



RESEARCH BRIEFS

Presenting a Holistic Student Veteran Advising Model

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Summary

This brief synthesizes recent research results (Griffin & Gilbert 2015; Morris et al., 2019; Williams-Klotz & Gansemer-Topf, 2017) to introduce a transitional advising model designed specifically to meet the needs of student veterans. The model is guided by the Coping with Transition framework (Anderson et al., 2011), which is based on Schlossberg's Four "S" theory of transition. The advising model addresses salient issues facing student veterans and creates a foundation for advisors and faculty to co-create individualized transition plans. The model centers the intersectional identities of student veterans, thus explicitly addressing diversity among student veterans and dispelling a one-size-fits-all approach to supporting student veterans, which can further inequities and negatively impact success in higher education (Moore, 2017).

Background

Student veterans have reported high levels of doubt in their academic skills and difficulty working in groups with younger students, which contributes to feelings of isolation on campus (Morris et al., 2019; Williams-Klotz & Gansemer-Topf, 2017). Furthermore, nationally, high proportions of faculty and staff have reported a lack of knowledge about the challenges facing student veterans, and a majority have reported not feeling adequately prepared to recognize signs of psychological distress among student veterans (e.g., posttraumatic stress or traumatic brain injuries) (Albright & Bryan, 2018). However, studies have found that frequent visits with faculty members and academic advisors have positive implications for student veteran retention (Southwell et al., 2018). Furthermore, development of personal connections with faculty and staff is associated with a better understanding of the veteran experience and stronger connections by student veterans to the campus (Molina & Ang, 2017). Consequently, the lack of culturally attuned resources, training, and exposure to veterans' issues for faculty and staff can limit the ability



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of advisors to build strong communications and connections (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Morris et al., 2021). Filling this gap in resources will aid faculty and advisors in developing stronger connections with student veterans and improve efficacy in addressing the diverse needs of veterans.

Synthesis of Research

Based on findings from the literature, I introduce a transitional advising model for student veterans and provide practical guidance for faculty and advisors. The proposed model draws upon Schlossberg's Four S's model (Anderson et al., 2011), which includes categorical factors impacting individuals during a life transition, including: (a) situation, (b) self, (c) supports, and (d) strategies (see Table 1 for a description of each factor). The Four S's model has been applied previously to studying veteran transition to higher education (e.g., DiRamio et al., 2008; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015;

Livingston et al., 2011; Morris et al., 2019). Findings from these studies yield a set of recommendations for campuses to consider broadly when developing support services for student veterans (Table 1).

Development of a Holistic Advising Model

Anderson et al. (2011), extended the "Four S's" model from theory to practice by developing a guide for counselling individuals through a major life transition. In their work, they offer a series of questions, discussion prompts, and considerations that can be applied to individuals with unique circumstances, such as student veterans. Using the Coping with Transition counseling model provided by Anderson et al. (2011), Table 2 provides a set of advising discussion prompts along with evidence-based justification for using these questions/prompts for student veteran advising.

Table 1
Synthesis of Schlossberg's Four S's model applied to student veteran transition.

| Transition Factor | Description | Recommendations for Campuses |
|-------------------|--|--|
| Situation | Features that shape an individuals' situation include triggers, timing, control, changes in role, duration, and assessment of the situation. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Understand and address financial concerns 2. Allocate transfer credit system/policy for military service credits 3. Provide a point person for veteran resources 4. Provide resources for point person to facilitate advocacy, educate the campus, and lead policy initiatives |
| Support | Social and emotional support consists of concentric circles moving from intimate relationships to institutional or community connections – all of which are important in the transition. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide peer support opportunities 2. Understand the disconnect/divide between veterans and traditional students 3. Understand how diversity and identity-salience (specifically veteran identity) impacts support needs |
| Self | These include identity attributes such as demographic, cultural, and psychological characteristics that may impact self-efficacy, and lead one to feel optimistic or pessimistic about the transition. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consider diverse and intersecting identities in developing veteran support strategies (e.g., range of disabilities, service type, gender, age, race) 2. Understand that veterans often do not self-identify 3. Identify gaps in tracking educational progress and understanding how to reach veterans, and address those gaps |
| Strategies | These include actions (or inaction) related to an individual's success in channeling emotional responses to situations they cannot change. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish a veteran office with comprehensive coordinated resources 2. Create dedicated space(s) for veterans to connect and share word-of-mouth knowledge and experiences 3. Provide multiple opportunities for veterans to connect with one another |

Note. Concepts presented in this table are adapted from DiRamio et al. (2008); Griffin and Gilbert (2015); Livingston et al. (2011); and Morris et al. (2019).

Table 2
Student Veteran Holistic Advising Framework

| Transition Factor | Advising questions and discussion prompts | Justification |
|-------------------|---|--|
| Situation | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What was your motivation for enrolling? 2. How long have you been out of the military, and how do you feel that earning a degree will advance you towards your goals? 3. How important were VA education benefits in your decision to enroll at this campus? 4. Was enrolling in higher education your first choice, or was this the best choice at the time? 5. Do you see this transition to college as positive, negative, or neutral? and Why? | <p>As high as 40% of student-veterans have indicated that military separation was not planned, nor was it preferred. (Molina & Ang, 2017).</p> <p>Student-veterans have indicated a feeling of being behind academically, being older, and having a variety of disparate credits, all of which may exacerbate anxiety around enrollment and course-taking. (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015).</p> |
| Support | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is your current support system working? 2. Is the veteran getting what he/she needs in terms of support via affirmation, counsel, positivity? 3. Is there a range of social and emotional supports for the individual throughout the transition? 4. Was your support system disrupted by the transition? What are some ways that you (the veteran) can establish new relationships with people on and off campus to support your progress? 5. Are you utilizing campus supports that accommodate your family needs, e.g., advising hours later in the evenings, childcare options, etc.? | <p>Student veterans often report the loss of social supports during the military to civilian transition as one of the most difficult transition obstacles to overcome (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Williams-Klotz & Gansemmer-Topf, 2017).</p> |
| Self | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How much ambiguity are you feeling as you transition, and do you have other veterans or staff/faculty who can answer questions and provide clarity? 2. Do you have an effective treatment plan for service-connected injuries that you feel confident in? 3. Do you feel in control of your transition? Do you know about all the services on campus that can help you gain a sense of control (e.g., advising, career services, veteran services)? 4. Is there a void in sense of meaning and purpose, since leaving the military? Are you aware of the clubs/organizations on campus and in the community that can help you feel a sense of purpose? 5. Are you comfortable asking for help, and do you know where and how to do so? 6. Have you given thought to your new identity as a student or community member? How is the process going? | <p>Veterans perceive their identity through a range of demographic and military/occupational experiences, including age, gender, race, time and period of service, rank and branch of service, (dis)ability status, and combat exposure. Further, student veterans are twice as likely as non-veterans to have a documented disability, which can significantly impact transition and success in higher education. Attempting to understand the diverse values, beliefs, and identity vectors of student veterans can help advisors better connect with and support veterans (Doe, 2020; Morris et al., 2019).</p> |

Table continues on page 4

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| Transition Factor | Advising questions and discussion prompts | Justification |
|-------------------|---|---|
| Strategies | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Are you using the veteran service office and other resources specifically for veterans? 2. How are you experiencing studying and working on projects with other non-veterans? What can you learn from this experience? 3. How are you coping with frustrating experiences on campus? | A commonly expressed challenge for student veterans includes interactions and frustrations with civilian classmates, faculty, and staff (Williams-Klotz & Gansemer-Topf, 2017). |

Conclusion

College and community programs led by civilians often valorize military veterans and view them as a homogenous “other” group (Moore 2017). In neglecting the multiple facets of veteran identity and diverse range of perspectives and unique needs, individual and personal connections between advisors and student veterans are difficult to establish. Utilization of the advising model presented here can serve to remove communication barriers and acknowledge the diversity of needs, values, beliefs, and identities within the student veteran population. This brief synthesized key frameworks and ideas from recent research to build the Student Veteran Holistic Advising Framework. The four “S” components of the model frame a set of targeted questions that advisors and faculty can pose to transitioning student veterans. The model addresses salient issues facing student veterans to help create deeper connections between advisors and advisees and thereby facilitate successful individualized transition plans.

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