

RESEARCH REVIEW | ISSUE 269

Student Veterans in Higher Education: The Critical Role of Veterans' Resource Centers

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SOURCE: Journal of American College Health**YEAR:** 2021**Publication Type:** peer-reviewed journal**LINK:** <https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2021.1970562>**KEYWORDS:** Higher education, Schlossberg Transition Model, student veterans, transition to college, veterans resource centers (VRCs)**ABSTRACT:****“Objective**

To examine how veterans resource centers (VRCs) and corresponding services influence student veteran transitions by applying the Schlossberg Transition Model.

Participants

12 student support staff and 6 junior/senior undergraduate student veterans at a four-year public university in California.

Methods

In-depth semi-structured, one-on-one interviews were conducted with diverse group of university staff and student veterans. Thematic analyses were conducted to identify salient factors that help promote successful transition to college life.

Results

Overarching theme was the significance of the university's veterans resource center (VRC), which is a designated space that facilitates connectedness and student engagement; fosters collaborations across student support services via liaisons to increase access to vital services/resources on/off campus, provides peer-to-peer mentorship; and includes staff, who understand military culture.

Conclusions

Higher education should expand supporting student veterans by having a VRC to help them successfully transition to college life; this would ultimately improve retention and graduation rates.”

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS:

- This study explores the critical role of Veterans Resource Centers (VRCs) in supporting student veterans through comprehensive services such as counseling, GI benefits assistance, academic and career resources, and socialization opportunities.
- Through structured and semi-structured interviews with veteran support staff and student veterans, this study was conducted at a public four-year university in California, where over 500 student veterans make up 11% of the student body.
- The study concludes that Veterans Resource Centers (VRCs) are essential for supporting student veterans' transitions to college life. VRCs address unique challenges such as adjusting to less structured environments and diverse personal needs, highlighting the critical importance of available and accessible resources, policies, and programs.

Implications

FOR PRACTICE

Higher education institutions should prioritize establishing and enhancing Veterans Resource Centers (VRCs) to meet the unique needs of student veterans. VRCs provide essential services such as counseling, GI benefits assistance, academic and career resources, and socialization opportunities. They offer a dedicated space for veterans to connect with peers, receive individualized attention, and stay engaged toward graduation. Integrating Schlossberg's Transition Model into VRC support strategies effectively addresses veterans' transitions to college life. Peer-to-peer mentorship within VRCs significantly benefits veterans by allowing them to apply leadership skills and establish supportive relationships. Veteran-specific orientation courses should be offered to help new student veterans acclimate to campus life, access resources, and develop skills for balancing personal and academic responsibilities.

FOR POLICY

Universities should adopt veteran-friendly policies, including faculty training on student veterans' needs, promoting awareness of veteran issues, and providing appropriate classroom accommodations. The study emphasizes the importance of a Veteran Resource Center (VRC) in informing faculty about necessary accommodations and serving as a dedicated space for veterans, integrating Schlossberg's model, and offering a sense of belonging and support. Universities should collaborate with external agencies like the VA and local veteran organizations to connect student veterans with off-campus resources. Policies should also address the diverse needs of subpopulations within the student veteran community, focusing on challenges like weaker academic preparation, lower income, and issues such as PTSD and TBI.

FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research should examine the diverse needs of post-9/11 student veterans, considering factors like gender, race, and military branch, to understand their impact on college transitions and support services. Longitudinal studies can provide insights into the long-term effects of Veteran Resource Centers (VRCs) and support services on veterans' academic and personal success, identifying best practices and areas for improvement. Comparative studies across different institution types can determine how varying contexts affect support services' effectiveness. Broader research beyond single-site studies is needed to develop tailored strategies for diverse educational settings. Investigating the impact of peer mentorship programs on academic performance, sense of belonging, and well-being can guide effective mentorship models. Evaluating veteran-specific orientation programs can identify key components for successful transitions to college life. The study highlights the success of the VRC's orientation course in helping veterans balance their responsibilities.

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