

Old Friends and New Faces

A POPULATION OF STUDENTS is emerging on college campuses across the nation. In some ways they are just like other college students, particularly those considered “nontraditional” such as transfer students and adult learners. In other respects, however, they possess unique characteristics stemming from personal experiences that few college administrators, faculty members, campus staff, or traditionally aged students can claim for themselves or, perhaps, empathize with and relate to. The group we are referring to are students with military experience, including those who have served on combat duty in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Student veterans—those who have exited the armed services and those who still have military ties—are entering colleges and universities in increasing numbers. If you have not noticed them on your campus, it is likely you will (and soon). Thanks in part to generous educational benefits earned while serving their country, they are indeed coming to higher education, perhaps as many as 2 million students in the near term (American Council on Education, 2008). Are we, the higher education community, including those of us in central administration, academic affairs, and student affairs, ready to welcome student veterans into postsecondary education and assist them in achieving success?

This volume is intended to provide useful information about students with military experience who are attending college by blending the theoretical, practical, and empirical. As student veterans, like typical college students, navigate through the academic system, the challenges faced can be better understood if we can adapt and integrate student development theory in planning programs and services for this population. The “old friends” referred to in this

introduction include some of the best-known theorists and theories in the literature on higher education. Iconic names such as Astin, Baxter Magolda, Braxton, Chickering, Schlossberg, and Tinto (and others) provide a comfortable starting point from which to investigate the phenomenon of veterans attending college. In some cases, we contacted the major theorists themselves, who generously contributed their thoughts on the topic. In other instances, experts who have written on the subtopics presented in the chapters offered their ideas in areas such as persistence and departure, student development, and women's issues. Each contributor was initially contacted by telephone or e-mail and asked to provide his or her thoughts on the topic of student veterans, with some guiding questions provided to initiate the process. The idea behind our requests for expert contributions was to strengthen the information provided with additional input from prominent authors who are familiar names from the higher education literature. Readers trained in college administration and student development should find this "old friends" approach helpful as they consider the "new faces," the students themselves.

Many of these men and women who courageously served during times of conflict are now turning their attention toward postsecondary pursuits, and it is important that we as a nation, and the higher education community in particular, make reasonable efforts to provide the necessary supports to assist veterans in their collegiate journey. Higher education has a rich history of assisting special populations to achieve academic success, including minorities, first-generation attendees, and students with disabilities. And although each generation has its own story and distinct qualities, the phenomenon of the returning veteran is not an unfamiliar scenario in the history of the United States.

Following World War II, record numbers of war veterans enrolled in colleges and universities using educational benefits from the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, familiar to most readers as the GI bill. The impact that millions of new college students had on American higher education was unprecedented, and postsecondary education grew tremendously during that era. Interestingly, although many of us who work in higher education have no military experience and perhaps cannot relate to today's student veterans, most of us can venture back in our family histories to see where members of our

own families served during past periods of conflict. In many cases, the trajectory of the family tree was altered for the better as a result of post–World War II college attendance by an elder. For many professors and senior administrators today, it is probable that college was not initially part of their family’s tradition until a parent or grandparent attended college on the GI bill, subsequently paving the way for later generations and perhaps their own college education. Fast forward to the current generation, and one might wonder whether life paths are being similarly altered by contemporary war service, subsequent college attendance using educational benefits, and, ultimately, degree attainment in the twenty-first century. Surely they are! Moreover, perhaps we are witnessing the origins of a new “greatest generation” (Brokaw, 1998), as our servicemen and –women protect our freedoms in a world where terroristic extremism is once again a threat. If predictions made by sociologists Strauss and Howe (1991, 2000) are accurate, then this current generation, the Millennials (born in the period from 1982 to 2002), should emulate their “elder” generation, the post–World War II age group. A new generation of college-trained adults who have sacrificed much for their country could be what America needs in terms of leadership in this new millennium of rapid global change. Employers seem to think so, as we witness many corporations in the Fortune 500 instituting efforts to recruit the best and brightest from the military to management positions. But for the time being, let us go back to campus.

The following chapters contain theories, frameworks, facts, and ideas for consideration when approaching the subject of the newest generation of college students who have experienced military service. This information should be particularly useful for those whose task is to provide support and services for student veterans, including campus administrators and policymakers. Not much research has been conducted in this area to date, and most of the work published in the last five years is qualitative, including publications from the authors of this volume. We are just now beginning to see an increase in the number of publications about veterans in college, using both qualitative and quantitative methods, a few ambitious research projects currently under way, and substantial interest from graduate students writing dissertations. We hope this volume proves to be a catalyst for increased attention and awareness.

The next chapter, “Home Alone? Applying Theories of Transition to Support Student Veterans’ Success,” uses the lens of the transition process as a basis for contemplating the experience of student veterans. Theories from Schlossberg, Bridges, Wapner, and others provide the foundation for an adapted model for helping professionals in higher education who work with students who are transitioning from military service to college and civilian life. Transitions of this type often involve adjustments in a variety of areas, including personal, academic, vocational, and social. Institutional assistance is integral to aid students in transition, with a holistic approach preferred. Nancy Schlossberg provided us a thoughtful commentary, giving her insights about transition for these students.

In “What Matters to Veterans? Peer Influences and the Campus Environment,” Astin’s I–E–O model provides a framework for characterizing the importance of veterans’ connecting with other veterans, which the research indicates may be vital for initial success and persistence when starting college. Veterans of war share a unique bond, and those ties can be useful when navigating the confusion and bureaucracy inherent in any college or university. It can occur in the student organization for veterans on campus or, more informally, in direct peer-to-peer interaction inside and outside the classroom. Moreover, the campus environment, as Astin made clear in his research and writings, plays a key role in this discussion and includes the programs and services designed to assist student veterans. Alexander Astin shared his thoughts in a brief commentary on the topic.

“Transition 2.0: Using Tinto’s Model to Understand Student Veterans’ Persistence” looks further into the collegiate journey of veterans, later into the matriculation process, and beyond initial peer connections to consider the interactions these students will have with the broader campus community, including faculty members and nonmilitary students. We consider Tinto’s ideas about integration, both academic and social, and whether those concepts apply to older, experienced students. We ask how all of these factors may play into a student’s decision to depart the institution or to persist. We also introduce two novel thoughts for readers to consider. First, we suggest that a veteran’s transition from military duty to civilian college student is really not complete until interaction with diverse others takes place. Second, we put forward

evidence that employers want a “civilian version” of the desirable military traits that veterans possess. John Braxton, renowned professor and higher education researcher, shares his thinking on the topics of persistence and departure related to student veterans.

“Crisis of Identity? Veteran, Civilian, Student” reviews some of the key literature on college student development, drawing from the seminal works of Chickering, Jossleson, Kegan, Perry, and others. A typological model for understanding identity development in student veterans is revealed based on Marcia’s writings about identity formation and Jones and McEwen’s theory of multiple dimensions of identity. This chapter provides a novel approach for considering where a student veteran is in terms of development and offers ideas about how to proceed toward a fulfilled civilian identity. This information should be helpful for those whose task is to create programs and services for students with military experience. Linda Reisser, coauthor with Arthur Chickering of *Education and Identity* (1993; featuring the seven vectors of student development), provides her ideas about student veterans.

“Women Warriors: Supporting Female Student Veterans” shows the reader a new wrinkle in the story of student veterans: females with military experience, including those who have experienced combat and other traumas. This chapter introduces a distinctive subpopulation of women on our campuses and reveals some of the challenges they face. For example, military sexual trauma is a big issue in the armed forces, and many women also suffer post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) at higher rates than men. One in seven military personnel is female, and information in this chapter confirms that many women serve in harm’s way along with men. Today’s version of warfare has no front lines of battle for women to stay behind. The issue of providing support specifically for women veterans is finally garnering more attention, and we hope this chapter inspires the higher education community to do its part to help. Margaret Baechtold, retired Air Force officer and director of Indiana University–Bloomington’s center for veterans, offers her commentary about the phenomenon of female college students with military experience.

“Ideas for a Self-Authorship Curriculum for Students with Military Experience” draws heavily from the research of Baxter Magolda, Pizzalato, and others to conceive of ways in which a course for veterans can help in their

transition to college. More than a traditional orientation class, this proposed curriculum includes reflective writing about experiences in war and college, challenges students to make meaning of those experiences, and introduces them to the concept of self-authoring one's own life. The tenets of self-authorship are ideal for older students who are transitioning to college and civilian life from an environment where heavy reliance on an external authority, the military way, is obligatory. Marcia Baxter Magolda provided insightful commentary on the topic.

"Institutional Response to an Emerging Population of Veterans" provides the types of empirical evidence and inferential analyses needed for data-driven decision making by senior administrators and policymakers. Using data from the American Council on Education's *From Soldier to Student* (Cook and Kim, 2009), we performed a secondary analysis, including a factor analysis, which revealed five areas for policy consideration, and explored differences in veteran services and support by educational sector and percentage of enrollment of veteran students. Quantitative research on students with military experience is lacking, particularly in terms of scale and sample size, and we trust this chapter helps fill a gap in the research literature.

The British historian and statesman James Bryce said, "The worth of a book is to be measured by what you can carry away from it" (Seaman, 2006, p. 44), and we hope you carry much with you from reading this volume. Carry with you some compassion for the men and women who have served our country so admirably, balanced with a fair sense of pragmatism about how much colleges and universities can do to support their success. Most important, we hope this volume inspires a wave of new research in this important topic.