

**RESEARCH**

# The State of Research in Veterans Studies: A Systematic Literature Review

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New areas of research on veterans are emerging as the field of veterans studies develops and grows. Yet gaps remain in interdisciplinary research efforts on veterans. The research available across disciplines is still too fragmented to coalesce into a full-fledged field of veteran studies, as other categorical, area, and identity fields of study have done so. By surveying research literature of multiple disciplines used in the curricula of higher education-level veteran study programs, this article presents a thematic and integrative review of the state of research contributing to the growing field of veterans studies. Discussion follows about research emerging from within contributing disciplines, the themes across disciplines, and comments on the need for further research as the field of veterans studies continues to mature.

**Keywords:** veterans; veteran research; veteran studies; interdisciplinary research; thematic analysis; literature review

Several identity-based area studies claim interdisciplinary to be an objective goal. For example, the Mexican American scholar, Julius Rivera, stated that one goal among many others was to apply “an interdisciplinary model” (Soldatenko, 2012, p. 44). For Native American Studies, the interdisciplinary model is a necessity as “universities have had to balance the demands of offering classes for relatively small numbers of American Indian undergraduates with the opportunity of using faculty expertise to develop future professionals and faculty members” (Kidwell, 2005, pp. 133–134). In addition, Manning Marble, the founder of the Institute for Research in African American Studies at Columbia University, argues that Black Studies “need a 360-degree approach that must be interdisciplinary” (Davidson, 2010, p. 103). Similarly, veteran studies should aim for interdisciplinary models of research. However, claiming that there is an interdisciplinary field of study for veterans, similar to other categorical and area studies, may be premature.

Nonetheless, the extant literature shows that the nascent field of research on veteran is at a minimum, multidisciplinary, and trending toward interdisciplinary. In fact, several disciplines contribute to programs of veteran studies at the university level. Still, according to the Department of Veterans Administration’s Office of Enterprise Integration, the state of research on veterans studies is fragmented, with no consensus of a common definition for veteran studies,

and none or inconsistent communication between researchers of veteran issues and those who implement veteran policy (Collins & Wagner, 2017; Ortiz, 2012; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016).

Veteran studies are unlike other areas/identity studies. While other area studies started in the late 1940s or early 1950s (Engerman, 2015), veteran studies have yet to cohere into a tangible focus of study that exhibits the interdisciplinary nature and academic pedigree of its predecessors. Other categorical areas or identity studies research classes of people that are distinctly disadvantaged socially by prejudice, social inequality, or institutional racism. Consequently, the research for those categories emanates from a groundswell of local intellectual advocacy as well as other social grassroots movements (Cook-Lynn, 1997; Kidwell, 2005; Rooks, 2006; Soldatenko, 2012).

In contrast, veterans have, at least most recently, been held in high esteem. In fact, there were socio-economic benefits accorded to veterans during historical periods in the U.S. when the political feasibility of social-welfare programs was in jeopardy. Providing these welfare benefits to veterans paved the way for future welfare policies offered for other classes of citizens (Skocpol, 1995).

Additionally, the military veterans represent a unique cultural subgroup, that is gender inclusive and ethnically diverse. In one sense, it seems natural that the study of

veterans should evolve into an academic field of study. In another, it is interesting that what constitutes a “field of study” for veterans is not replicating the evolutionary paths of other area studies.

This article reviews the state of research in the field of veterans studies. It positions the field of veterans studies within the leading journal publications of academic disciplines that both contribute to current programs of veterans studies and conduct research on veterans. The goal is to discern major themes emanating from that research literature. Lastly, this article identifies major research questions for future interdisciplinary research on veterans that could assist veterans studies to evolve into a full-fledged field of study.

### **The State of Research on Veterans**

To bind research on veteran studies within an academic field, it is necessary to identify what is meant by the term “veteran studies.” Further, it is helpful to describe previous attempts to review the state of that research.

#### **Definition of Veterans Studies**

Several scholars have endeavored to conceive the field of veteran studies. For example, the academic coordinators of the first-ever conference on veteran studies framed the field of veteran studies in the following manner:

[Veterans studies is] the emerging research and growing need for interdisciplinary efforts relating to all aspects of veterans’ experience, from access to higher education, healthcare, and employment; the efficacy of psychological and medical services; veterans’ identity, diversity and inclusion; higher education; to veterans’ engagement with civil society. (Pencek, 2013)

This definition is interesting because it starts in humanities but seeks to address topics from the public policy and social science realm. Nonetheless, the emphasis is squarely on research and an interdisciplinary approach.

Perhaps the most descriptive definition comes from the editors of the *Journal of Veterans Studies (JVS)*. Below is their definition:

We, at JVS, understand veterans studies as an interdisciplinary and therefore multifaceted, scholarly investigation of military veterans and their families. Topics within that exploration may include, but are not limited to combat exposure, reintegration challenges, and the complex systems that shape the veteran experience. Veterans studies, by its very nature, may analyze experiences closely tied to military studies, but the emphasis of veterans studies is the “veteran experience,” i.e., what happens after the service member departs the armed forces. (Grohowski, 2016)

While *JVS* aims to be interdisciplinary, and publishes articles from multiple scholars of different disciplines, it is interest-

ing to note that as a field related to policy, the initial defining articles published in this journal come not from the normal social science disciplines, but rather from the fields of behavioral sciences and humanities. Both definitions above represent a body of work that is contributing to a growing number of programs of study on veterans issues in institutions of higher education and research.

#### **Previous Systematic Literature Reviews**

Compared to more mature fields of study, the literature reviews for veterans studies is paltry. A search for articles containing the terms “literature review” and “veteran” brought a return of just five results, only three of which were related to military veterans.<sup>1</sup> By comparison, within the field of organizational studies, the return of literature reviews on the term “organization change” numbers in the millions (Ven & Poole, 1995).

The first return was a book chapter (Watkins, 2013) that reviewed the leading research from the Canadian Institute for Military and Veteran Health Research. That review identified themes such as mental, physical, social, rehabilitative, and occupational health, in addition to combat care. However, it concluded that in addition to the prevalence of applied research, more academic research was required. The second return was an article (Rose et al., 2018) that reviewed 18 of 94 articles identified from the literature discussing factors contributing to successful transition to civilian life for medically discharged Canadian Armed Forces veterans. This article listed several limitations in conducting this type of review. Highest among the limitations was a scarcity of research articles available to establish a solid review of the state of veterans research. The third review identified was a PhD thesis manuscript (Mammone, 2018) that conducted a systematic review of the literature about veteran homelessness and factors leading to this condition. Like the first two results, this manuscript highlighted the meager state of research literature on veterans studies.

Expanding the search term “veteran” to “veteran issues,” returned one additional citation. In a review of articles addressing veterans’ issues published in the journal *Armed Forces & Society*, the authors identify 24 articles dealing with veterans from that journal since its inception in 1974 (Camacho & Atwood, 2007). The themes the authors identified emanated from articles about Vietnam War-era veterans, the physical effects of Agent Orange poisoning, psychological re-adjustment after re-integration, employment or socio/economic status, women veterans, veteran social status within their communities, research on veterans of other nations, and veterans of the all-volunteer force. The authors concluded that while the literature was of good quality, it mainly focused on the experience of veterans from Western first-world nations. Camacho & Atwood (2007) recommended additional research on veterans from multiple nations, the issue of PTSD, the idea of a growing civil-military gap as exhibited by findings of disengaged public

support for veterans' issues, and on the status of veterans benefit policies from across the states and regions.

Despite lacking reviews, research articles on veterans continue to grow. While only 24 articles in total were published by *Armed Forces and Society* at the time of Camacho and Atwood's (2007) article (a time period from 1974 until 2006 representing 42 years), the same journal published 39 articles on veterans from 2007 until 2018 (a short 11-year time span in comparison). To further demonstrate the growth in veteran research literature by expanding the search to any peer-review journal article published at the end of America's war in Vietnam in 1975 until 1990, the return on articles with veteran or veterans in the title number 1,914. However, from the end of that period until present, the number of articles spiked to 23,490. No doubt related, the increase of veteran research coincides with the emergence of veteran programs in various institutions of higher education and illustrates the need to reassess the state of research on veterans studies.

### **Veteran Programs of Study and Research**

Academic programs focused on veterans are emerging in higher education. These programs fall into one of 2 categories, a program of study or a program of research. Programs of study offer certificates, associate degrees, or an undergraduate minor in veterans studies. As of 2017, programs of veterans studies exist at Eastern Kentucky University (EKU), the University of Missouri-St. Louis (UMSTL), and SUNY/Empire State College (SUNY/ESC). A robust program of research currently exists at the University of Utah and Syracuse University, and its focus is primarily on applied research.

Each program of study draws on multiple disciplines to inform their curriculum. **Table 1** details the types of certificate or degree and their corresponding curricula used to build programs of veterans study.

The coursework from the surveyed programs includes classes from major academic disciplines such as anthropology, English, communications, criminal justice, history, philosophy, political science, psychology, and sociology. They also include courses from established fields of academic and professional studies such as management, information sciences, children and family studies, gerontology, criminal justice, public administration/policy, nursing, and social work. The level of study, certificate or minor, and the wide array of disciplines that contribute to the curricula confirm both the fledgling and multi-disciplinary nature of the current state of veterans studies. In attempting to set parameters around which disciplines to draw from, the contributing disciplines listed in **Table 1** makes a convenient starting point.

### **Method of Literature Review**

This paper combines thematic, integrative, and synthetic reviews of leading research from the multiple disciplines that make curricula contributions to the previously identified veteran programs of study. That is to say, articles from the leading journal titles from each discipline, listed in **Table 1**,

**Table 1:** Veteran Programs of Study by Award and Discipline.

<b>Programs of Study</b>			
<b>Degree/Certificate</b>	<b>EKU VTS</b>	<b>UMSTL MVS</b>	<b>SUNY/ESC Graduate Certificate</b>
Baccalaureate Degree	No	No*	No
Minor	Yes	Yes	No
Associates Degree	No	No	No
Certificate of Study	Yes	Yes	Yes
Discipline	X = contributing Discipline		
Anthropology		X	X
Communications		X	
Criminal Justice		X	
English	X	X	
Family Studies	X		
Gerontology		X	
Health policy			X
History	X	X	
Information Science	X		
Management			X
Military Studies	X		
Nursing		X	
Philosophy		X	
Political Science	X		
Psychology		X	
Public Administration			X
Sociology	X	X	
Social Work	X	X	
Veterans Studies	X	X	
Women & Gender studies	X		

*Notes:* Since this survey was first made, each of these programs have evolved by dropping, adding, or combining courses from multiple disciplines. The authors decided to use this as the baseline year and not add or drop in correlation with the evolutions of the programs to allow for consistency in analysis.

\* The UMSTL Military and Veterans Studies program allows students to "create" his or her own 36-hour interdisciplinary major studying the veteran experience in concert with the bachelor's degree program in the Interdisciplinary Studies program.

were selected for analysis. The analysis was completed using NVivo 12, a qualitative data analysis software. The thematic aspect of the review identified research themes emanating from within each discipline, the integrative approach analyzed if and how those themes transcended disciplinary boundaries, and the synthetic approach analyzed the

**Table 2:** Total Number of Articles and Disciplines.

Disciplines from leading peer-reviewed journals	# of articles
Anthropology	4
Communications	1
Criminal Justice	15
English	7
Family Studies	32
Gerontology	49
Health Policy	22
History	14
Information Science	16
Management	3
Military Studies	5
Nursing	26
Philosophy	2
Political science	6
Psychology	6
Public Administration	8
Social Work	13
Sociology	17
Women and Gender Studies	7
Total Articles w/out <i>Journal of Veteran Studies</i>	253
Articles from <i>Journal of Veteran Studies</i>	67
Total # of Journal Articles	320

multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary areas of research presented within the articles published in the *Journal of Veteran Studies* (from hereon, mostly referred to as *JVS*) since its inception. These combined methods involved five steps:

1. Selecting the academic disciplines and the corresponding disciplines journal publications.
2. Collecting and sorting the relevant articles from each journal publication.
3. The identification of themes within each discipline.
4. Identification of themes that transcend each discipline and
5. The identification of gaps which could provide new research direction emanating from within individual disciplines or across disciplines.

#### **Selection of Academic Disciplines and Journal Articles**

The academic disciplines that contributed to the curricula of veterans programs of study, as identified in **Table 1**, provided the source from which to draw the journal titles and articles to conduct the literature review. The top three

leading journal publications, identified by their 2019 journal impact factor (Thomson Reuters, 2019) were selected, if they published articles that returned search results for the term “veteran” in the title, abstract, or keywords and focused research on military veterans. Following this selection process, 19 academic disciplines, 52 journal publications, and 320 articles all relating to the study of veterans were retained. See **Table 2**.

#### **Major Theme, Topic, and Trend Identification**

Major themes, topics, and trends emanating from within and across each discipline were identified using NVivo's word frequency and word tree tools. Themes were identified by the words that returned the highest word frequency, either within or across each discipline. The criteria for theme selection within disciplines were if the word with the highest word frequency return was present in over 50% of the articles selected for each discipline. The criteria for theme selection across discipline were if the word with the highest word frequency return was present in the majority of articles across more than 50% of the disciplines. Topics were identified by conducting root-word analysis from the resulting word tree of each thematic word. Root words consisted of identifying the majority of references across journals within and across disciplines. Trends were identified by word frequency results and root-word returns that were present in the latest published articles.

The initial results of themes within and across all disciplines are depicted in NVivo-generated word cloud pictures. **Figure 1** demonstrates the word clouds for the complete number of articles used, including *JVS* articles, and without *JVS* articles.

Topics of themes within each discipline were identified by taking the results of the top three-word frequencies in each discipline and analyzed using NVivo's word tree search function. These topics were further analyzed for their frequency mentioned within each article and the date of publication for the article to identify if these themes and topics were trending.

In addition to the research theme identification, typical literature review relevant word searches were also identified and became literature review codes. The literature review codes identified research design, type of methodology, type of data, unit of analysis, war era, research results, and recommendations for future research directions. Thematic codes were identified during the analysis and are presented in the results section below. Lastly, the level of interdisciplinary character was determined by reviewing *JVS* articles for the integration of data, techniques, tools, perspectives, concepts, or the utilization of theories from two or more academic disciplines (National Academies Committee on Facilitating Interdisciplinary Research, 2005).

#### **Results**

Two main sub-sections of results are presented here. First, the descriptive literature review data from articles published in non-*JVS* journals and articles published in *JVS* are pre-

sented. This data consists of the methodology, unit of analysis, war era, and publication timeline from both non-*JVS* and *JVS* articles presented side by side for ease of comparison. The second subsection presents results from the analysis of themes observed in articles derived from across and within the disciplines that contributed to the curricula of programs of veteran studies, as described earlier and from the articles published within the *JVS* journal from 2016 to 2019.<sup>2</sup>

**Descriptive Literature Review Data**

This subsection describes results of literature review data for articles from all disciplines and compares them to literature review data for articles from *JVS*. In looking at the preferred methodology of research articles, **Figure 2** depicts data on the type of methodology used in the articles reviewed. Fifty-four percent of the non-*JVS* articles analyzed followed a qualitative methodology while 45% had a quantitative

methodology and the other 2% followed a mixed method approach.

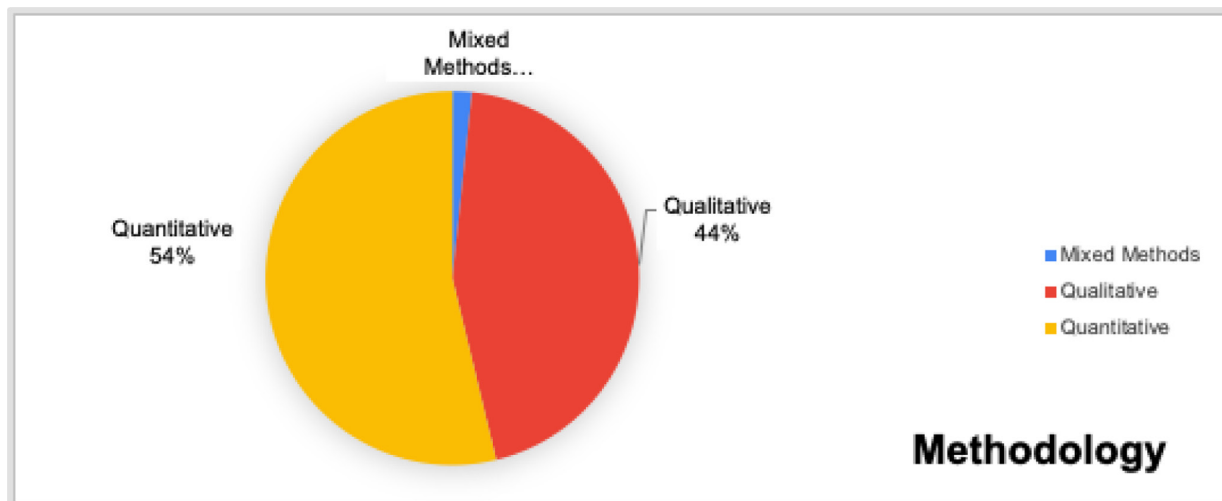
By comparison, articles published within *JVS* trend more toward qualitative analysis. The majority of *JVS* articles reviewed used a qualitative approach with 68% of the articles in this category, followed by 25% of entries having a quantitative methodology, while the remaining 7% used a mixed-methods approach. See **Figure 3**.

Not all articles clearly presented a unit of analysis to make a comparison. However, for those articles that did, the distribution of codes by articles on the basis of the unit of analysis is represented in the **Figure 4**. For non-*JVS* articles, the unit of analysis “male” was the most frequently occurring unit with 31% of the articles focused on it. “Foreign veteran” and “female” followed with 24% each and these formed the bulk of the codes observed. Interestingly, when specified by race or ethnicity: African Americans, Asians, Hispanics, and

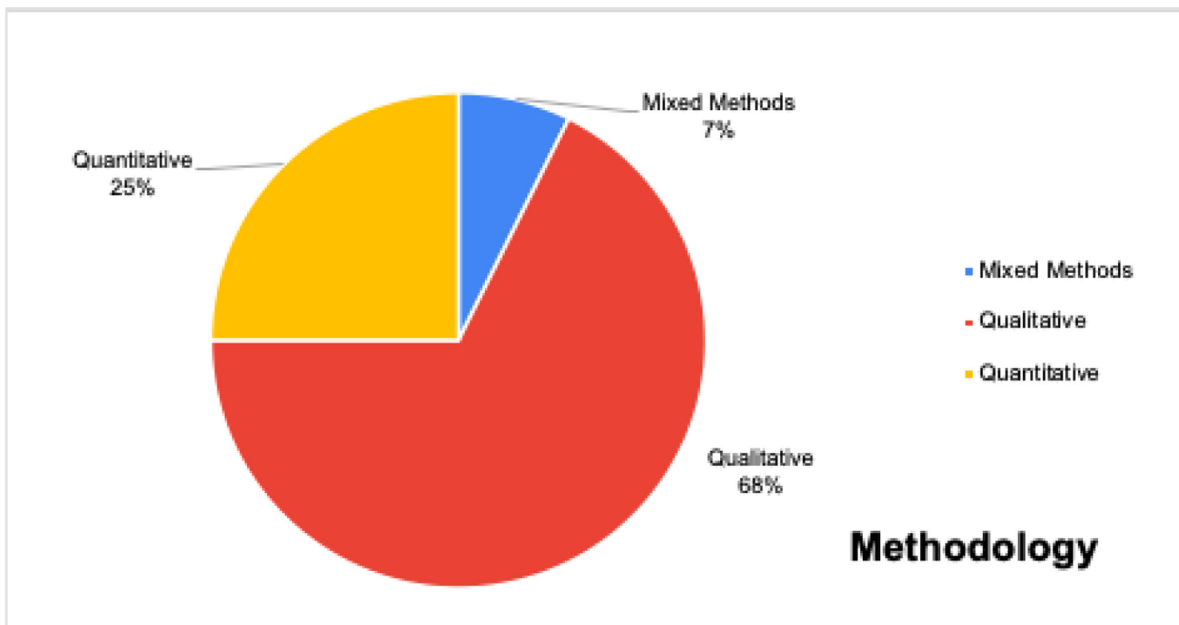


**Figure 1:** Word Clouds with and Without *JVS* Articles.

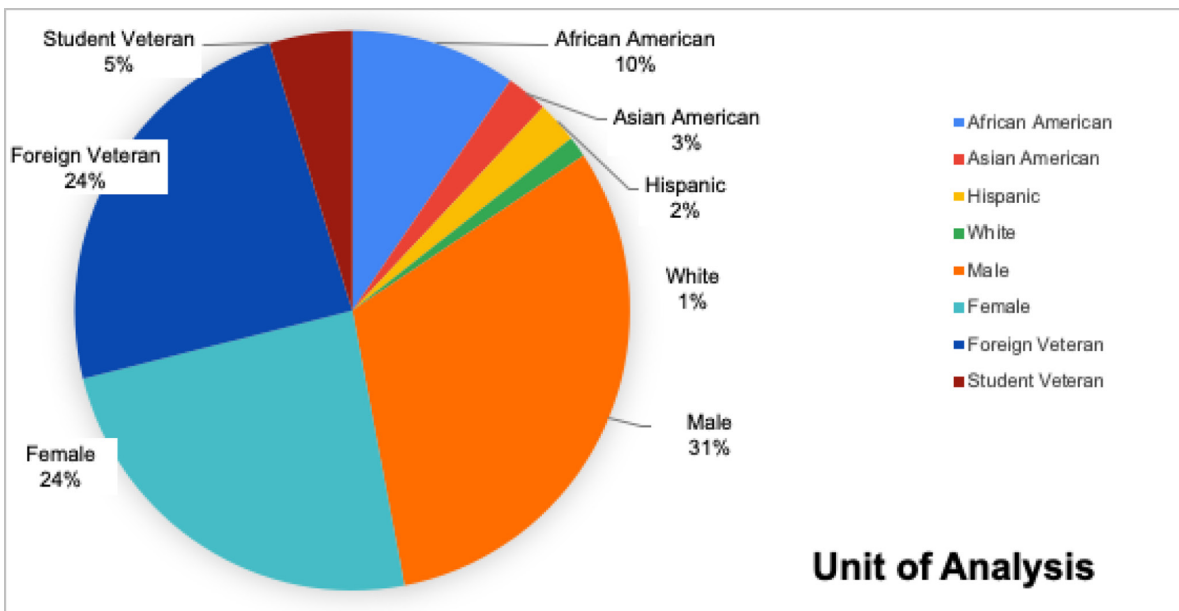
Note: The image on the left is a word cloud with all articles used in this study, to include *JVS* articles. The right image is a word cloud with only non-*JVS* articles.



**Figure 2:** Methodology Used in All Non-*JVS* Articles.



**Figure 3:** Methodologies used in JVS articles.



**Figure 4:** Unit of Analysis Identified in Non-JVS Articles.

Whites only constituted 16% of the unit of analysis identified from each non-JVS article reviewed.

In comparison, the distribution of articles on the basis of unit of analysis in articles published in the JVS is represented in **Figure 5**. Of the articles analyzed, 50% of the articles had students/student veterans as their unit of analysis followed by spouses of veterans and faculty at 9%.

In comparing **Figures 4** and **5**, it is evident that there is a larger diversity of topics presented in articles published in JVS than in the individual disciplinary journals.

For non-JVS articles, the distribution of articles based on the war era is represented in **Figure 6**. The Post 9/11 era, which constitutes studying veterans from both the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan form an area of focus for 27% of the articles. Combining studies of Iraq only or Afghanistan only veterans raises the focus to 44%. This is closely followed by the Vietnam war-era veterans and World War II era veterans, each forming 22% of the total distribution.

While World War II, Vietnam, and Post 9/11 compose over 70% of war eras covered by non-JVS articles, the Post 9/11

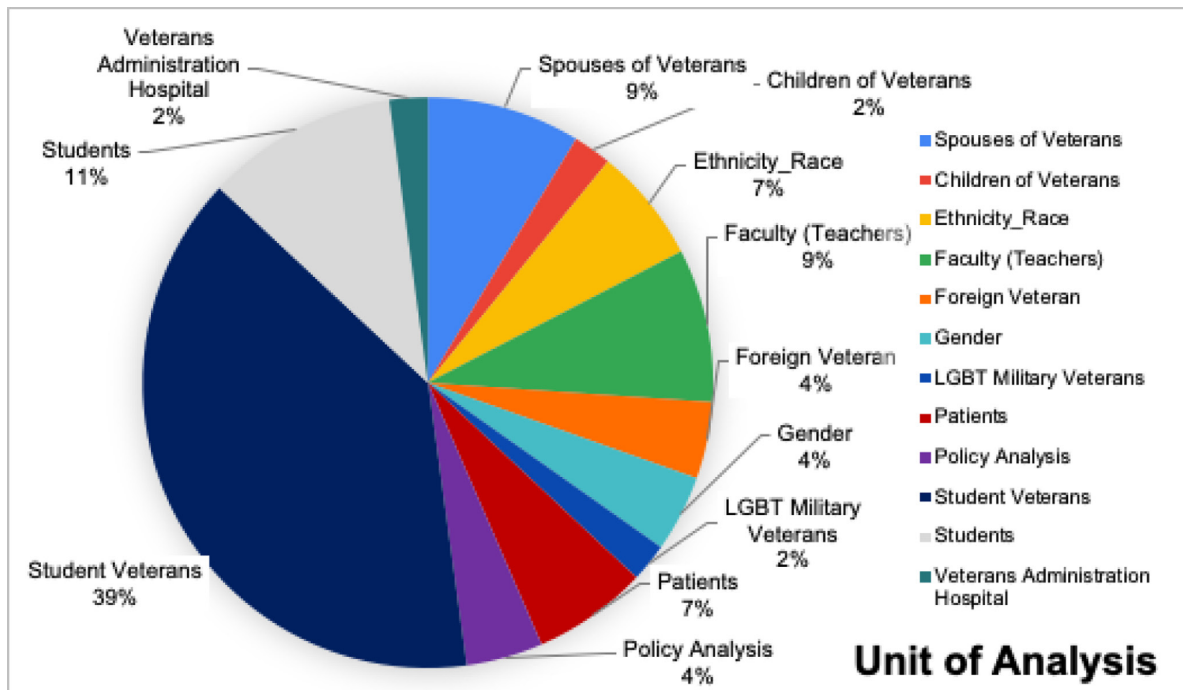


Figure 5: Unit of Analysis in JVS Articles.

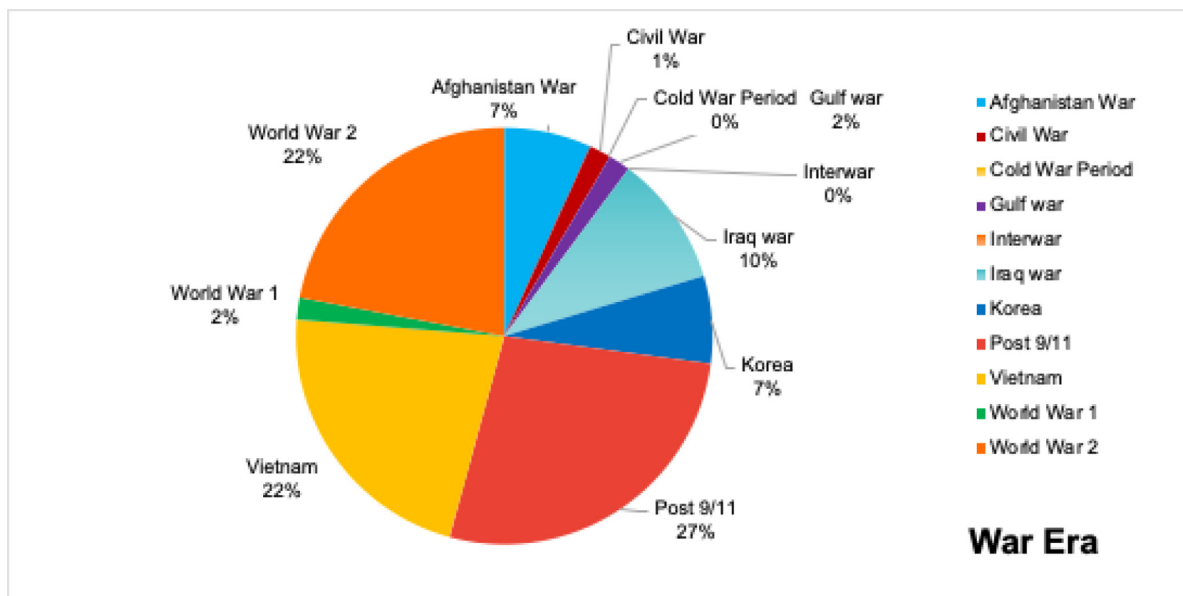


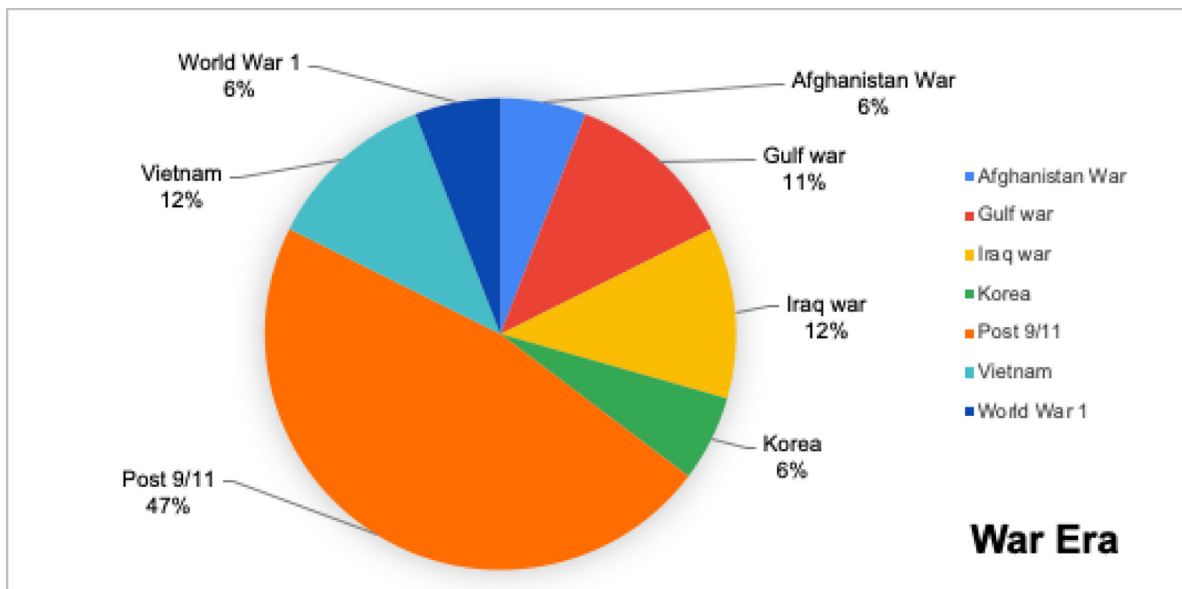
Figure 6: War Era Focus from All Non-JVS Articles.

period represents over 47% of the entries coded at this particular node on the *JVS* articles. See **Figure 7**. This percentage rises if articles that focused only on veterans who served in the Iraq war (11%) and in Afghanistan (6%) to 57%. The next highest level of war eras discussed in *JVS* articles are the Vietnam War and Gulf War, each constituting 12% of the total war era codes.

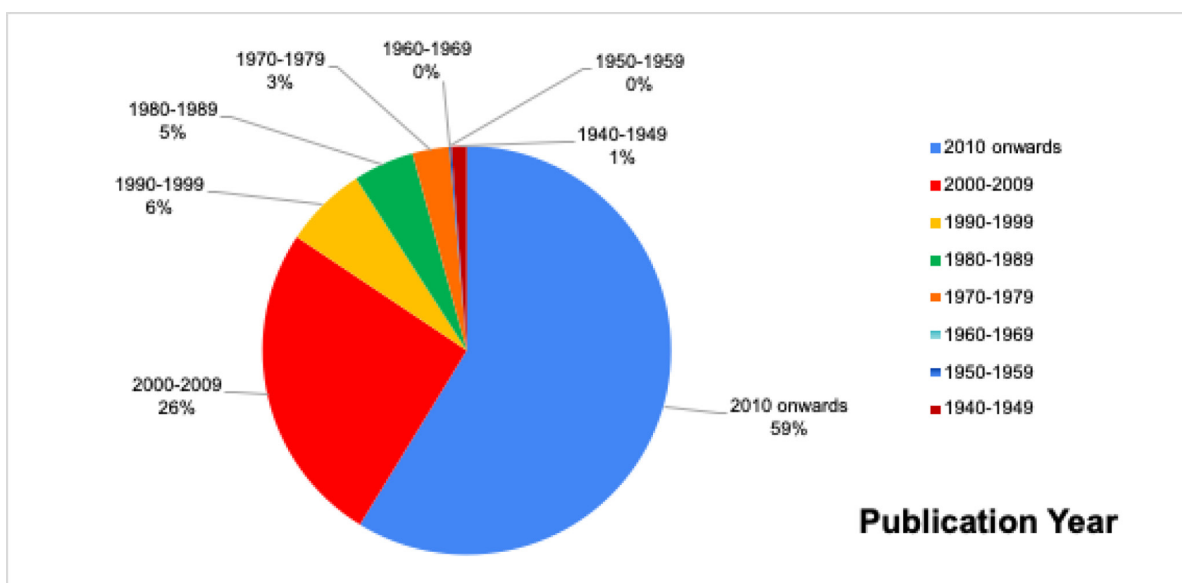
Interestingly, as will be demonstrated in the **Figure 8**, while the number of articles published about veterans went

up exponentially after the Gulf War conflict between the U.S. and Iraq, the topic of those articles spread nearly even between WWII, Vietnam, and Post 9/11 era veterans in non-*JVS* articles. While in *JVS* articles, Post 9/11 era veterans are discussed most, and there were no research articles that discussed WWII era veterans.

To understand the trend in the publication of articles covering veterans studies and associated subjects, non-*JVS* articles were classified on the basis of their publication



**Figure 7:** War Era Focus of JVS Articles.

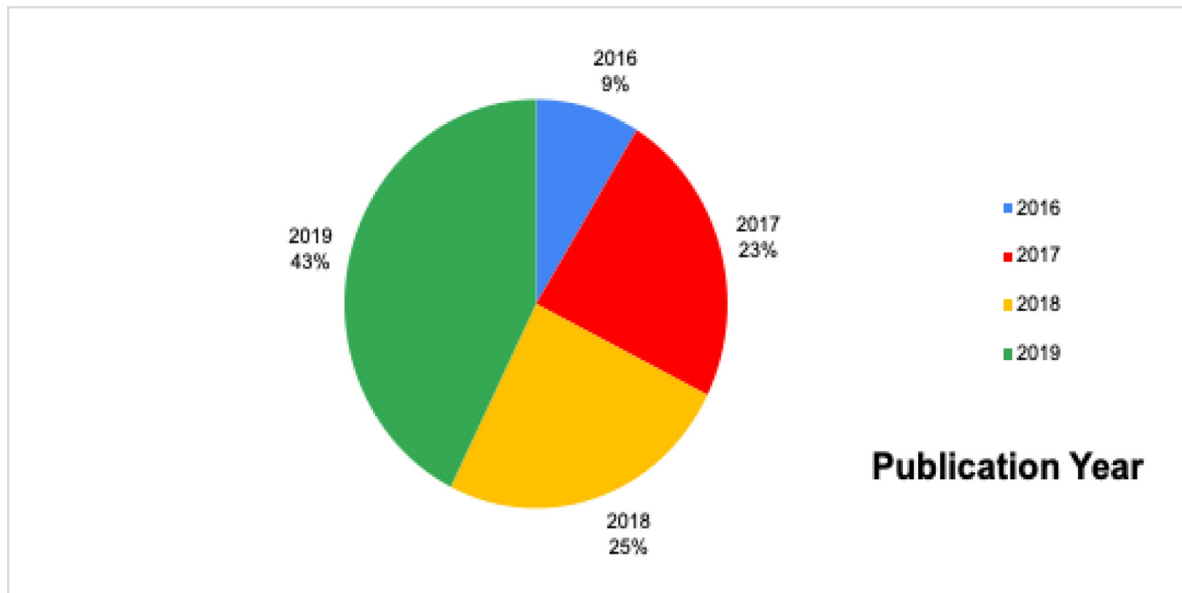


**Figure 8:** Publication Percentage by Year for All Journal Articles Minus JVS.

year and were then grouped into 10-year intervals. Most articles analyzed were published in the recent decade from 2010 onwards, constituting 59% of the total codes by time period observed. However, the beginning of that upward trend in articles published on veterans in non-*JVS* journals clearly starts during the 1990–1999 period (following the Gulf War), with 6% of the entries, and continues expanding during the 2000–2010 period, with 26%. This indicates a rising trend in the focus on veterans across the multiple disciplines analyzed for this study, starting in 1990, at a time in US history when the number of non-veterans in the U.S. population drastically outnumbered the number of veterans. See **Figure 8**.

Since a one-on-one comparison based on publication year cannot be made between non-*JVS* articles and *JVS* articles, due to the shorter number of years *JVS* articles have been published. **Figure 9** presents the year of publication for *JVS* articles focused on veteran research specifically. This number is less than the total number of articles published by *JVS* since this journal also publishes book reviews, editorials, or program profiles which were not included in the analysis of this study. On the basis of the year of publication, research articles start making up a significant number of articles published in the *JVS* by 2017, with 23% of the articles focused on research. The upward trend continues with 24% of the articles published in 2018 being research articles, and then





**Figure 9:** Percent Research Articles Published by Year in JVS.

doubles in 2019 with 43% of the articles published focused on research. This indicates that the publication of research-based articles by *JVS* is increasing and projects an upward trend for the 2020 publication season.

#### **Thematic Analysis Results**

As mentioned earlier, this subsection first presents the thematic analysis results from within and across disciplines published in non-*JVS* articles. Presenting results from an intra-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary perspective better demonstrates the potential interdisciplinary nature of the future of veterans studies. Lastly, this subsection presents the thematic analytical results of reviewed research articles published in *JVS* articles between 2016 and 2019. It presents the themes observed and then also presents the interdisciplinary characteristic of those articles from *JVS*.

#### **Intra-Disciplinary Themes from Non-*JVS* Articles**

NVivo's word frequency query on articles in leading journal titles from each discipline separately, allowed the extraction of the leading themes across each discipline. **Table 3** lists the discipline, theme, and number of references of each leading theme within the articles composing that discipline's contribution.

In reviewing all of the terms above, most themes seem to hang together. In one way or the other, they appear to relate to medical or psychological health and care. Even the theme "narrative," prominent in the English discipline, deals with the therapeutic effect of journal writing for veterans (Balla, 2016; Hart & Thompson, 2016) that help build resilience in veterans with war trauma (Stenberg & Minter, 2018). Nonetheless, a few themes stand out within their respective disciplines, like criminal justice's theme of PTSD, political science and leaders, and women studies and gender. Themes of war, leaders, and services are consistent with expectations

for journal publications within military studies, political science, public administration, and sociology.

The discipline of criminal justice, also known as criminology, generally studies the aspects of crime and delinquent behavior, or the processes of deciding what is legal or not legal. This discipline's focus is usually more on the causes and preventions of crime or delinquency. As such, when studying veterans, criminal justice scholars study the various aspects of how post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) relates to the field of criminal justice. For example, in the journal *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, Schurfield and Wilson (2003) review research conducted by the Department of Veteran Affairs that lead to the dismantling of several inpatient and outpatient programs to treat veterans with PTSD. They found that the research was riddled with several design flaws, its data collection was biased, and it was misused for policy purposes to decide on type of care. In turn, this caused huge impacts on policy and treatment planning, misleading practitioners as to the appropriate plan of care. Other research in this field indicated that duration and symptomology of PTSD is moderated by the context of the trauma (i.e., combat, child sex abuse, domestic violence, or a combination [Kaysen et al., 2003]), or the prevalence of PTSD in victims of military sexual trauma (MST) in women (Suris & Lind, 2008; Wilson, 2018) and men (Morris et al., 2014). It should be noted that each of these topics relate to the treatment and diagnosis of PTSD instead of PTSD's relationship to criminal or delinquent behavior, making the treatment of PTSD as a theme stand out in the leading journal titles for the field of criminal justice.

The discipline of political science is wide ranging, looking at a host of issues from local power politics to international relations. In studying the topic of veterans, the leading political science journals tackle the topic from the theme of leaders. This stands out, in that this approach is less focused on

**Table 3:** Intra-disciplinary Themes from Veteran Research from Non-JVS Research Articles.

Disciplines from leading peer-reviewed journals	Leading theme	Total articles	# of articles referencing identified theme	% of Articles
Anthropology	Care	4	4	100%
Communications	Memories	1	1	100%
Criminal Justice	PTSD	15	11	73%
English	Narrative	7	6	86%
Family Studies	Health	32	32	100%
Gerontology	Care	49	47	96%
Health Policy	Patient	22	21	95%
History	Memory	14	14	100%
Information Science	Health	16	16	100%
Management	Providers	3	3	100%
Military Studies	War	5	5	100%
Nursing	Caring	28	26	93%
Philosophy	Moral	2	2	100%
Political Science	Leaders	6	5	83%
Psychology	Vietnam	6	5	83%
Public Administration	Services	8	8	100%
Social Work	Abuse	13	13	100%
Sociology	War	17	17	100%
Women Studies	Gender	7	7	100%
Total		253	243	95%

veteran as a dependent variable (i.e., identifying the physical and mental health effects on veterans from certain interventions or policies), but instead, more as an independent variable, looking at the impact that the experience of veterans has on their environments. The theme of leaders emanates in the selected articles from the political science field such as veteran decisions on voting selections of political leaders that resonate with military experience (Lowande et al., 2019), the veteran support of political leaders' war and peace policies based on the leader's military experience (Grossman et al., 2015), the political leadership roles that veterans adopt to preserve military history (Hubbard & Hasian, 1998), or how prior military experience of military veterans in positions of national leadership shapes their political behavior (Horowitz & Stam, 2014).

The theme of gender within the articles from the field of women studies also stands out, like the theme of leader in political science, primarily because the topics deal less with the therapeutic and health concerns of women veterans, but more with how women veterans experience and shape their gender identities. For example, Kumar (2004) points out how women adopt androgynous identities to claim the title

"honorary men" in order to serve in the same capacity and roles as men. This is an adoption of "gender camouflage" that allows women to perform in traditional masculine roles while being accepted, promoted, and respected (Midberry, 2017, p. 976). Regardless, while providing women more capacity, it also makes them more susceptible to gender discrimination in that it hides them from the legal protections afforded women as a protected class of citizen (Scheper, 2014). By crossing the gender boundary, military institutional effects such as using shame as a disciplinary tactic, prevent women from using the protective power of gender-based laws since they in effect used military power preserved exclusively for masculine gender identities (Karazi-Presler et al., 2018). Beyond the initial effects of cross-gender identity on women while on active duty, there are further gender inequity effects from this choice as women veterans exit military service. For example, women make up about 5% of the veteran population, or about 1.4 million veterans, however, healthcare workers are less exposed to women's medical needs in this population of veterans. Similar uni-gender assumptions as in the military field and the lack of gender awareness sensitivity among care providers in the veteran

medical profession contribute to a lack of knowledge and thus, a lack of service for women veterans (Salgado et al., 2002).

Clearly, the themes of the research emanating from within each of the contributing disciplines to veterans research is related to their particular disciplinary origin. However, another interesting aspect to understand about veteran studies as a disciplinary field, is which themes cross disciplines and are similar to the internal disciplines. This paper turns next to the across discipline themes that can be observed from the sample of articles used to compose this in-depth literature review.

#### Cross Disciplinary Themes from Non-JVS Articles

The word-frequency analysis across all disciplines published in non-JVS articles, results in the following top themes: health, using, study, caring, servicing, war, research, PTSD. After reviewing each term using the NVivo word tree tool, the following terms were assessed as too generic to make a meaningful contribution to this study: using, study, and research. This resulted in the top five themes spanning

across the selected disciplines as health, caring, servicing, war, and PTSD. Similar to the bulk of the themes coming from within the disciplines, the theme of health is by far the most prominent theme observed trending across disciplinary journal publications. See **Table 4**.

In **Table 4**, the larger percentages of all theme references coded across disciplines are bolded in each individual column to demonstrate the upper part of the percentage spread of references for each theme present in each discipline as compared to each other. So, for example, the theme of caring and war in anthropology makeup 49% and 41% respectively of all of the top coded references for that discipline. In comparison, communications' bulk of coded references is found in the theme of war at 75%.

Lastly, the total percentage of each code reference across disciplines is bolded in the same manner to indicate the percentage spread of between coded themes from across all disciplines. According to the data, the theme of health has the highest percentage, 27% of references across all articles reviewed. Caring, servicing, war, and PTSD are 23%, 18%, 17%, and 15% respectively.

**Table 4:** Percent of Cross Disciplinary Themes per non-JVS Article.

Journals by Discipline	# of Articles	Health	Caring	Servicing	War	PTSD	Total %
Anthropology	4	3%	<b>49%</b>	7%	<b>41%</b>	0%	100%
Communications	1	0%	0%	<b>25%</b>	<b>75%</b>	0%	100%
Criminal Justice	15	<b>20%</b>	9%	16%	12%	<b>43%</b>	100%
English	7	25%	16%	<b>26%</b>	<b>26%</b>	7%	100%
Family Studies	32	<b>29%</b>	12%	17%	5%	<b>37%</b>	100%
Gerontology	49	<b>32%</b>	<b>34%</b>	12%	9%	13%	100%
Health Policy & Services	22	<b>41%</b>	<b>41%</b>	15%	1%	1%	100%
History	14	3%	3%	<b>10%</b>	<b>82%</b>	2%	100%
Information Science	16	<b>54%</b>	<b>33%</b>	12%	1%	0%	100%
Management	3	20%	<b>31%</b>	5%	<b>38%</b>	7%	100%
Military Studies	5	2%	4%	<b>10%</b>	<b>84%</b>	1%	100%
Nursing	26	<b>31%</b>	<b>34%</b>	19%	6%	10%	100%
Philosophy	2	<b>26%</b>	<b>26%</b>	7%	<b>29%</b>	12%	100%
Political Science	6	8%	2%	<b>34%</b>	<b>56%</b>	0%	100%
Psychology	6	5%	1%	10%	<b>13%</b>	<b>71%</b>	100%
Public Administration	8	6%	8%	<b>58%</b>	<b>27%</b>	0%	100%
Social Work	13	<b>37%</b>	7%	<b>24%</b>	6%	<b>27%</b>	100%
Sociology	17	5%	3%	<b>34%</b>	<b>56%</b>	3%	100%
Women Studies	7	25%	<b>29%</b>	<b>28%</b>	17%	2%	100%
Total % of reference among all articles	253	<b>27%</b>	<b>23%</b>	18%	17%	15%	100.00%

*Note:* The larger percentages of all theme references coded across disciplines are bolded in each individual column to demonstrate the upper part of the percentage spread of references for each theme present in each discipline as compared to each other.

Within the theme of health, the discipline that had the highest percentage of code references was information science at 54%. All of the articles reviewed for information science contained multiple topics under the theme of health. The three most prominent topics, in order of number of articles and references, were health records (Cronin et al., 2015; D'Avolio et al., 2012; Javier et al., 2019; Lovis et al., 2001; Nazi, 2010; Saleem et al., 2013; Weaver et al., 2004; Woods et al., 2016), health information exchange systems (Dixon et al., 2015, 2017; Hynes et al., 2004; McQueen et al., 2004; Turvey et al., 2014), the general use of information exchange systems for the purpose of veterans seeking medical information online (Tsai & Rosenheck, 2012), educating veterans on health issues (Dennison et al., 2019), and using online secure messaging systems for communication between veterans and their care providers (Shimada et al., 2017).

Within the theme of caring, the discipline anthropology had the highest percentage of code references for this theme at 49%. Two main topics arise that are analyzed through anthropological methods, strategies for gaining access to medication to manage pain by veterans (Crowley-Matoka & True, 2012), and strategies for transnational wives to seek care and security in old age by marrying veterans of other nations (Lu, 2012).

Within the theme of servicing the discipline that had the highest degree of code references was public administration at 58%. Several topics arise from this discipline that are interestingly related to veteran studies. For example, there are topics about veteran motivations for public service and volunteering (Lewis & Frank, 2002; Nesbit & Reingold, 2011). Other topics include the implementation of veteran services (Caress, 2001; Dudley & Raymer, 2001), the use of leadership to improve veteran services (Hennessey Jr., 1998; Van Wart, 2015), and women veterans in civil service (Mani, 1999).

Within the theme of war, the discipline that had the highest percentage of code references for this theme was military studies at 84%. A variety of topics arise around the theme of war from this field of study when focused on veterans. Topics range from veteran treatment through the mobilization before war to disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration processes after war (MacKenzie, 2009; MacLeish, 2020), to veterans perspectives on the morality of the Vietnam Memorial Wall (Sylvester, 2018) and veterans' perspective of the ethical treatment of women and children in conflict zones (Schulzke, 2016).

Not surprisingly, psychology articles focusing on veterans exhibit 71% of the top code references associated with the theme of PTSD. In particular, articles coming from the psychology discipline address new cognitive theories of PTSD (Brewin et al., 1996) and controversies in the studies of PTSD (McNally, 2003) such as validity issues (King & King, 1991). Additionally, the topic of psychophysiology (the connection between mental and physical processes) is addressed as a leading issue regarding the study of veterans and PTSD (Pole, 2007).

As should be expected, articles focused on veterans published in disciplines and fields such as nursing, gerontology, and health policy present large percentages of references for the themes of health and caring with percentages ranging between 31% to 41%. History also presented a high percent of coded references for themes of war at 84% of the coded references.

The analytical results from themes that cut across disciplines indicate that disparate articles published in research journals produce themes that appear to hang together from multiple disciplines, but still revolve around the theme of veteran health, care, and services. Next, this article explores the results of the focused analysis from articles specifically published in *JVS*.

#### Themes from *JVS* Articles

True to its stated purpose, veterans' experiences are discussed prominently in the bulk of research articles published in *JVS* since its inception in 2016. The study of those experiences is explored in the main theme of "student veterans." See **Figure 10**.

By utilizing NVivo's word frequency query search, three topics emanate from the theme of student veterans as observed in *JVS* articles. They are student veteran transition experiences from military to civilian and becoming student veterans (Andrewartha & Harvey, 2019; Bodrog et al., 2018; Boettcher et al., 2017; Jenner, 2017; McMenamin, 2016; Mendez et al., 2018; Petri et al., 2016; Phillips, 2016; Pollak et al., 2019; Young, 2017), conditions surrounding student veteran academic success (Bagby et al., 2019; Blackwell-Starnes, 2018; Cipher et al., 2018; Flatt & Rhodes, 2019; Garrity, 2017; Hembrough, 2017; Hembrough et al., 2018; Spencer, 2016), and issues surrounding accommodations needed by student veterans (Flink, 2017; Kranke et al., 2017; Morris et al., 2019; Wild & Mahapatra, 2018).

When looking at the multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary nature of the articles published in *JVS*, it becomes clear that there is a mix of disciplines that contribute to the articles. See **Figure 11** for a list of disciplines identified as contributing to one or more research articles published by *JVS* during the observed time period.

While a great many disciplines have contributed to advancing research in veteran studies, one indicator of interdisciplinary contributions is multiple disciplines contributing to single articles. Interestingly, nearly one third of the research articles published in *JVS*, 28%, are from multiple authors, from separate disciplines, contributing to a single research article. See **Figure 12**.

Going deeper into the articles co-written by multiple authors from separate disciplines reveals that at least 46% of the articles presented the theme of students, 30% presented the theme of services, and 24% presented the theme of research. This indicates that the leading themes presented in research articles published by *JVS* are coming from an interdisciplinary effort of researchers from vastly different

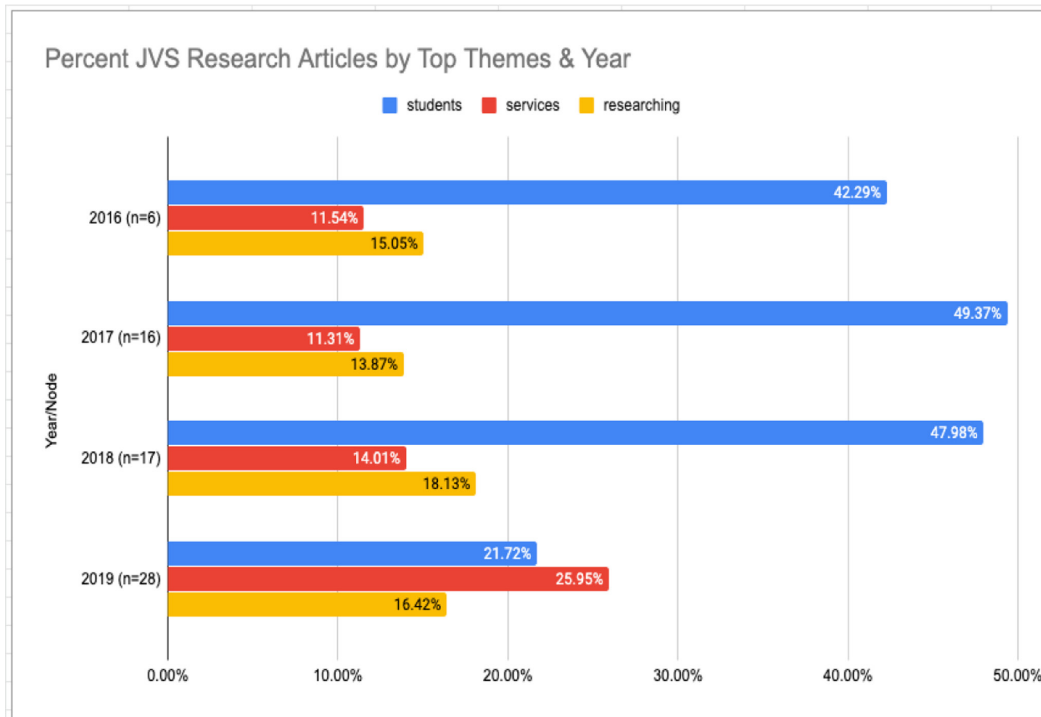


Figure 10: Percent JVS Research Articles of Top Themes.

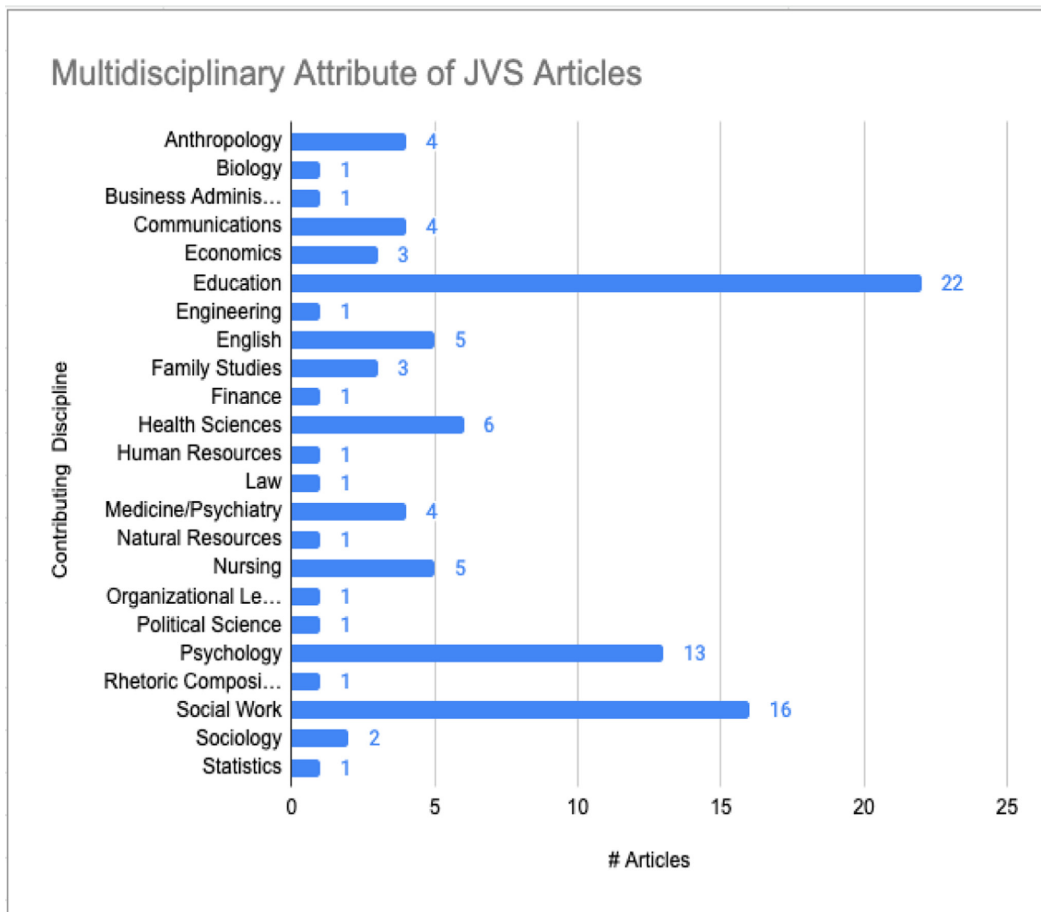
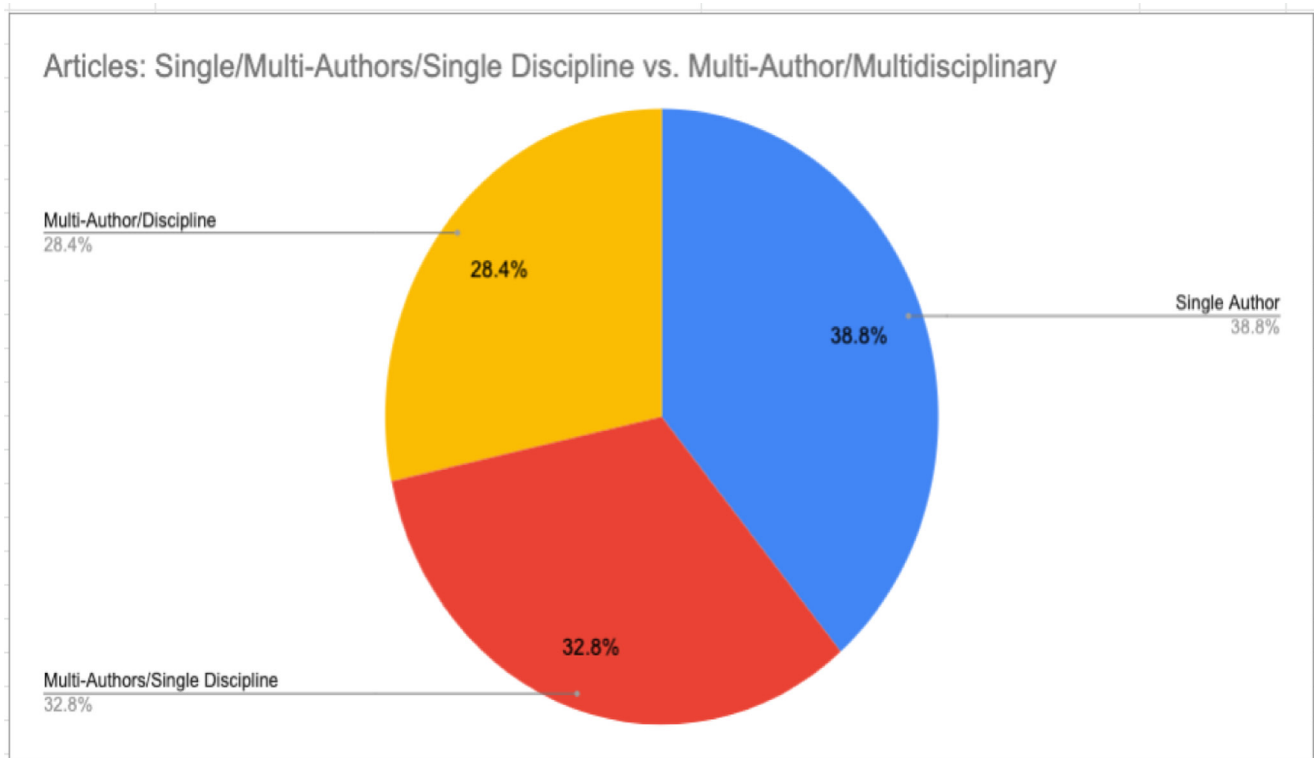


Figure 11: Multidisciplinary Attributes of JVS Articles.



**Figure 12:** Inter/Multidisciplinary Attributes of JVS Articles.

disciplines who are finding overlapping connections in their research on veterans.

While *JVS* has published articles on a wide variety of themes and topics that cover a diverse set of issues affecting veterans, it is clear that the majority of research articles it has published between 2016 and 2019 lean toward issues closely related to veteran experiences with higher education or social interactions affecting their transition from military service to civilian academic settings. Further, that research is emanating from a multi- and interdisciplinary effort of researchers from various academic discipline backgrounds.

### Discussion

A couple of general observable trends stemming from the review of the broad and narrow scope of the veteran research literature standout. The first issue is that many disciplines use veterans as a convenience sample, rather than focus squarely on the veterans themselves. For example, a study may have been about heart disease, or the impact of trauma on smoking among veterans, but in reading the research questions, focus, and findings it became clear that veterans could have been replaced with any other sample population and the article would still have achieved its research goals. This issue was especially prevalent in the psychological and health journals that were surveyed. This added an additional layer of complexity and limitation to identifying the true state of research on veterans.<sup>3</sup>

Another broad observation on articles published about veterans is that there is very little to no research on policies

affecting veterans. Aside from a few exceptions of articles reviewed for this literature (see Caress, 2001), most of the articles within and across disciplines and from *JVS* still focus on the physical, mental, or social experiences of veterans. This lack of investigation of policy not only exists at the federal level, but at the state and local levels as well.

Looking at the descriptive data from the literature review, it becomes clear that the methodology preference is quantitative among most disciplines, while remaining largely qualitative by authors published in the *Journal of Veteran Studies*. This is an advancement in some respects across disciplines from when Camacho and Attwood (2007) reviewed the veterans literature published in *Armed Forces and Society*, but it is still the case that qualitative research is the preferred method in the majority of articles published in *JVS*. Given the nascent nature of this field of studies, this may be acceptable since qualitative research tends to set the context for which quantitative research then can follow. Nonetheless, it would be interesting to see more quantitative and mixed-methods research published on veterans in *JVS*. Perhaps, an increased focus on veterans policy impacts will produce this type of methodological advancement in the literature.

When looking at the unit of analysis within and across disciplines as compared to *JVS*, it becomes clear that distinct analysis of demographic groups (e.g., race, ethnicity, and gender) is more prevalent in the general research articles within and across discipline than in *JVS*. This highlights an interesting research question not covered in any literature,

but highly relevant given the issue of race and gender in today's society. It would be interesting to see if there is a "veteran credit" that minority and women veterans receive from society in general as compared to similar settings in military communities specifically. In other words, do minorities and women veterans suffer lesser levels of discrimination than other non-veteran minorities and women in society in general? Do they suffer an equivalent amount of discrimination within military communities as their counterparts do in general society? Does the veteran identity and status provide some level of protection or exemption from the general types of discrimination that non-veteran minorities and women suffer in general?

When it comes to researching veterans by war era, similar patterns exist in articles from non-*JVS* articles that are presented in *JVS* articles. Post 9-11 veterans top the list of focused research, followed by Vietnam veterans. However, one major distinction between articles within and across disciplines compared to *JVS* articles, despite the lack of focus on WWII era veterans in *JVS*, is the large focus on foreign veterans in the articles from the intra and cross-cutting themes displayed in disciplines from non-*JVS* article samples. This observation highlights the focus on American veterans from *JVS* and shows that more research on comparative veteran experiences from other nations could be beneficial for a focused field of study in veterans research. Additionally, the Civil War-era veteran experience appears largely missing from the leading research in both *JVS* and non-*JVS* articles, despite there being a large trove of data both qualitative and quantitative.<sup>4</sup>

Looking at the descriptive data for publication year in percentages, both within and across disciplines, and from *JVS*, the research on veterans is late in blooming. This points to a gap and larger existential question existing in the literature: why a field for veterans studies at all? More specifically, why does the research interest exist, and why should there be a veterans field of study? One reason for this increase in research interest may be due to a growing population of veterans stemming from one of the longest running combat conflicts in U.S. history (Operation Enduring Freedom, AKA, the War on Terrorism, which is approaching its 20th year). However, the largest population of U.S. veterans existed shortly after WWII, with about 16.9 million veterans. In contrast, today about 7.1 million veterans of the Gulf-era wars represent the largest cohort of veterans. When one observes the amount of research (in terms of peer-reviewed articles) generated about the veterans of the "greatest generation" from WWII, within and across journal articles, the total amounts to 27% of all publications and there are no articles focused on WWII veterans in *JVS* research articles. This is a much smaller research effort compared to the volumes of research done on Gulf War and later era veterans, which come from a much shorter time span between the start of the modern Gulf wars to today. Compared to the WWII era, there are fewer Gulf war veterans, with less impact on the U.S. civilian population, and a

smaller proportion of the population who have served in the military. Despite this downward trend in veteran population and impact on the citizenry, research on veterans is growing exponentially. Why? What is driving it, and can it be sustained?

The leading theme trending within and across disciplines, the theme of health, may be explained by the fact that journal publications chosen for investigation come from disciplines selected by program developers who created programs of study on veterans to assist veterans. In this sense, research on veterans is more applied research than pure research. Nonetheless, this theme is prevalent even in disciplines that are not traditionally focused on the health of its subjects, such as criminal justice. This gives the misleading impression both within and across disciplines of the existence of the "wounded hero" myth or "broken veteran" syndrome and tends to minimize the extreme complexity and variety of veteran experiences. It highlights the need for more research on veterans as independent variables, not dependent variables. For example, instead of focusing so much on what physical and mental health issues they have and how to treat them, or what psychological support they need, future research could uncover what contributions and impacts veterans are having on their communities, companies, and society in general. Other areas should be researched as well, and the *Journal of Veteran Studies* could be the leading outlet for this breaking research.

Ostensibly, *JVS* is positioned to be the leading flagship of a new field of study in veteran research. Despite the focus on student veterans emanating from the majority of research articles published by *JVS*, the journal stands to be the reservoir of knowledge on a whole realm of other issues important to this field of study. For example, the Department of Veterans Affairs has identified 5 areas it sees as critical to veterans studies and that it would like to see turned into research agendas to help it develop and implement veteran policies. Those areas are re-integration, veterans families and children, public-private partnerships, veterans benefits, and federal compensation (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016). These are only recommended areas of study and not mutually exclusive.

Another source of research overlooked by social scientists is the fields and disciplines of the humanities. The research on veterans from this area is highly developed, in terms of deliberately trying to contribute to veterans studies as an area of focus. Research topics from this area could lead to new areas of interest for the social sciences that study policy. In fact, if social science researchers draw from the rich data presented in the humanities research literature, this would further increase the interdisciplinary nature of veterans studies as it solidifies into a legitimate field of study.

## Conclusion

This review has barely scratched the surface of this new area of study and has raised more questions than it

answers. It remains a work-in-progress with several directions to explore. Given that the Department of Veterans Affairs is the second largest organization in the government, with over 300,000 staff members, it presents to scholars a rich field of research and the potential to apply interdisciplinary efforts. While this paper has presented the current state of the field of veterans studies in terms of where the field is coming from and where it could likely go in the future, it also offers normative, empirical, and interdisciplinary questions. What are the existential reasons for a veterans field of study? Should it exist at all? If so, how is it being studied now, and how should it be studied in the future? What are the opportunities for interdisciplinary and cross disciplinary collaborations among researchers in order to move this field along? Before becoming a legitimate and standalone field of study, like other area studies, broader normative, empirical, and interdisciplinary questions need to be answered.

Perhaps, future research contributions will provide a broader understanding of the veteran experience if, in addition to focusing on the psychological and mental requirements of veterans in transition settings, it also includes more research on the impact of veterans on society based on their experiences. Nonetheless, the growing interest across disciplines, within the government and civilian academia is lending an impetus towards the creation of this new field of study. It is incumbent upon veteran studies scholars to grasp fully this initiative and begin building the broad base of knowledge necessary to take full advantage of what this field of study can offer to society.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Search was conducted using the California State University (CSU) AcademicOneSearch library database, which searches all CSU research databases and all worldwide search engines such as EBSCOhost, Wiley Online Library, PubMed, Springer Link, NCBI, ProQuest, PsychiatryOnline, and Google Scholar.
- <sup>2</sup> 2020 *JVS* articles were not used since the year was not complete when this study concluded.
- <sup>3</sup> To put this issue into perspective, this paper used 322 articles to conduct the review of veteran studies literature. However, the total number of articles initially identified was 598.
- <sup>4</sup> Comment based on a phone conversation with Bruce Pencek, founding co-organizer of interdisciplinary the Veterans in Society Conference series at Virginia Tech, May 4, 2018.

## Competing Interests

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