the number of SSM/Vs who do not wish to continue their education is low. There does seem to be ample room for improvement for all the schools in the following categories:

- Awarding transfer credit for military service and college credit granting examinations;
- Offering a SSM/V specific orientation program;
- Promoting the disability service office;
- Promoting the campus mental health programs;

The process for awarding transfer credit is virtually unknown to the SSM/V population with 42% not sure if they are receiving the credits they have earned. The lack of understanding of the process leads the SSM/Vs to believe that it is possible they are getting shortchanged by college staff who either are unaware of how to fairly apply the transfer formulas or who purposely offer a low transfer rate in order to increase the amount of credit hours for which they can bill a student. While not suggesting that there is a nefarious plan in place, the lack of transparency should be addressed by advisors or department chair, that is, those college personnel who can sit down with the SSM/V and show them the process used to determine the number of transfer credits awarded. This would give the SSM/V the peace of mind that they are being treated fairly and that their service is being recognized. In addition, it could increase SSM/Vs confidence in their campus and their belief that they are a valued member of the campus community.

With over 58% of the respondents not sure if their campus has a SSM/V specific orientation program available, and 4 of the 5 studied schools having such a program, it indicates that schools are not being very effective at informing their SSM/V population of this opportunity when they are admitted to college. With college orientation being one of the first real impressions a school can make with their students (other than highly curated promotional material), it would be in the college's interest to draw the SSM/V population into targeted orientation sessions so that they feel like they are being treated as an important part of the school. These orientation sessions also allow administrators to communicate their needs to the students and provide an opportunity for campus offices and external agencies to conduct outreach.

One of the agencies that may need to do a better job of promoting who they are and what they do on campus is the student Disability Service Office. Of the disabled SSM/V population, 36% of the respondents decided not to seek assistance. While the majority cited that they wanted to be treated like any other student or that they did not feel like their disability was severe enough to warrant a visit, the number three reason respondents did not seek assistance was that the SSM/V did not know what the office was, what services they provided, or that their disability allowed them to be assisted by the office. This could and should be addressed either through orientation, an information booklet, or through a dedicated section of the school's website.

As mentioned in the presentation of the data, there is a disturbing lack of SSM/V specific mental health services offered (per the website analysis). The survey results corroborated the conclusion drawn from the website content analysis. As research shows, the needs of the SSM/V population are unique and the challenges they face may not best be dealt with using the same techniques used with the traditional student populations. As mentioned earlier in the results of

the survey only 24% of the SSM/Vs responding to the survey were confident that their mental health needs would be adequately addressed by their schools mental health services. The fact that 77% of SSM/Vs are not confident in the provided services should be alarming to these colleges and universities and needs to be addressed. Schools should either build up their own mental health services programs with a focus on SSM/V issues, or they should partner with local nonprofit agencies dedicated to serving veterans and/or the Department of Veterans Affairs. Currently there is no evidence per the website analysis of such partnerships, but in Erie County there are several services that could be tapped for partnership such as WNY Heroes Inc., The Veterans One Stop Center of Western New York, and the Buffalo VA Medical Center. In addition, outreach and promotion of these services is critical for SSM/V success.

Finally, this study reinforces previous findings that professors, staff, and administrators trained in SSM/V issues have a positive impact on the SSM/V population. Positive interactions with professors, who support the SSM/Vs as members of the campus community regardless of their personal biases, weighs heavily in SSM/V's perception of the military friendliness of a school. When a SSM/V feels they are welcomed and their service to the nation is recognized and appreciated, it frees them from certain anxiety and allows them to focus on their studies and their transition to civilian life. Postsecondary educational institutions should invest in the training of their staff in order to better teach, provide advisement, and offer services to their SSM/V population.

## **Chapter V: Summary, Results, Implications**

Out of 11 schools meeting the criteria of the study, 68 SSM/Vs from five postsecondary educational institutions in the Erie County area responded to a web-administered survey. In general, the survey results corroborated earlier findings as reported in the literature.

This study found that campuses could do a better job at promoting services offered such as SSM/V specific orientation, disability services, and mental health services. Respondents report that the most valued programs schools can offer their SSM/V population are: financial aid assistance and access to Military scholarship programs; a dedicated Veterans Service Office; and, a SSM/V specific orientation program.

The original assumption of the study was that the more services a school provided their SSM/V population, the more satisfied the SSM/V would be in their transition from military life to that of a civilian/student. However, this study found no statistically significant correlation. However it was discovered that there was a strong positive statistically significant correlation between the satisfaction levels respondents reported for their campus's Veteran Service Office and their satisfaction level in transitioning.

Interviews conducted with SSM/Vs from each campus found specific school-related anxieties, including finding meaningful employment while they are going to school, ensuring their benefits are paid on time, and helping them find something meaningful to do after spending so much time in service to their nation. The majority of the interviewed respondents mentioned that the best way a school can support their SSM/V population is by having staff and professors trained in dealing with SSM/V issues, who can help them navigate the school's environment and processes, and help them understand how the campus can help them succeed in college and their

personal transition. It is the personal touch they say that shows a school cares more than any billboard or press release.

### **Implications of Possible Outcomes**

The results of this study can be used to make several conclusions. Because it is quality of services and not quantity of services provided that has an impact on SSM/Vs, postsecondary institutions should be conducting their own research on their programs to determine if they are effective and high in quality. Surveys and focus groups could be used to determine if there are improvements to be made and if so, what would serve the student best. Each program should be optimized to ensure they are doing their best to support the SSM/V population. While expense is always a concern, there are affordable options. For example, a school can group SSM/V mental health services with the regular mental health services program so long as the regular program has providers who are trained and familiar with the needs of the SSM/V population. Likewise, partnerships should be made with area nonprofits with expertise in providing these services to help guide campus programs.

### **Limitations of Study**

The present study has three limitations. First, despite the fact that the three SUNY campuses participated (accounting for the lion's share of veteran enrollments), the researcher felt the results would be stronger if all of the Erie County colleges and universities had participated. Second, a larger sample size from participating campuses would have made the results more generalizable to the population of SSM/Vs. Third, while this study's readers may wish to see the



results of statistical tests for means (t-test) and variance (ANOVA) comparing campus results, reporting groups results could undermine the goodwill informing this study. The researcher plans to provide campus-specific results to VSOs should they agree to a debriefing session when the report becomes available.

### **Future Research**

As mentioned earlier, the website analysis was conducted in May of 2015: since that time, it is possible that the services offered by each school could change and the way they are marketed to the SSM/V population could have changed as well. It would be important to re-conduct the website analysis prior to any further study of programs because websites change frequently and institutions change their programs to fit their SSM/V population. Because the number of participating schools and overall number of participants were small, it would be worthwhile to expand the study to see if the results remained the same. It is recommended that this study or a similar one be conducted at the State University of New York level for all SUNY schools. If the results of a SUNY wide study indicates that schools with a base level of SSM/V support services has a positive effect on degree completion and transition to civilian student life, it is possible that New York State might consider some of the elements of the California program.<sup>2</sup>

Since the number of programs does not have a significant effect on transition to civilian and student life or on the number of students who report they will complete their academic

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<sup>2</sup> A key provision of the California Troops to College program discussed in the literature review is the waiver of non-resident tuition for active service personnel and their dependents. SUNY also waives the non-resident tuition rate for all active personnel and their dependents. There may be more cooperation among California public colleges and universities concerning veteran's services, but this would need to be investigated.

program, what does have an effect? Besides quality of the VSO and the services they provide, is there any other factor that a school can control to increase transition satisfaction rates? Could it be possible that family/social support, career opportunities and personal health constitute the major factors affecting student satisfaction?

While previous studies indicate that SSM/V camaraderie is essential to the transition from military to civilian/student life, only 23% of the SSM/Vs in this study were members or were considering membership in a peer group. Studies should be conducted to find out why SSM/Vs are not participating in these programs, is it a lack of desire to be around other SSM/Vs? Limited time for extra-curricular activities? Or are SSM/Vs unaware of these groups and the benefits they could offer?

Finally, this study points to the need for campuses to further investigate why so many SSM/Vs are not aware of campus services. Are campuses using the right channels and media format to effectively engage with SSM/Vs and disseminate information? By learning how SSM/Vs seek information about a school and the programs they offer, institutions can do a better job of having that critical information seen and utilized by the SSM/Vs in need of it.

During the course of the qualitative interviews, several respondents stated that they wondered how much revenue the schools were receiving from SSM/Vs and why such considerable revenue was not directed toward SSM/V services. While the revenue question could be answered by simple calculations of number of SSM/Vs enrolled multiplied by the cost of attendance, it raises the question: "What is the economic impact of SSM/Vs on an area?" There is the obvious benefit of increased postsecondary institution enrollment and guaranteed payment of tuition, but what of the cost of living stipends provided by several VA programs, the disability

and retirement pensions provided by the VA being spent in an area? The effect of having disciplined and motivated trained leaders in the local workforce? If colleges and universities in an area are deemed veteran friendly, it may assist the region in drawing veterans to select this area to pursue postsecondary education, and hopefully, remain in the area upon graduation.

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## Appendix A- Survey Instrument

*Student Service Members/Veterans Programs in Erie County Colleges and Universities:  
Analyzing Program Effectiveness for Removing Barriers to Program Completion*

Name and title of Researcher: William E. Langer

Department/Room Number: Public Administration

Telephone Number: [REDACTED]

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Study Location(s): On-line.

### PURPOSE OF STUDY

This study attempts to collect information about Student Service Members/Veterans (SSM/Vs) services and programs provided by colleges, universities and vocational educational institutions in Erie County in order to help determine if those programs are useful in facilitating the transition from service member to civilian, and if they have an effect on degree/program persistence. It will also aid in determining best practices to be shared within postsecondary educational institutions in the region.

### PROCEDURES

The questionnaire consists of 30-50 questions and will take approximately 8 minutes or less. Questions are designed to collect demographic data for statistical analysis, determine if your school has designated student service member/veterans programs and evaluate participation with and satisfaction levels with those services.

There will be a question on the survey that will ask if you will be interested in participating in a 5 question follow up interview. If you would like to participate in this follow up interview, please enter your email address in the space provided in the question. Follow up interviews will be conducted either in person, via e-mail or over the phone at the convenience of the participant and will take approx. 10 minutes.

### RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

Risks are minimal for involvement in this study. However, you may feel emotionally uneasy when asked to volunteer disability information or recall a specific event which you may find unpleasant. Although we do not expect any harm to come upon any participants due to electronic malfunction of the computer, it is possible though extremely rare and uncommon.

If at any time you wish to discontinue the survey, please just close your web browser and your answers will not be recorded.

## BENEFITS

You will not directly benefit from participation in this study.

### Confidentiality

All data obtained from participants will be kept confidential and will only be reported in an aggregate format (by reporting only combined results and never reporting individual ones). If in case a specific recorded answer is deemed to be of benefit to the study, the quote will be attributed to a pseudonym which will not be related to you. All questionnaires will be concealed, and no one other than the primary investigator will have access to them. The data collected will be stored in the HIPPA-compliant, Qualtrics-secure database until it has been deleted by the primary investigator.

### Results

Upon project completion, the results of this study will be available at the following URL:

[http://digitalcommons.buffalostate.edu/mpa\\_projects/](http://digitalcommons.buffalostate.edu/mpa_projects/)

If you have any comments, concerns, or questions regarding the conduct of this research, please contact the researcher at the top of this form.

If you are unable to contact the researcher and have general questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the IRB Administrator, Research Foundation for SUNY/Buffalo State at

## VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION STATEMENT

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to answer any question or discontinue your involvement at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with your postsecondary educational institution. By selecting "Yes" below, you indicate that you have read the information in this informed consent and have had a chance to ask any questions that you have about the study.



**I have read, and understood the above consent form and desire of my own free will to participate in this study.**

- Yes
- No

The following demographic information is being used to paint a picture of the student service member/veteran population at your school. Answers are voluntary and will not affect you completing the rest of the survey.

**Which school do you currently attend or did you graduate from?**

- SUNY Buffalo State
- Erie Community College
- University at Buffalo (UB)
- Canisius College
- Daemen College
- Hilbert College
- D'Youville College
- Trocaire College
- Villa Maria College

**With what gender do you associate?**

- Male
- Female
- Trans-gender

**Ethnicity**

- Hispanic or Latino
- African American
- White
- Native American or American Indian
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Mixed Race
- Other

**Age**

- 18-22
- 23-27
- 28-32
- 33-37
- 38-42
- 43 or above

**Marital Status**

- Single
- Married
- Separated/Divorced

**I Live** \_\_\_\_\_

- On Campus.

Off Campus (Renter or Homeowner).

With Family (At Home).

**I am a \_\_\_\_\_**

Current Service Member.

Veteran.

Dependent Family Member of a Veteran.

Current Service Member on Active Duty

**Veteran Status (Please Check All That Apply)**

Combat Veteran

Active Duty

National Guard or Reservist Non-Deployed

National Guard or Reservist Currently Deployed

Disabled

N/A

**Are you currently receiving Department of Veterans Affairs Educational Benefits?**

Yes

No

**What Benefit are you receiving?**

Montgomery GI Bill (CH 30)

Post 9-11 GI Bill (CH 33)

- Vocational Rehabilitation (CH31)
- The Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance (DEA) Program (CH35)
- The Marine Gunnery Sergeant John David Fry Scholarship (Fry Scholarship) (CH 35)
- Chapter 1606 Montgomery GI Bill Selected Reserve
- Chapter 1607 REAP

**What is your academic status?**

- Undergrad First Year
- Undergrad Transfer
- Undergrad
- Graduate Student
- Alumni
- Taking an indefinite break from my studies
- Other

The next set of questions pertains to student service member/veteran programs and services offered by your school. Please answer any short answer questions honestly as they will provide helpful information to the researcher.

As a reminder, if at any time you wish to discontinue the survey, please just close your web browser and your answers will not be recorded.

**Does your school have a dedicated Veterans Service Office (VSO)?**

- Yes
- No

**What services/opportunities have you used from your school's Veterans Service Office (VSO)? Please check all that apply.**

- Assistance with veterans' educational benefits
- General Information/guidance on college processes or services
- Resolution of VA payment problems
- Bursar deferral based on expected VA benefits
- Information/referrals to outside agencies (Veterans One Stop Center, VA Medical Center etc.)
- Company of a fellow Student service member/veteran
- Other

**How satisfied are you with the assistance you received at the VSO?**

- Very Dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Neutral
- Satisfied
- Very Satisfied

**Overall, do you find your campus as being "Veteran Friendly"?**

- Yes
- No
- Neutral

**Please give an example of why you find it veteran friendly.**

**Please give an example of why you feel your campus is not veteran friendly.**

Just a reminder that your answers will not be compiled with identifying data.

**Did your school give every consideration in awarding transfer credit based on ACE guidelines for your military service and/or DANTES/CLEP or other credit granting examination test score?**

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

**Have you encountered any problems or issues while attending school specifically related to being a student service member/veteran?**

- Yes
- No

**Please briefly describe the nature of the problem or issue below.**

**Does your school offer an orientation program specifically for student service members/veterans?**

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

**Have you utilized the student service member/veteran orientation?**

- Yes
- No

**Did you find the orientation useful?**

- Very Useless
- Useless
- Neutral
- Useful

Very Useful

**Why not?**

**If disabled, do you utilize the Disability Service Office on Campus?**

\*Please note that you do not require a disability rating from the VA in order to receive disability services on campus.\*

Yes

No

N/A

**Are you receiving the assistance you need from the disability office?**

Yes

No

**Please share why you do not utilize the Disability Service Office.**

**Are you aware of a student service member/veterans group on campus such as the Student Veterans of America (SVA)?**

Yes

No

**Are you a member or plan to become a member of a student service member/veterans group?**

Yes

No

Undecided

- I have no interest in joining a student service member/veterans group.

**How useful is the student service member/veterans group to you in facilitating your transition from service member to civilian?**

- Very Useless
- Useless
- Neutral
- Useful
- Very Useful

**Does your school have a dedicated student service member/veteran mental health program?**

- Yes
- No
- Not Sure

**How confident do you feel that if you found yourself in need of mental health services, your school's mental health office would be able to give you the service and support that you would need?**

- Not Confident
- A Little Confident
- Neutral
- Somewhat Confident
- Very Confident

**Have you ever needed to interrupt your educational program (Withdraw for a semester or more) due to National Guard/Reserve mobilization/deployment?**



- Yes
- No
- N/A

**How easy was it to withdraw?**

- Very Difficult
- Difficult
- Somewhat Difficult
- Neutral
- Somewhat Easy
- Easy
- Very Easy

**How easy was it to re-register for classes?**

- Very Difficult
- Difficult
- Somewhat Difficult
- Neutral
- Somewhat Easy
- Easy
- Very Easy

**What could be done to improve the withdrawal/re-registering process at your school?**

For the following 2 questions, please reflect on your personal experiences with transitioning from service member/veteran to student and civilian and your experiences as a student.

**How satisfied in your personal transition from service member to civilian are you?**

- Very Dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Somewhat Dissatisfied
- Neutral
- Somewhat Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Very Satisfied

**How likely are you to continue your current degree/vocational program to graduation/completion?**

- Very Unlikely
- Unlikely
- Somewhat Unlikely
- Undecided
- Somewhat Likely
- Likely
- Very Likely
- Already Graduated

**Have you had any difficulties in accessing SSM/V programs at your school? (i.e. wrong point of contact listed online, incorrect email addresses, web pages not found, lack of office hours during class break periods?)**

**On a scale of 1 to 10 (with one being the greatest and 10 being the least), please rank the following programs in order of how much impact they would have on your ability to complete your degree program.**

A Dedicated Veterans Service Office.

Financial Aid Assistance and Access to Military Scholarship Programs.

Specific Student Service Member/Veteran Orientation Program.

Deployment/Re-deployment Policy and Support Services.

Assistance with the ACE Military Experience Transfer Credit Policy

Student Service Member/Veteran Program Website with Links to Outside Support Services.

Transition Services or Courses Geared Toward the Student Service Member/Veteran Population.

Access to Mental Health Professionals and Disability Services on Campus.

A Peer Student Service Member/Veteran Group on Campus (such as the Student Veterans of America)

Access to Student Service Member/Veteran Specific Academic Advisement.

**If offered, would you utilize or find helpful a "quick reference guide" that outlines the benefits and services available both on and off campus to student service member/veterans?**

Yes

No

**Would you be willing to participate in a 15 minute follow-up interview either by phone, email or in person?**

Yes

No

**Please enter your e-mail address (the one you are most likely to check regularly)**



If anytime during this survey you felt yourself experiencing emotional stress or if you currently feel that life is overwhelming or have thoughts of anger, depression, or thoughts of hurting yourself or others please call one of the following agencies to speak to a counselor.

IF YOU ARE IN CRISIS, PLEASE CALL:1.800.273.8255 #1  
Veterans Crisis Line

The Department of Veterans Affairs Behavioral Health Clinic  
716-862-3116 or 716-862-3117

The Veterans One Stop Center of WNY  
(716)-898-0110

Counseling Center.

If you do not wish to contact the VA or other non-profit veteran agency, please consider calling your school's counseling center. For Buffalo State students, your Counseling Center can help.

Call 716-878-4436.

Survey Powered By Qualtrics

## **PART 2 Questionnaire**

- 1. What was/is the biggest challenge for you in transitioning to civilian life?**
- 2. In regards to your postsecondary education, what is/was your biggest barrier to program completion?**
- 3. What service do you believe, if offered, would provide the most benefit to transitioning into student and civilian life?**

**4. What services do you feel should be offered in a student service member/veteran specific program?**

**5. What if anything, could your school do to make your campus more "Military Friendly"?**

## Appendix B - Qualtrics Survey Report

### FINAL SURVEY RESULTS

#### 1. I have read, and understood the above consent form and desire of my own free will to participate in this study.

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Yes	68	100%
2	No	0	0%
	Total	68	100%

#### 2. Which school do you currently attend or graduate from?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	SUNY Buffalo State	24	35%
2	Erie Community College	12	18%
3	University at Buffalo (UB)	13	19%
4	Daemen College	9	13%
5	Hilbert College	10	15%
	Total	68	100%

#### 3. With what gender do you associate?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Male	52	76%
2	Female	15	22%
3	Trans-gender	1	1%
	Total	68	100%

### 4. Ethnicity

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Hispanic or Latino	3	4%
2	African American	5	7%
3	White	53	78%
4	Native American or American Indian	1	1%
5	Asian/Pacific Islander	1	1%
6	Mixed Race	5	7%
7	Other	0	0%
	Total	68	100%

### 5. Age

#	Answer	Response	%
1	18-22	0	0%
2	23-27	16	24%
3	28-32	15	22%
4	33-37	14	21%
5	38-42	8	12%
6	43 or above	14	21%
	Total	67	100%

Statistic	Value
Min Value	2
Max Value	6
Mean	3.84
Variance	2.14
Standard Deviation	1.46
Total Responses	67

### 6. Marital Status

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Single	21	32%
2	Married	28	43%
3	Separated/Divorced	16	25%
	Total	65	100%

**7. I Live \_\_\_\_\_**

#	Answer	Response	%
1	On Campus.	0	0%
2	Off Campus (Renter or Homeowner).	56	82%
3	With Family (At Home).	12	18%
	Total	68	100%

**8. I am a \_\_\_\_\_**

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Current Service Member.	6	9%
2	Veteran.	61	90%
3	Dependent Family Member of a Veteran.	1	1%
4	Current Service Member on Active Duty	0	0%
	Total	68	100%

**9. Veteran Status (Please Check All That Apply)**

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Combat Veteran	40	63%
2	Active Duty	23	36%
3	National Guard or Reservist Non-Deployed	10	16%
4	National Guard or Reservist Currently Deployed	0	0%
5	Disabled	28	44%










### 10. Are you currently receiving Department of Veterans Affairs Educational Benefits?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Yes	58	85%
2	No	10	15%
	Total	68	100%



### 11. What Benefit are you receiving?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Montgomery GI Bill (CH 30)	3	5%
2	Post 9-11 GI Bill (CH 33)	37	64%
3	Vocational Rehabilitation (CH31)	17	29%
4	The Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance (DEA) Program (CH35)	0	0%
5	The Marine Gunnery Sergeant John David Fry Scholarship (Fry Scholarship) (CH 35)	0	0%
6	Chapter 1606 Montgomery GI Bill Selected Reserve	0	0%
7	Chapter 1607 REAP	1	2%
	Total	58	100%

**12. What is your status?**

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Undergrad First Year		6	9%
2	Undergrad Transfer		27	40%
3	Undergrad		17	25%
4	Graduate Student		16	24%
5	Alumni		1	1%
6	Taking an indefinite break from my studies		0	0%
7	Other		1	1%
	Total		68	100%

**13. Does your school have a dedicated Veterans Service Office (VSO)?**

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Yes		63	93%
2	No		5	7%
	Total		68	100%

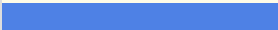


**14. What services/opportunities have you used from your school's Veterans Service Office (VSO)? Please check all that apply.**

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Assistance with veterans' educational benefits	44	77%
2	General Information/guidance on college processes or services	38	67%
3	Resolution of VA payment problems	17	30%
4	Bursar deferral based on expected VA benefits	9	16%
5	Information/referrals to outside agencies (Veterans One Stop Center, VA Medical Center etc.)	10	18%
6	Company of a fellow Student service member/veteran	7	12%
7	Other	1	2%

**15. How satisfied are you with the assistance you received at the VSO?**

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Very Dissatisfied	3	5%
2	Dissatisfied	1	2%
3	Neutral	11	18%
4	Satisfied	22	37%
5	Very Satisfied	23	38%
	Total	60	100%

**16. Overall, do you find your campus as being "Veteran Friendly"?**

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Yes		39	58%
2	No		7	10%
3	Neutral		21	31%
	Total		67	100%

## 17. Please give an example of why you find it veteran friendly.

### Text Response

Daemen's Veteran's Lounge

There is a very nice lounge for us and the representative gets back to me whenever I leave a message.

The campus has a dedicated lounge for veterans.

The faculty have gone out of their way on numerous occasions in an effort to help.

There is a separate study room for veterans which includes computers, coffee machine, couches, etc. This room is dimly lit and quiet, it is a welcomed alternative to be able to study and relax in.

Veterans reach out to other veterans and we don't feel like an outcast.

A lot of fellow vets

it's got an amazing veterans lounge

The Student Veterans Coordinator is very helpful. Veteran services help with financial resolutions and questions about the GI-bill as well.

Professors are very accommodating of training requirements.

Everyone is very helpful. They understand that life experience counts.

The VA rep is very helpful.

Veteran service center on campus is very helpful and friendly. They have always submitted my education benefit paper work in a timely manner

People admire the job I did in the military.

I liked the separate orientation and greatly appreciate the free parking and early registration.

All the professors helped when I needed it

Personability

Although I did not directly seek help with the SVA office, they still contacted me via email and provided help with my tuition assistance paperwork.

The veteran's representative is always available and is well informed.

Teachers understand and accommodate military obligations

More than 1 Veterans lounge, Emails from veterans groups...

All of my professors who know me have thanked me more than once for serving our country.

interactions with most of the staff

They go out of their way to make sure everything is working smoothly and helping with disabilities

Department Chair is understanding of specific veteran needs and willing to help make me successful.

They responded to my email questions in a timely fashion.

VSO is very helpful

The people in the veteran's office are nice and there is nothing about campus that is particularly unfriendly specific to veterans

Helpful information and willingness to offer assistance and services

When I bring up the fact that I am a veteran I hear no disparaging comments.

Helpful with questions specifically pertaining to veterans.




Veterans lounge is very nice, and Veterans group does a lot of events

**18. Please give an example of why you feel your campus is not veteran friendly. Just a reminder that your answers will not be compiled with identifying data.**



Text Response Heavily redacted due to PII and naming of specific administrators

Not having an education care manager who is knowledgeable in Veteran resources, and issues. Professors arguing with me regarding what I am required by the VA at the end of every semester, and not legitimately honoring my requests.

**19. Did your school give every consideration in awarding transfer credit based on ACE guidelines for your military service and/or DANTES/CLEP or other credit granting examination test score?**

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Yes		26	40%
2	No		12	18%
3	Not sure		27	42%
	Total		65	100%

**20. Have you encountered any problems or issues while attending school specifically related to being a student service member/veteran?**

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Yes		7	11%
2	No		59	89%
	Total		66	100%

## 21. Please briefly describe the nature of the problem or issue below.

### Text Response



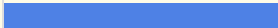
Many of the resources identified in the Orientation did not specify military and Veteran links to their services. Most were the services a younger age group would need on the campus, very few identified military and Veteran resources with the exception of the SVA Chapter on campus. VA certification not being done on time causing me to not receive my BAH and being late on my rent.

Anxiety



convoluted Paperwork requirement and processes that do not align with deadlines

The school only has one veteran office on the opposite campus it is hard to go there for assistance during office hours and to use it to study. I was made to attend freshman seminar even being over 5 years older its extremely irrelevant. There is little need to learn how to handle stress I know how to handle stress.





## 22. Does your school offer an orientation program specifically for student service members/veterans?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Yes		21	32%
2	No		7	11%
3	I don't know		38	58%
	Total		66	100%

## 23. Have you utilized the student service member/veteran orientation?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Yes		14	67%
2	No		7	33%
	Total		21	100%

## 24. Did you find the orientation useful?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Very Useless		2	14%
2	Useless		0	0%
3	Neutral		2	14%
4	Useful		3	21%
5	Very Useful		7	50%
	Total		14	100%

## 25. Why not?

### Text Response

This was the first semester it was offered. This is my last semester at Hilbert.

Scheduling

Current student

I didn't feel a need to

I was not feeling well that day.

## 26. If disabled, do you utilize the Disability Service Office on Campus? \*Please note that you do not require a disability rating from the VA in order to receive disability services on campus.\*

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Yes	6	9%
2	No	24	36%
3	N/A	36	55%
	Total	66	100%

## 27. Are you receiving the assistance you need from the disability office?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Yes	4	67%
2	No	2	33%
	Total	6	100%



## 28. Please share why you do not utilize the Disability Service Office.

### Text Response

Disability is not related to school-work.  
 I didn't know there was a DSO or what it even is  
 My disability is not that hindering.  
 not sure what it is or does  
 Not aware of it  
 I want to be able to complete my education like every other student here  
 Anxiety about my anxiety. I dont like attention and even if they gave me what they could it wouldnt help.  
 I feel like I do not need to.  
 I don't need any help  
 Don't need to.  
 unsure of services  
 I Just feel like i don't need it at this time  
 I have not fallen behind yet, when I need to I will  
 I do not have a disability.  
 I'm unaware of their existence or the services provided  
 I'm not disabled  
 I want to blend in and not be known as 'that 28 y/o disabled guy'  
 I dont know what it is  
 I didn't know it existed.

## 29. Are you aware of a student service member/veterans group on campus such as the Student Veterans of America (SVA)?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Yes	40	63%
2	No	24	38%
	Total	64	100%

### 30. Are you a member or plan to become a member of a student service member/veterans group?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Yes		15	23%
2	No		13	20%
3	Undecided		26	40%
4	I have no interest in joining a student service member/veterans group.		11	17%
	Total		65	100%

### 31. How useful is the student service member/veterans group to you in facilitating your transition from service member to civilian?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Very Useless		0	0%
2	Useless		2	13%
3	Neutral		7	47%
4	Useful		5	33%
5	Very Useful		1	7%
	Total		15	100%

### 32. Does your school have a dedicated student service member/veteran mental health program?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Yes		1	2%
2	No		9	14%
3	Not Sure		54	84%
	Total		64	100%

### 33. How confident do you feel that if you found yourself in need of mental health services, your school's mental health office would be able to give you the service and support that you would need?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Not Confident	11	17%
2	A Little Confident	14	22%
3	Neutral	24	38%
4	Somewhat Confident	8	13%
5	Very Confident	7	11%
	Total	64	100%





### 34. Have you ever needed to interrupt your educational program (Withdraw for a semester or more) due to National Guard/Reserve mobilization/deployment?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Yes	7	11%
2	No	34	53%
3	N/A	23	36%
	Total	64	100%

### 35. How easy was it to withdraw?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Very Difficult	0	0%
2	Difficult	0	0%
3	Somewhat Difficult	1	14%
4	Neutral	0	0%
5	Somewhat Easy	1	14%
6	Easy	4	57%
7	Very Easy	1	14%
	Total	7	100%

### 36. How easy was it to re-register for classes?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Very Difficult		0	0%
2	Difficult		1	14%
3	Somewhat Difficult		1	14%
4	Neutral		0	0%
5	Somewhat Easy		0	0%
6	Easy		3	43%
7	Very Easy		2	29%
	Total		7	100%

### 37. What could be done to improve the withdrawal/re-registering process at your school?

#### Text Response








I applied for a leave of absence for 1 semester, but was not notified until I returned that I was withdrawn as a student. Once I knew, reapplying to register for classes was a simple process.

Doesn't pertain to this college

I knew in advance I would be deployed so I didn't reregister

This was done at the University of Kentucky so it does not apply to UB. It was early in the semester so there wasn't a problem of deciding credit or getting a deferral. I imagine in those cases, clear standards would be useful.

### 38. How satisfied in your personal transition from service member to civilian are you?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Very Dissatisfied		5	8%
2	Dissatisfied		3	5%
3	Somewhat Dissatisfied		4	6%
4	Neutral		12	19%
5	Somewhat Satisfied		11	18%
6	Satisfied		20	32%
7	Very Satisfied		7	11%
	Total		62	100%

### 39. How likely are you to continue your current degree/vocational program to graduation/completion?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Very Unlikely	2	3%
2	Unlikely	0	0%
3	Somewhat Unlikely	1	2%
4	Undecided	0	0%
5	Somewhat Likely	1	2%
6	Likely	4	6%
7	Very Likely	53	85%
8	Already Graduated	1	2%
	Total	62	100%

### 40. If offered, would you utilize or find helpful a "quick reference guide" that outlines the benefits and services available both on and off campus to student service member/veterans?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Yes	58	94%
2	No	4	6%
	Total	62	100%

### 41. Would you be willing to participate in a 15 minute follow-up interview either by phone, email or in person?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Yes	38	61%
2	No	24	39%
	Total	62	100%

### 42. Please enter your e-mail address (the one you are most likely to check regularly)

REDACTED due to PII

#### 44. Have you had any difficulties in accessing SSM/V programs at your school? (i.e. wrong point of contact listed online, incorrect email addresses, web pages not found, lack of office hours during class break periods?)

##### Text Response

The SSMV services provided on campus has been integrated into another office which has nothing to do with SSMV services. I have over worked myself in advocating for SSMV services in different respects to other Veterans and military students, faculty, etc. I have accepted it as just being part of life of being a Veteran.

No

Don't know

I don't know of any programs at school. No one ever told me about them

No

No

only issues I ever had were with ECC, Hilbert is great

web pages not found

Daemen has constructed a solid system for helping veterans.

No...most of these service contacts are given to us through our VSO.

No

Not sure what SSM/V is, so I can't answer this question

None

No

Person is never in the office, I wonder how they do anything. I wait at least a week for my calls to get returned.

I guess the guy who was the Veterans officer quit and they never updated the web page.

There is a long wait to fill out forms certifying veteran programs at the location provided at the school.

Yes. I don't have a clue who they are or where they are.

No, once I contacted my VA office at ECC they have been my source for all VA educated information.

Not sure what SSM/V is actually

POC at School has wrong email address listed on the school's website

No

NO problems

No

Turns out the person I was trying to reach to learn about the schools program quit. No wonder he never returned my calls.

Slow to return phone calls and e-mails.

Not really.

In the beginning as I was setting up my GI bill and working I called and left many messages it took almost 2 weeks to speak to the Veterans office

I have not encountered any problems

ECC South seems to have a very well run program

No difficulties to report.

No

No

I haven't tried.

**45. On a scale of 1 to 10 (with one being the greatest and 10 being the least), please rank the following programs in order of how much impact they would have on your ability to complete your degree program.**

#	Answer											Total Responses
1	A Dedicated Veterans Service Office.	20	8	2	4	5	3	2	3	4	7	58
2	Financial Aid Assistance and Access to Military Scholarship Programs.	22	11	1	2	4	2	0	4	4	6	56
3	Specific Student Service Member/Veteran Orientation Program.	13	6	3	5	8	3	5	6	2	4	56
4	Deployment/Re-deployment Policy and Support Services.	6	3	1	8	8	1	4	3	7	11	53
5	Assistance With the ACE Military Experience Transfer Credit Policy	8	3	11	6	6	5	2	5	1	8	55
6	Student Service Member/Veteran Program Website with Links to Outside Support Services.	5	3	8	6	9	7	5	5	1	6	56
7	Transition Services or Courses Geared Toward the Student Service Member/Veteran Population.	7	3	6	4	8	7	5	6	1	8	56
8	Access to	4	4	6	5	4	4	4	6	7	11	56

	Mental Health Professionals and Disability Services on Campus.											
9	A Peer Student Service Member/Veteran Group on Campus (such as the Student Veterans of America)	9	5	5	2	4	4	6	9	10	2	57
10	Access to Student Service Member/Veteran Specific Academic Advisement.	9	6	5	6	6	0	6	8	3	7	57
	Total	103	52	48	48	62	36	39	55	40	70	-



Statistic	A Dedicated Veterans Service Office.	Financial Aid Assistance and Access to Military Scholarship Programs.	Specific Student Service Member/Veteran Orientation Program.	Deployment/Re-deployment Policy and Support Services.	Assistance With the ACE Military Experience Transfer Credit Policy	Student Service Member/Veteran Program Website with Links to Outside Support Services.	Transition Services or Courses Geared Toward the Student Service Member/Veteran Population.	Access to Mental Health Professionals and Disability Services on Campus.	A Peer Student Service Member/Veteran Group on Campus (such as the Student Veterans of America)	Access to Student Service Member/Veteran Specific Academic Advisement.
Min Value	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Max Value	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
Mean	4.22	3.84	4.52	6.00	4.98	5.18	5.38	6.13	5.44	5.14
Variance	11.33	11.52	9.09	10.35	8.87	7.39	8.75	9.89	9.71	10.12
Standard Deviation	3.37	3.39	3.02	3.22	2.98	2.72	2.96	3.15	3.12	3.18
Total Responses	58	56	56	53	55	56	56	56	57	57