



# The Lived Experience of Veteran and Military Nursing Majors Transitioning to College

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## ABSTRACT

A needs assessment was conducted with a group of veteran and military students enrolled in prerequisite general education courses for a bachelor's degree in nursing. This qualitative study sought to explore the question: What is the lived experience of veteran and military nursing majors transitioning to college? Using a phenomenological approach, we found three overarching themes: Interactions on Campus, Barriers to Success, and Facilitators of Success. Within these themes, nine subthemes emerged reflecting participants' positive and negative transition experiences. The veteran and military students in this study described challenges relating to younger civilian students, navigating college processes and procedures, developing their own structure and routine, having good study skills, commuting to campus, maintaining work obligations, and having a heightened awareness of their surroundings on campus. Deployment was described as a challenge for military students. Participants described financial benefits received through the military, transference of skills learned in the military to college, having supportive faculty, access to veteran-centered services and counselors, and forming connections with other veterans and military students as factors contributing to success in college. Insights from this study may be helpful to nursing and other higher-education faculty and staff in supporting veteran and military students transitioning to college. Findings are consistent with other studies, contributing to the collective body of knowledge related to the phenomenon of veteran and military students transitioning from military service to college.

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Nurses comprise the largest group of health care professionals in the United States (US), but it is a profession with a growing shortage. According to the National Center for Health Workforce Analysis (2022), it is anticipated that in 2025, there will be a shortage of 78,610 full-time equivalent (FTE) registered nurses (RNs), and a shortage of 63,720 FTE RNs in 2030. Many of the values and skills service members learn in the US Military, such as a strong work ethic, discipline, and teamwork, are transferrable to a career in nursing (Cox, 2019). Over the coming years, 1 million service members are expected to leave the military (Pullis et al., 2021). Many of these exiting service members will enroll in college, and one potential career choice is nursing.

Veterans transitioning to college frequently face a unique set of difficulties from non-veteran students and faculty (Bryant, 2021), and those who choose to pursue a nursing degree will be educated in civilian nursing programs, most likely by non-veteran nursing faculty. Few academics are aware of challenges student veterans may face when transferring from the military to college (Cox, 2019), and many civilian nursing faculty members also lack this knowledge (Elliott et al., 2021).

In a mixed-methodology study of nursing faculty teaching student veterans, Chargualaf et al. (2023) found faculty with prior military service had a statistically significant difference in knowledge to teach student veterans; their awareness of military and veteran culture and identifying student veteran needs made a difference, when compared to faculty without military experience. Seventy-eight percent of the nursing faculty in the study had never served in the military, and participants commented on the need for faculty training programs on how to best teach and support student veterans. Cox et al. (2021) also reported that nursing faculty need training on how to teach and support student veterans advocating for schools of nursing to maintain a single point of contact for student veterans.

Dyar (2019) conducted a scoping review of the literature to ascertain what is known about military and veteran students in higher education with the purpose of informing nursing faculty of the findings. Dyar found military and veteran students have skills learned through military service that can be helpful in an academic setting including maturity, perspective, and a strong sense of self-efficacy. However, military and veteran students also face challenges in the academic setting, including administrative and support barriers, personal struggles, and difficulty forming relationships with fellow students. Dyar concluded gaining knowledge of the strengths and barriers faced by veteran and military students could benefit nursing faculty in developing strategies to support these students.

There are a number of research studies focused on the experiences of veterans and military service members

transitioning to college. However, the literature related to veteran and military students who are also nursing majors, and specifically literature focused on the experience of transitioning to college from military service for nursing majors, is limited. In reviewing the literature, we began to wonder if the lived experiences of veterans and military students who were nursing majors might differ in some way from the reported lived experiences of non-nursing majors transitioning from military service to college.

## BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

This study grew out of a need to better understand the challenges experienced by nursing majors transitioning from military service, and those currently serving in the military, who were attending a regional 4-year public university. The university was the recipient of a Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Nurse Education, Practice, Quality and Retention (NPQR)—Veteran Nurses in Primary Care (VNPC) Training Program Grant. It is important to note this research was not conducted as part of, or funded by the HRSA NPQR-VNPC grant, as the VNPC training program focused primarily on providing clinical training opportunities to veteran and military nursing students in primary care settings. However, as the grant project was implemented, staff noted a number of student veteran and military nursing majors attending the university were not progressing into the clinical component of the nursing curriculum: the last 2-years of a 4-year program. This study was part of an overall needs assessment of veteran and military nursing majors enrolled in prerequisite general education courses.

Our purpose was to explore the research questions: What is the lived experience of veteran and military nursing majors transitioning to college? Our goal was to implement a collaborative inquiry process and gain insight into the needs and challenges of these students, and then develop strategies and interventions to better support them in successfully articulating into the clinical component of the nursing curriculum and ultimately graduating with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree.

As advocated by Hunnicutt (2022), the intention was not to conduct research “on” these veteran and military nursing majors, but rather conduct research “with” these individuals. The time participants contributed to being interviewed and comparing the exhaustive and fundamental descriptions generated from the data with their own experiences is greatly valued, and this research would not have been possible without their active engagement. It is hoped the insights and understanding gained from this study will be useful to faculty and staff

in supporting veteran and military students (V/MS) as they transition from military to civilian college life, and in easing challenges they may face throughout their college journey.

## METHODS

### STUDY DESIGN

This research utilized a qualitative phenomenology design. Phenomenology is focused on understanding the essence of people's lived experience of a phenomenon. According to Polit and Beck (2022), phenomenological researchers must bracket, or hold at abeyance, their preconceived beliefs and opinions about the phenomenon. Researchers remain open to the meanings attributed to the phenomenon by the participants who have experienced it, and then analyze these meanings through a defined process to derive at the essence or essential meanings of the phenomenon. The defined process selected for this research study was based on the qualitative method advanced by Colaizzi (1973).

### PARTICIPANTS

Participation was limited to students who were veterans or currently serving in the military through the Reserves or National Guard, had declared nursing as their major, and were enrolled in prerequisite general education courses required in the first or second year of a 4-year nursing curriculum. A total of 9 interviews were conducted before the researchers felt data saturation was reached. Of the 9 participants interviewed, 5 identified as male and 4 identified as female. The age of the participants interviewed ranged from 19 to 35, with an average age of 25-years old.

The research study was approved in advance by Southeastern Louisiana University's Institutional Review Board. Before any data were collected each participant was given an assent form to sign, which explained the purpose of the study, a description of the procedures that would be followed, and measures that would be taken to maintain confidentiality. The assent form indicated participation was voluntary, and participants could withdraw from the study at any time without reprisal. Once a participant signed the assent form, they self-selected a fictitious name, and that name was used during the interview and in all written transcripts.

### DATA COLLECTION

Data were collected through semistructured interviews consisting of the two demographic questions related to gender and age, and five guiding questions. Semistructured interview questions one and two were primarily included as ice-breakers; however, significant statements were generated from the two questions and included as part of the data analysis. Since transitioning from military service

to college represents a significant change, the remaining three semistructured interview questions were developed based on Kurt Lewin's Change Model (Burnes, 2020). These three questions sought to ascertain each participant's lived experience of adapting to and being successful in college in terms of driving forces, or facilitators, and restraining forces, or barriers, and were intentionally asked in a very broad and open-ended manner, to allow participants to answer with minimal influence or prompting. The guiding questions included the following:

1. Tell me about your background and your military service?
2. What are your long-term educational goals?
3. What do you believe helps facilitate veteran and military students adapting to college?
4. What do you believe helps facilitate veteran and military students being successful in college?
5. What do you believe are barriers for veteran and military students adapting to or being successful in college?

For consistency, all interviews were conducted by researcher RW. Digital audio recordings were made of each interview using Otter™ transcription software, and a written verbatim transcript of each interview was generated. The researcher conducting the interviews reviewed the written transcripts for accuracy.

### DATA ANALYSIS AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

Data were analyzed using the method introduced by Colaizzi (1973) in a phenomenological study of learning. Colaizzi's method has since been replicated by numerous phenomenological researchers, and Shosha (2012), described the seven steps of the Colaizzi method as follows:

1. Each transcript should be read and re-read in order to obtain a general sense about the whole content.
2. For each transcript, significant statements that pertain to the phenomenon under study should be extracted.
3. Meanings should be formulated from these significant statements.
4. The formulated meanings should be sorted into categories, clusters of themes, and themes.
5. The findings of the study should be integrated into an exhaustive description of the phenomenon under study.
6. The fundamental structure of the phenomenon should be described.
7. Finally, validation of the findings should be sought from the research participants to compare the researcher's descriptive results with their experiences. (p. 33)

To strengthen credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the research, investigator triangulation was utilized in the data-analysis process. Each of the researchers (authors) independently conducted an analysis of the data, and then collaborated to complete the final analysis. The purpose of utilizing an investigator triangulation technique in qualitative studies is to reduce each individual researcher's biases and idiosyncrasies through collaborative data interpretation (Polit & Beck, 2022).

## RESULTS

### THEMES AND SUBTHEMES

Following the Colaizzi (1973) method of data analysis, we first obtained a general sense about the content as a whole by reading and re-reading each transcript. This was followed by identification of significant statements within each transcript relative to the phenomenon under investigation. We identified a total of 238 significant statements. These significant statement and phrases were extracted from the interview transcripts, analyzed for similarity in content and meaning, and then sorted into groups. From these groupings, formulated meanings were developed. A total of 93 formulated meanings were developed. Formulated meanings were then analyzed and grouped into clusters based on similarities. These clusters were further analyzed and coded as themes and subthemes. Three overarching themes, and 9 subthemes, emerged from the data. Table 1 (below) shows the overarching themes and the related subthemes.

### EXHAUSTIVE DESCRIPTION

Following the Colaizzi (1973) method of data analysis, themes, and subthemes derived from the formulated meanings were narratively expanded to create an exhaustive description of the phenomenon under study. This exhaustive description captures a comprehensive representation of the collective lived experiences of all

the study participants. The authors have included some selected direct quotes from study participants (i.e., significant statements) to better illustrate how formulated meanings and the resulting exhaustive description were derived. The exhaustive description for participants in this study, arranged by themes and subthemes, is as follows.

### Interactions on Campus

#### *Socialization on Campus*

V/MS may feel awkward when first coming to college and may not have social skills to interact in the civilian world. V/MS may feel they have nothing in common with their civilian peers in college. V/MS may be older than their civilian college peers, and may not share the same interests. Younger civilian students may often be on their phones using social media, or may want to discuss their personal opinions and political views. V/MS may not be comfortable using social media or engaging in these types of conversations. For example, one participant described this by saying, "I have serious issues communicating with 18-year-olds, like the generation gap; they're always on their phones, constantly." The lack of having things in common with other college students may be a barrier to V/MS making friends on campus. This may lead V/MS to feel they are isolated and alone on campus. As a result of difficulties in making friends and being socially isolated, V/MS may develop feelings of low self-worth. For example, one participant described this by saying, "My feelings of self-worth, like the first semester, were very low, because I didn't have any friends here on campus." Another participant described feeling like a "Lone wolf" in reference to developing relationships on campus.

V/MS have a need to connect with other like-minded individuals on campus and may seek out other V/MS. They feel an automatic connection with, and have things in common with other V/MS. When meeting other V/MS, they can communicate with one another and relate to one another's background. For example, one participant described this by saying, "I automatically have that connection with them, and I automatically know some of the things that they've been through, and I have something to talk to them about." However, they acknowledge only seeking out friendships with other V/MS can become a barrier to adapting to college. V/MS must put forth effort to develop friendships at college, both with civilian students and other V/MS. Developing relationships with others on campus may become easier for V/MS with time. Like most college students, V/MS must find a balance between school and their social life and activities.

#### *Environmental Challenges on Campus*

When on campus V/MS are constantly aware of their surroundings. They are always on alert and have a

OVERARCHING THEMES	RELATED SUBTHEMES
Interactions on campus	Socialization on campus Environmental challenges Navigating college systems
Barriers to success	Military obligations Personal barriers
Facilitators of success	Benefits of support services Faculty roles Student roles Benefits of military service

**Table 1** Overarching Themes and Related Subthemes.

heightened sense of awareness due to their military training. This heightened awareness of surroundings may be more of a focus for V/MS who have recently been deployed or experienced combat.

When outdoors on campus, V/MS may be uncomfortable in certain spaces, such as open areas or events where there are large crowds. These types of outdoor spaces may provoke anxiety for V/MS, and they may choose to avoid these environmental settings. For example, one participant described this by saying, “And so, a lot of places here [on campus], there’s too many open spaces. It’s very nerve racking; a lot of anxiety.”

When indoors on campus, V/MS may continue to have a heightened awareness of their environment and engage in behaviors civilians do not understand or recognize. V/MS may position themselves in a room where they can see the door. V/MS may not walk between tables, but instead may walk the perimeter of a room. During classes, this heightened environmental awareness may be a distraction and barrier for V/MS, preventing them from fully focusing on class instruction. For example, one participant described this by saying,

You can pick up a military person a mile away. They’re going to be somewhere where they can see the door. [We’re] going to be somewhere where, if something happens or could happen, is always on our mind. So, we’re going to be like, if someone comes to that door, how are we going to react?

### ***Navigating College Systems***

V/MS may need instructions on institutional procedures and processes, and how to handle certain situations in college. The military is structured, and college may feel like a chaotic environment for V/MS. College faculty and staff should not assume V/MS understand something because of their military service. V/MS may need procedural information to facilitate their transition to college and help them understand what to do. For example, one participant described this by saying, “Explaining some of the simpler things like, oh, you have to get advised before you can schedule classes...I guess [we] might have a little trouble adjusting to kind of like the procedural stuff.”

### **Barriers to Success**

#### ***Military Obligations and Deployment Challenges***

Military service itself may be a barrier or challenge to college, especially if a military student (MS) is deployed during enrollment in classes. In the military, the job or occupation of a student may be unrelated to their degree major, and they must try to keep up with both roles. When activated, a MS may be unable to remotely access classes and schoolwork. They may not have access to the internet,

or an environment in which to study and focus on school work. As a result, they may feel their only option is to drop classes if they can’t keep up.

A MS may feel their faculty and fellow students expect them to just figure out missed class content and work on their own. A MS benefits from faculty who are willing use technology to offer classes remotely, or record lectures, and offer flexibility with assignment due dates. For example, one participant described this by saying,

[During a deployment] I missed a ton of school, and each of the teachers found ways to actually do like...online learning...or, Google Meet...and record the lecture. In general, with that kind of stuff they helped out a lot. They were really lenient with [assignment due] dates where I had to miss.

A MS who is deployed benefits from courses that have an online option. It is helpful if a college has a campus-wide policy allowing a deployed MS to make up missed work.

Another barrier for a MS who is deployed occurs when they return home from deployment. A MS may be tempted to spend time catching up with family and friends, and making up for time and events they missed while deployed. This desire to socialize with family and friends can be a barrier for a MS who is trying to focus on and complete school work after deployment.

#### ***Personal Barriers to College Success***

Not having a structured routine in college could be a personal barrier for some V/MS. The military is very structured, but in the civilian world, V/MS must establish their own structure and routine. V/MS may lack organizational skills related to college. For example, one participant described this by saying,

We’re so used to a structure, like you got to be here, got to wear this, you got to eat this, you got to talk to these people, you know, wake up at this time. That kind of stuff. But, if we have a structure, like a planner or some way to just organize everything... that helps.

V/MS may also lack study skills needed for success in college. For example, one participant described this by saying,

I had no study habits. I was like, well, if I can pass in high school without needing to pay attention to class, why do I need to go in college whenever my teachers don’t really require it? It was basically no discipline for that.



In addition, V/MS may be working and commuting while attending school. All of these may become barriers to success in college for V/MS. For example, one participant described this by saying, “It was hard for me to adjust. I don’t know if it was because I was working and I was doing school, and, I was commuting too, so that could have been why it was so difficult.”

## **Facilitators of Success**

### ***Benefits of Support Services***

Having access to a dedicated veteran and military student support services office on campus is very helpful to V/MS transitioning to college. For example, one participant described this by saying, “The [university’s] Office of Veterans Affairs definitely helps a lot in that they generally, from my experience, sent me all of the information that I ever needed to know.” Having access to dedicated counselors and advisors for V/MS, and being oriented to college by other students with military service, are helpful to students making the transition. Allowing V/MS to have priority registration in advance of other students is beneficial.

V/MS prefer one-on-one advising and orientation rather than being part of a large group. However, being in a freshman success courses with other V/MS is helpful, and in general, having other V/MS in a class is beneficial. This facilitates V/MS getting to know one another and feel connected as a peer group. It also helps facilitate formation of study groups and provides peer motivation for success.

V/MS benefit from access to organized social activities outside of classes with other V/MS. These activities provide opportunities for V/MS to meet one another, form connections, and helps V/MS adapt to college. For example, one participant described this by saying, “Just having a peer group... like veteran groups, like we have here, or just social functions...just finding, you know, some people that are in your same classes.”

### ***Faculty Roles***

Communication with faculty is important, and helps facilitate V/MS adapting to college. It is important for faculty to understand V/MS may prefer in person interactions. V/MS may need to see someone face-to-face in order to “read” the person. Lack of face-to-face contact with faculty, such as telephone and/or email communications, may be a barrier for V/MS. For example, one participant described this by saying,

We need to see people. We need to read people. We really need that contact because that’s how we’re trained. We’re trained to look at a person and read them and you can’t do that over a phone or email

or text message. So, I think that’s been my biggest struggle is not being able to reach out and physically talk to people.

V/MS may benefit from clear, concise directives from faculty. V/MS may prefer written instructions instead of verbal, and may prefer instructions in a sequential, step-by-step format. For example, one participant described this by saying, “If we’re not given a clear directive, then... you may not get what you want, but you’re going to get something.” In addition, MS who are deployed benefit from faculty who are also flexible.

### ***Veteran/Military Student Roles***

V/MS must have a desire to do well in school if they wish to succeed. V/MS need self-motivation and must make school their priority. To achieve success in school, V/MS need to take initiative, develop a routine, set aside time to study, and balance school, work, family and social commitments.

V/MS can apply skills learned in the military to college, especially being disciplined and organized. For example, one participant described this by saying, “The military I feel like helped me learn how to have discipline, how to have organization, how to deal with a high stress environment.” V/MS need to be goal-oriented, and make sure everything is “in-line.” Having a schedule and structure in college is beneficial to V/MS, the use of a planner to stay organized is helpful. Being able to multitask is helpful for V/MS.

### ***Benefits of Military Service***

V/MS can transfer experiences gained in the military to college, and these experiences can help them be successful. In the service, V/MS learn how to handle stress, adapt to changes, be flexible, and how to roll with deviations in plans. V/MS also develop confidence in the military. All of these skills can benefit V/MS in learning how to balance work, family, and school. For example, one participant described this by saying,

So, taking a lot of classes, working, and worrying about bills, and balancing work, family, and school life on top of it. So, I think, honestly, it [military service] just helped shape me to actually be able to go into college and say, hey, I can do this.

V/MS benefit from the financial support received through military service. V/MS students attending college are not weighed down by student loans like some civilian students. V/MS believe it is important for civilians to know military service is a good option for financing education, and more college students should consider military service for the education assistance and health care benefits.

## FUNDAMENTAL STRUCTURE

Based on the Colaizzi (1973) method, the exhaustive description was then reduced to the essence or fundamental structure of the phenomenon for the participants in this study. Therefore, for the participants in this study, the fundamental structure for the research question, “What is the lived experience of veteran and military nursing majors transitioning to college,” is defined as: V/MS may have challenges relating to younger civilian students, a heightened awareness of their surroundings on campus, knowing how to navigate college processes and procedures, forming their own structure and routine, study skills, commuting to campus, work obligations, and for MS, deployment. V/MS benefit from financial support received through the military, transference of skills learned in the military to college, having supportive faculty, access to veteran-centered services and counselors, and forming connections with other V/MS.

Based on this fundamental structure, and compared to data reported in the extant literature, the conclusion of this research is the lived experience of veteran and military nursing majors interviewed for this study is similar to that of other V/MS transitioning to college. The participants in this study reported no unique or significant lived experiences that were different when compared to other V/MS transitioning to college, regardless of major. The discussion section compares the findings from the participants in this study with similar findings previously reported in the literature.

## DISCUSSION

The participants in this study expressed that one of the challenges in transitioning to college was the lack of social engagement, and that they often felt they had little in common with their younger civilian peers. This challenge of social engagement may result in social isolation and feelings of low self-worth. This finding is consistent with findings of other researchers who have reported veteran and military students may struggle with relating to and forming connections with civilian peers and may experience feelings of social isolation or alienation (Cox, 2019; Mahoney et al., 2023; McNeil et al., 2020).

The participants in this study spoke about the need to connect with other V/MS. When engaged with other V/MS, the participants felt there was a connection and understanding. This finding is consistent with reports in the literature that describe veterans transitioning to college as having feelings of living in two separate worlds, or “two universes brushing together” (Mahoney et al., 2023, p. 183), their deployment or military reality and their civilian reality. Only other V/MS can understand and relate to the realities of their military

lives and experiences. Connecting V/MS with one another during the transition to college could be beneficial. This is similar to the findings of Hill and Wynn (2020) who reported the benefits of connecting veteran students with other veteran students through a peer mentoring program and providing veteran-to-veteran support during the transition to college, and with retention and graduation.

The participants in this study reported having a heightened sense of alertness regarding their surroundings when on campus, and this increased environmental awareness can be a distraction in class. Being in outdoor areas with open spaces or in large groups may also provoke anxiety. Mahoney et al. (2023) reported veterans transitioning to college may experience discomfort in certain spaces such as large classrooms or crowds, and avoidance of such spaces may lead to isolation, contradicting the military cultural values of group belonging. According to Mahoney et al., this may contribute to feelings of low self-esteem, emotional numbing, and depression.

The participants in this study expressed difficulty in understanding college procedures and processes. They believed others on campus assume they should know what to do and how to navigate college systems. Compared to the highly structured environment and processes in the military, participants in this study described college as feeling unorganized or chaotic. This is similar to findings reported by Patterson et al. (2019a), who also found veteran students described college as being chaotic. McNeil et al. (2020), report the defined structure of the military is absent and V/MS on campus must learn to navigate university systems independently. Other researchers have reported V/MS may not feel comfortable asking for assistance, do not know where to seek assistance, and may feel they are lost in the system (Prasad et al., 2020; Shellenbarger & Decker, 2019).

Military obligations and deployment for students serving in the Reserves or National Guard were considered barriers to academic success by the participants in this study. Faculty who are flexible in terms of class content delivery and assignment due dates were viewed as supportive and beneficial. Johnson and Appel (2020), reported deployment and the inability to take online courses are two barriers that delay degree completion for military-connected students. Even if course content is offered online, deployed military students may not be able to access it due to connectivity and/or security issues.

Participants in this study described the military as being very structured, and in the civilian world of college they struggled with developing their own routines and structure. They described the military as being highly organized, and some veteran and military students believed they lacked their own personal organizational skills. This finding is similar to Patterson et al. (2019a), who reported veteran students spoke

about the ease of being in the military because it was a highly structured environment, but also felt a lack of preparation to figure things out on their own in the civilian world.

In addition to struggling with the inability to make their own decisions about routines and structure, the V/MS in this study reported other personal barriers to their success in college such as not having good study skills, not attending class, having to work, and time lost to commuting. These findings are consistent with reports in the literature that veteran and military students may lack effective study skills (Ackerman et al., 2009), struggle with balancing work and school commitments (Cox, 2019; Johnson & Appel, 2020), and use valuable time commuting to campus (Johnson & Appel, 2020).

The participants in this study believed having access to dedicated V/MS support services was beneficial in helping V/MS succeed in college. A dedicated center with counselors and staff to provide one-on-one help to students, and opportunities to connect socially with other V/MS at a dedicated center, were viewed as most helpful. This finding is similar to numerous reports in the literature that having support staff and counselors working in a dedicated office for V/MS is a best practice for colleges and universities in supporting V/MS success (Ackerman et al., 2009; Cox, 2019; Dyar & Brown, 2019; Hill & Wynn, 2020; Mahoney et al., 2023; McNeil et al., 2020).

For the participants in this study, having an opportunity to interact face-to-face with a faculty member, and receiving clear and concise instructions from a faculty member are viewed as helpful to V/MS. This finding is similar to the finding reported by Prasad et al. (2020), that veteran students felt a lack of guidance in the college setting compared to clear instructions received in the military. Patterson et al. (2019b) reported veteran students spoke about learning how to gauge people and read a room while in the military, illustrating why V/MS may be more comfortable with face-to-face interactions. Pullis et al. (2021), reported supportive teachers and a welcoming environment are crucial to the success of student veterans.

The participants in this study recognized the importance of taking ownership of their education, and spoke about the need to be disciplined and organized. They also spoke of the need to be flexible and adaptable. Participants reported all of these were skills they had learned in the military and believed these skills were transferable to their role as a college student. This finding is similar to other studies that also have documented the beneficial transference of skills learned in the military to the academic setting, including discipline, work ethic, adaptability and a drive to succeed (Cox, 2019; Mahoney et al. 2023; Patterson et al., 2019a; Prasad et al., 2020).

## LIMITATIONS

The findings of this study are based on the lived experiences of 9 V/MS attending one university, and are not generalizable beyond this group of participants. In this study, both veterans and students still engaged in military service (either in the Reserves or National Guard) were interviewed. Distinctions were not made between the two groups, and the voices of all participants were considered collectively in the analysis. If the study had consisted of only veterans, or of only students currently engaged in military service, the results may have been different. This study did not include representatives from each branch of the military, and the lived experience of students transitioning to college from one branch of the military may be different from the experiences of veterans transitioning from another branch. Limited demographic data were collected in this study, confined to gender identity and age, and no data on race were collected. The lived experiences of transitioning to college may be different for veterans from different racial or ethnic backgrounds. It must also be noted that not all participants responded to member check inquiries, and therefore, the final step of the Colaizzi (1973) method to validate the experiences of the participants with the researcher's descriptive results was not fully completed with all participants.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study offer a foundation from which to build and contribute to the expanding body of knowledge exploring the transition of V/MS to college. Areas suggested for further research consideration include studying the perceptions of V/MS members regarding careers in the nursing profession. What are the perceived positive and negative factors that may potentially attract or hinder someone with military service from pursuing nursing as a career choice? For V/MS pursuing studies in nursing, future research may focus on how to best support students in being successful. Studies examining the retention and graduation rates of such students would be valuable, as well as studies that look at support services available to V/MS nursing majors, and their success rates on national licensure examinations. Finally, considering that numerous qualitative research studies have now been conducted on the lived experiences of V/MS transitioning to college, there is a need for a qualitative meta-analysis to begin synthesizing the findings of the studies investigating this specific phenomenon.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.



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