Transfer and Military-Affiliated Community College Students
Saralyn McKinnon-Crowley, The University of Texas at Austin
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Agenda for Today

- Learning Objectives
- Literature about Military-Connected Students
- Study Overview & Findings
- Implications for Practice & Future Research
- Discussion
Learning Objectives

• Learn how military-affiliated students navigate the transfer process
• Discuss how military-affiliated students describe their identities and sense of belonging at the community college and, if applicable, their four-year institution
• Discuss how the lessons learned can apply to all students.
Transfer Background

- Facilitating transfer to 4-year institutions one of key goals of community colleges (CC)
- While 80% of entering CC students aspire to obtain a bachelor’s, only 25% transfer within 5 years
- Lots of research on transfer, but little research on transfer and military-affiliated students

(Grubb, 1991; Jenkins & Fink, 2016)
Veterans in Higher Education

• High structure of military -> “organized anarchy” of higher education
• Changes: from active duty to “student” self-identity
• Strongly committed to higher education
  – “A necessary step to improving their lives as civilians after military service”
• Many joined military for educational funding

(Vacchi & Berger, 2014, p. 123; Cook & Kim, 2009, p. 21; Barr, 2016)
Veterans and Staff Members

- Veterans preferred one-stop shop for military benefits
- Staff who understand VA system very helpful to students

(Brown & Gross, 2011; Persky & Oliver, 2010; Whikehart, 2010; DiRamio et al., 2008; Vacchi, 2012)
Military Students and CCs

• Every CC in the U.S. enrolls active-duty military students, veteran students, or their dependents
• CCs have a variety of academic programs, offered at a low cost
• We don’t know how students navigate the transfer process

(Williams-Klotz & Gansemer-Topf, 2018; Rumann et al., 2011)
Poll

• Out of the military-connected students you work with, what percentage do you encounter that either have transferred from a CC to a 4-year or intend to transfer?
• http://etc.ch/pDHz
  – 0-25%
  – 25-50%
  – 50-75%
  – 75-100%
  – Don’t know/unsure
• Results:
• https://directpoll.com/r?XDbzPBd3ixYqg8p1WWUqFP1lMiN2YjHna2gtlylz
Our Study

• From a larger case study of 100+ transfer-intending CC students in Texas
  – 2015-2021
  – 2 CC systems: CCA & CCB
• Interviews and surveys
• Here, I focus on the 16 students in our study who were military-affiliated as of Year 3 of data collection
• First- and second-level coding
• Memos and triangulation

(Patton, 1990; Yin, 2015)
Community Colleges: Shapeless River

• Community colleges are historically quite unstructured ("shapeless river")
• Students are free to make their own decisions without consulting an advisor  
  – Not always great!
• Structured staff meetings can help  
  – Especially for low-income and/or first-generation students
• Guided pathways model seeking to change the lack of structure

(Scott-Clayton, 2011; Bailey et al., 2015)
Limitations

- From larger study
  - Military-connected students not explicit focus

- Data from each student varied
  - 9/16 or 56.25%: 3 years of data
  - 2/16 or 12.50%: 2 years of data
  - 5/16 or 31.25%: 1 year of data
## Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Racial Self-Identity</th>
<th>Ethnicity Self-Identity</th>
<th>Whose Military Benefits?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women: 62.5%</td>
<td>African American: 12.5%</td>
<td>African American: 12.5%</td>
<td>Own: 68.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men: 37.5%</td>
<td>Asian: 12.5%</td>
<td>Asian: 6.25%</td>
<td>Parents': 31.25%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Did not Report: 6.25%</td>
<td>Latina/o/x: 56.25%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Native American: 12.5%</td>
<td>White: 25%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White: 56.25%</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Minute for Reflection

- What do you think we learned?
- What would you expect this population to say about navigating the transfer process?
- Take a minute to note down what you’ll think we’ll find
  - Or, put it in the chat
  - Plan to revisit during Discussion
Findings: Transfer Rates

• Transferred by Year 3: $\frac{9}{16}$ or 56.25%
  – Recall from earlier: 80% want a bachelor’s, but only 25% transfer within 5 years
  – That’s a high amount!
    • Relatively large rate of transfer inspired this study

• We wanted to know: why were these students transferring successfully?

(Jenkins & Fink, 2016)
Findings

• Guardrails
  - Institutional support for military-connected students

• Financial Independence
  - Educational benefits
    • Pros/cons

• Identity Characteristics
  - Traits that can help with transfer
Minute for Reflection

• Any surprises with these findings so far?
• Note your thoughts to yourself or in the chat.
  – Plan to revisit at the end of the presentation
Findings: Guardrails

- Guardrails
  - Definition: Institutional supports that contribute to a successful transfer process
  - Degree plan & required courses (at least enough to reach full-time status)
  - Course choice matters a lot!
    - Wrong choice = no funding for a semester
Findings: Guardrails

For me, [my degree plan] mattered just because it’s one of the VA requirements—that you have a degree plan and that you’re following it. . . It’s just one of the things that the VA has, just to make sure that you’re spending the GI bill wisely, not just taking random classes just to get a living stipend or something like that. – “Gregory,” transfer
Findings: Guardrails

• Or, waiting to use benefits until applicability to career goal was assured
  
  - *Sometimes I want to pick [a course] for fun, but I can’t really do that. I won’t wanna waste my money . . . like, I’m dying to take another art class, but . . . it’d have to come out of pocket.*” - “Olivia,” Voc Rehab benefits (transferred as of Year 5 of the study)
Findings: Guardrails

- Contact between staff and students was required
  - VA advisor; academic advisor
  - Students highly valued that support
    - 2 did receive misinformation or not enough information
    - Talked to father about transfer and benefits rather than academic advisor because: “I’m not allowed to go anywhere else. I could only stay with the veterans, but if I could . . . I mean, [I’d see] anybody who knows more about transfers than them, because they don’t know at all.” “Martina,” transfer
Findings: Guardrails

• Forced interactions between students and staff because of the VA benefits
  – Structured their community college experience
  – AND therefore their transfer experience
  – Optimal transfer behavior
Findings: Financial Independence

- Independence because of governmental educational financing
- High structure in course selection = requirement for educational financing
  - Past labor/parents’ labor for financial independence while in higher education
- Manifested in:
  - Earned benefits v. government money
  - Where to spend?
  - Careful planning
Findings: Financial Independence

• Sense of responsibility regarding educational benefits:
  – “I know it’s not exactly my money” but wanted to be careful in spending it – Olivia
  – School as new vocation post-military

• But, there were inefficiencies in staying full-time to receive maximum benefits
Findings: Financial Independence

• “To get my full benefits from the GI Bill, like the housing allowance and stuff like that, [I] had to be full time. But I had gone as far as I could at [CCA], so I had to tack on two extra class[es] to be full time to get my full benefits, and those classes could be in anything.” – “Ryan,” Year 3 transfer
Findings: Financial Independence

- Trying to maximize benefits by using it only for most expensive education
  - You get 36 months of school. So however you break that up, you know, like a semester is four months, there’s four months down. You take summer, two and a half months or whatever, that subtracts that off. And that’s why the first, I think, maybe first two semesters and I think the summer at [CCA], I didn’t use the GI bill, because tuition at [CCA] is a lot cheaper, one-fifth what it is at [the four-year university]. So, I figured, if there was a chance I would run out of GI bill at [the four-year university], I’d rather not use it at [CCA]. So, I did that in order to make sure I would have enough GI bill to carry me through [to my master’s degree]. - Gregory
Findings: Financial Independence

• Earned Benefits
  – Like a salary
  – NOT a handout
    • “I just wanted to use the GI Bill because it is such a great benefit. I did my years, so I earned it. I felt like it would be foolish not to go back to school. I have free education.” – Gregory
Findings: Financial Independence

- Still, could be leery of using benefits at private school
  - I don’t want to go to a private school. I know my school’s paid for; I still don’t want to spend that money. You know, it’s stupid to me. I don’t want to spend that money on a private school. – “Veronica”

- Insufficient book benefit ($800 out of pocket)
  - Then I turned everything in, and then of course I had to go get it approved, because the military has a cap on how much you can spend on education. Well, the school costs $14,000 ... well, it cost $13,000 when I started, but it costs $14,000 now, and it costs a [per] semester, so it was kind of expensive ... That was the hardest process, is making sure that they would approve the program, the military. – Veronica
Findings: Identity Characteristics

- Defined as: the traits students possess that can impact their transfer process, positively or negatively
- Veteran students: easy transfer process
  - “The military would give me directions. I had specific, straight to the point. If I have a problem, let me do my thing. If I have a problem I will raise my hand. I have no problem doing that.” - Olivia
Findings: Identity Characteristics

- Transfer could be easy
  - Transfer “wasn't complicated. It's not like I'm applying to an Ivy League, you know.” - “Mario,” Year 3 transfer
- Using parents’ benefits could be more complicated:
  - “I had to resubmit all my paperwork” upon transfer and was “super frustrating” ”annoying” “aggravating”
    - “Reilly,” Year 3 transfer
- Felt older and more mature than other students
  - Made friends through veterans’ or transfer groups
Poll

- One-word reflection on what you’ve learned so far: PollEv.com/saralynmckin318
- Can skip submitting your name
- Can submit multiple times
Discussion

- Military benefits created structure for students absent elsewhere
  - Forced to pursue optimal transfer strategy
    - Degree plan
    - Advanced planning (destination institutions)
      - Triangulation
    - Staff interactions
- But, no/limited room for degree experimentation
  - Locked into particular path, for better or worse

(Scott-Clayton, 2011)
Breakout Rooms (5 Minutes)

- Introduce yourselves, if you feel comfortable
- What resonates with you and your experiences?
- Is there any way to apply the findings from this study in your own practice? Why or why not?
Whole-Group Reflection Questions

• Any volunteers to share what you discussed in small groups?
• Are there any additional implications of this work we may not have considered?
• What else do you want to know about the students in this study?
• Revisiting the chat, if applicable
• What general questions do you have?
Thanks to My Collaborators

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References


Thank YOU!

- saralyn@austin.utexas.edu with any questions/comments
- Check out our website at: sites.edb.utexas.edu/texas-transfer-project/