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FALLING THROUGH THE CRACKS: A SCREENING ASSESSMENT FOR STUDENT VETERANS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

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by

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B.A., Southern Illinois University, 2002

A Research Paper Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Masters of Science.

> Department of Rehabilitation Counseling Southern Illinois University Carbondale December, 2011

RESEARCH PAPER APPROVAL

FALLING THROUGH THE CRACKS: A SCREENING ASSESSMENT FOR STUDENT VETERANS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

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Charles G. Hillesheim

A Research Paper Submitted in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Science

in the field of Rehabilitation Counseling

Approved by:

Thomas D. Upton, Ph.D., Chair

Graduate School Southern Illinois University Carbondale July 25, 2011

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TITLE: FALLING THROUGH THE CRACKS: A SCREENING ASSESSMENT FOR STUDENT VETERANS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Thomas Upton

This paper examines historical context of military intelligence assessment, post secondary challenges of student veterans, student veterans with a learning disability and campus support for veterans with learning disabilities and to facilitate an intervention by using a C-SIP style screener survey which can be a useful tool for a Rehabilitation Counselor. Facilitating student veteran success is tantamount in the face of a burgeoning student veteran population which faces academic challenges unique to their group.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Anyone who joins the military at the present day has the opportunity to go to college on the G. I. Bill. Since 2001, according to the Rand Report (2008), approximately 1.6 million U.S. troops have deployed as part of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF, Afghanistan) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF, Iraq) and as in previous wars since World War II, service men and women will have incentive to attend college with updated education legislation providing veterans money to attend college.

Many men and women join the military for the opportunity to attend college. Some veterans may have a Learning Disability (LD) and they may or may not realize it. The Military intelligence testing today is largely there to classify personnel for jobs but also can potentially screen out personnel who may have problems in the academic nature i.e. reading and mathematics. Some who join the military however are still able to make it in the military in spite of having a Learning Disability.

This paper looks at the topic of veteran preparation; the idea that some veterans are not ready or prepared for college due either to lack of education, amount of time passed since last academic exercise, or an undiagnosed learning disability.

Historical Background

During the course of the First World War, psychologists zealous for trying new scientific methods began the development of intelligence testing with the

development of the Army's alpha and beta intelligence tests (Kevles, 1968). Intelligence testing did not come about from within the Army as if the organization decided to categorize its personnel for the sake of efficiency. Rather it was due to science and the beliefs of a scientist who felt that the Army and the nation could benefit by helping "men to find their place in society on the basis of their scientifically determined abilities" (Kevles, 1968, 566). The Army grudgingly participated and the alpha test (for people who could read) and the beta (for people who could not read) (Kevles, 1968). Testing of military personnel before World War I was nonexistent since men mostly were promoted due to merit, time-in-rate or the aspect of on the job training; if a person was able do a particular job that was all that mattered to the military. After the advent of testing younger officers became convinced of the practical usage of testing as a means for classifying men, thus, recruiting officers were the first to use testing a regular basis –the beginning of recruit aptitude tests was born (Kevles, 1968). At the end of the First World War "some 1.5 million recruits" were tested and classified giving way to the "Army General Classification Test (AGCT) and the Navy General Classification Test (NGCT)" which were both used during World War II (ASVAB.com). During the 1950s the single test, used by all services, was the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT) which was used until 1972. By 1968 the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery was introduced and in use by all services by 1975 (ASVAB.com).

The use of these tests helped the military services to place individuals in the best positions for which their test scores supported ability for a particular position. That was the idea from the inception of the first military intelligence tests, although the military uses the tests as a means for removing individuals as well, notwithstanding the original intent. Today however, the ASVAB is used by the Department of Defense as a means to screen out candidates for the military based on low assessment scores Hess, Kennedy, Hardin, and Kupke (2010). The department of defense has a threshold limit for people who want to join the military. That limit has not always been constant and at times has been lowered as it was in the 1970's when the military went to an all volunteer force (Riggan, 1982). Thus the military from time to time can raise or lower its threshold depending on need of personnel which can affect the person who has an academic processing problem such as an LD.

Purpose/Objectives:

The purpose of this study is to develop a screening instrument for veterans that may have a learning disability and are pursuing postsecondary education following their national military service. This assessment is needed so veterans and postsecondary institutions can make use of the GI funding available.

This study and the development of a Military Veteran College Screener illuminates the need for further research of student-veterans and to point out a tool that can be used to help returning veterans who want to attend college. A survey of student-veterans at Southern Illinois University Carbondale highlights the potential for identifying educational deficits setting a platform for further research into student veteran need and accommodation.

Definition of Terms

Disability Support Services (DSS) - Organization on college or university campuses that provide special support for persons with disabilities. To partake of the services, disability must be documented.

Learning Disability (LD)- as defined by the DSM-IV-TR, are when individual achievement on subjects such as reading, writing, and arithmetic are considerably lower than what should be reflected by a person's age, schooling or level of intelligence.

Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) - U.S. Military Theater of operations in Afghanistan.

Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) - U.S. Military Theater of operations in Iraq.

Operation New Dawn (OND) - Subsequent U.S. Military operations post

OEF/OIF.

Student Veteran – A U.S. Military Veteran who attends postsecondary education.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There has been a continuous interaction between the U. S. military and higher education since the early 1800's where citizen soldiers have had need of training. Through following decades this relationship culminated into the eventual 'General Issue Bill', better known as the G.I. Bill, of the post World War II era. (Ruman & Hamrick, 2010). Opportunities for higher education before World War II were limited to a small cadre of individuals. It was during the First World War where testing for the purposes of job categorization for the common soldier became a useful tool for screening out unqualified individuals. Those early assessments eventually helped to develop the ASVAB test, which is utilized by all branches of U.S. military this present day.

All enlisted military personnel in the last 40 years have taken the ASVAB and while for many there was and is no trouble performing during such an exam others may barely make the cut. Thus every time a person goes up for higher rank they do so flush with frustration if they happen to struggle with a Learning Disability.

A Learning Disability becomes even more of an issue inhibiting their potential for success when they attempt to attend college once discharged from active duty. However, through the use of a C-SIP style screening test it is possible to identify a student veteran who may have difficulty with higher education or possibly may have an undiagnosed Learning Disability. Thus a student veteran could be referred to a professional career counselor for further

assessment (e.g. the Veterans Educational and Vocational Assessment) to find out what particular educational needs they might have, benefiting their academic success by virtue of proactive intervention through Disability Support Services, available on college campuses for potential struggling student veterans.

The purpose of this paper is to illuminate the needs of a growing student veteran population within the context of potentially unknown or undocumented disability. A view will be taken from a historical context of veteran assessment which all veterans are universally exposed to in their initial enlistment. Notable changes will be examined with the post secondary challenges that student veterans will face when transitioning from military to civilian college life and the struggles that some will have due their learning disability and the support available to student veterans as they use their G.I. Bill.

History of Veteran Education

The United States has been in a state of war for over a decade sending soldiers, sailors, airmen, coast guardsmen and marines overseas to fight in the Global War on Terrorism in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and now Operation New Dawn (OND).

An indication as to the potential amount of returning veterans is that since ten years ago, almost million U.S. troops have deployed as part of OEF/ OIF (Rand, 2008) and armed conflicts involving U.S. forces still abound as of this writing. In today's all volunteer military part of the benefit to joining the service is that at the end of one's tour of duty a person is eligible to pursue higher education with monies appropriated for such a purpose under a new G. I. Bill.

There are numerous reasons why a person would join the military, but a large portion of people join the military as an avenue for obtaining a college education. Veterans Affairs data indicates that "only a small percentage of veterans use all of their federal education benefits" (O'Herrin, 2011, p.15), reasons not withstanding, after many years of the country being at war there will most certainly a future drawdown of forces and this would suggest that there will be potentially thousands of military veterans coming to universities and colleges across the country to collect on the formal education part of their contract.

Post Secondary Challenges for Student Veterans

Many veterans will make the transition from soldier to civilian easily, but for scores of others the transition from military life to college life is not so smooth. Student veterans may experience significant frustrations while making a shift to an academic setting. Thus it is not an unusual concern voiced about returning veterans that many veterans are not ready for college, either due to time out of a classroom, lack of preparedness or poor performance attributed to a learning disability (LD). Moreover, academic institutions will need to be prepared for an influx of non-traditional, military veteran population with their own set of needs and supports due to issues ranging from exposure to combat to simply not being prepared academically. Universities and college institutions have the opportunity to gain understanding about military veterans and prepare to meet specific needs of the student military veteran in order for their educational venture to be rewarding and successful (Brown & Gross, 2010). It is especially important for higher institutions to understand the aspect of a student veteran having an LD

and how it is possible for a student veteran to have the condition and not have it documented. Some may not even realize their academic struggles are because of an LD (DiRamio & Spires, 2009).

If a person has struggled throughout their years in primary and secondary education it is likely that such a person decides to join the military rather than pursue higher education. Thus, one is more likely to find people with LDs in the military, even though the Department of Defense believes it screens out most persons who may have problems with mathematics or writing ability via their own testing with the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (A.S.V.A.B.). Without going into specifics concerning the definition of an LD, historically people in many cases who have an LD present themselves quite well with regard to intelligence even over compensating in some areas to make up for their deficit, they are survivors who many times can make or fake their performance until they encounter a conventional classroom environment (Riggan, 1982). Therefore, a problem can arise for a student veteran who now has money and financial incentive for higher education, but no certain diagnosis to enable accommodation at their prospective academic facility. A veteran, during their time in the military, generally performed a function "based on what he/she can do", in other words "a veteran may have been able to perform in some job capacity in the military, but higher academic exercise may bring out obstacles not expected" (Hess, Kennedy, Hardin, & Kupke, 2010, p.206). It is important to understand that while active in the military a person may get by fairly well while at a lower rank and it is necessary for an individual to move up in rank which

becomes more difficult to attain as testing and requirements must be met within certain parameters. If a person does not make rank within prescribed times, a career in the military is generally out of the question. Ability to advance is key to a successful career and if a person struggles with mathematics or written ability the opportunity to advance is severely curtailed as Hess et al. (2010) states "our understanding of the impact of ADHD and LD on individual service members and on the larger military mission is remarkably limited" (p. 221).

Students with a Learning Disability

People who have learning disabilities are according to Gregg, (2007) are an underserved population not limited to one particular ethnicity or group of individuals who in most cases are not prepared for what awaits them academically, he calls "transitioning to college" a "time of "great disequilibrium" (p.221), which is exacerbated by limited institutional support and accommodation which can be expensive. Before one can be accommodated there must be sufficient assessment performed -an additional expense- thus providing documented evidence that academic ability is compromised. The transitioning factor is compounded for the student-veteran population as noted by shifts from a military culture, which is well structured, to a civilian college culture, quite unstructured, populated with young, less mature fellow classmates. These differences cannot be understated as the student veteran population will be better served with specific attention befitting their specific needs due to being a veteran.

Disability Support Services at Academic Institutions

It is important for faculty and staff to understand what a student-veteran will face relative to support and identity. The transition of becoming a 'veteran' and what that means as an identity. More exclusive as well are those who have experienced combat entering into a brother/sisterhood of shared experience and potential disability i.e. PTSD. The whole point of the original G.I. Bill instituted by President Truman at the close of World War II was to help give veterans a boost in civilian life as Smith-Osborne (2009) states "society has an obligation to meet the needs of service members returning to civilian life in the community" (p.327) thus we should no less ignore those who may need special assistance academically due to an LD if they have college aspirations.

The relationship of military veterans and higher education has existed in the United States since the Civil War. Since the advent of the G.I. Bill, first initiated during World War II, the investment in veterans has caused millions of veterans to become professionals advancing the professional fields of medicine and science creating a large return on the initial G.I. Bill investment. It is with this understanding in hopes that such an educational opportunity does not go to waste or become lost on the present day veteran population who may struggle academically due to an LD. This is why a proposal of using of a C-SIP style screening test could potentially benefit many veterans before they begin taking classes in college and are not sure of themselves academically either due to an LD or for simply having been out of school for many years. A study from the University of Hawaii found that many non-veterans as well as the veteran population need some kind of help when they initially attend college, so it is not

something completely unique to the veteran population (Vorsino, 2010). C-SIP style screening assessments do not diagnose a particular condition, rather they can indicate whether or not there may be a problem in some academic field leading to the use of another more thorough assessment such as a Veterans Educational and Vocational Analysis (VEVA). The VEVA, which is an extensive series of assessments such as the Woodcock Johnson III – tests of achievement and tests of cognitive ability, the Meyers-Briggs Type indicator, ONET Career Interest Inventory, ONET Career Values Inventory, the Career Planning Scale and the Career Scope Assessment Profile. If a student veteran may have a potential LD or is having academic difficulty in any way, including making a career decision, the VEVA would be an extremely useful means for obtaining certified help if results from the assessment indicate an LD; whereupon help from Disability Support Services could be adequately secured due to a documented learning disability.

Veterans endure extensive assessment the moment they express interest in joining the military. Since World War I and the first Alpha and Beta intelligence tests were implemented and inductees into the military were assessed in order to facilitate matching the right person for the right job (Kelves, 1968). The Alpha and Beta assessments gave way to more specific Army General Classification Test (AGCT) and the Navy General Classification Test (NGCT) for World War II and then the single service wide Armed Forces Qualification Test or AFQT from which ultimately the development of the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery or ASVAB, 1968, which continues in use to present day (ASVAB, 2011).

Summary

Veterans through the ages have had to face, not only the effects of experienced combat, but the academic challenges of college and perhaps added disability. Veterans returning from previous wars and conflicts have come home with a host of difficulty to overcome from disabling experiences and have become successful college graduates thanks to G.I. Bill enabled opportunities. Veterans may feel out of place transitioning to a new civilian atmosphere and as student veterans many universities are trying to rectify past omissions of student veteran need (Ruman, 2010).

Today among many student veterans there is a sense of academic unpreparedness. Stigma, of both being a combat veteran and potentially having a learning disability can be an inhibiting factor as one attends a college or university. Building on the skills veterans already are accustomed to having such as camaraderie and a highly motivational sense of accomplishment will help a veteran transition into a successful active student. Persky (2010) notes that "veterans should be recognized as a group of students who come to the table of education with unique skills and perspectives, but also with special needs (p.31) it is the factor of "inclusiveness" which will help a veteran adjust.

Helping a veteran deal with the changes in the structure they are used to in addition to encouraging a mystified veteran on the tools available to help him or her succeed academically will go a long way in erasing potential for stigma regarding disability whether PTSD or an LD. Remedial educational experience is not enough and often is a dead-end cycle that can fuel frustration within the

student veteran. Instead, once a veteran has been screened the veteran can be set up for services and activities or tutors who can immediately act on supportive techniques tuned to helping mitigate an academic deficit. The ultimate goal of the student veteran is employment in a career field they will feel confident and competent performing thus bringing satisfaction in what they do.

CHAPTER 3

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

REVIEW OF KEY LITERATURE FINDINGS

Throughout recent military history of the last 80 years development of military based aptitude tests have been used to measure placement of military personnel and at various times in history scores have been either raised or lowered based on circumstance. Such tests have not been for the benefit of a person who may have a learning disability. Learning disabilities are not adequately dealt with while in the military and once a person is discharged such a person may fall through the cracks as concerning the ASVAB research has shown that the ASVAB does not prepare for a career or education after a military career or time served. Research has also found that student veterans face great challenges in moving from a planned and organized military structure to an academic atmosphere with relative looseness. Accommodating student veterans can at times seem expensive.

Studies have shown that support services would be beneficial to the student veteran population; however the lack of pre-screening restricts veterans from receiving services allowing for an LD to go undiagnosed preventing access to programs in Disability Support Services.

Given the summary of the literature review, I propose a formalized prescreening survey, given there is a barrier to receiving access to Disability support services. Since there is a lack of a pre-screener to illuminate the possibility of either an LD or other possible academic issue relative to academic success what is needed is a C-SIP pre-screener test of at least 30 questions covering a broad range of areas to indicate the possibility of a deficit in a particular area. Upon examining the assessment it could be surmised that the student veteran could benefit from further assessment by taking the VEVA upon which if it is determined the student veteran has an LD or deficit in some other area DSS services could be employed. Having such a tool at the disposal of a Rehabilitation counselor would be invaluable in helping to give a student veteran feedback on where their deficits lie and helping to facilitate a solution for their academic success. It is clear not all student veterans need help when attending college, but a significant number of veterans due struggle while attending college and some may have multiple disabilities they must contend with. Extra stress is not necessary when there are services available to mitigate academic deficits that a small survey could rectify.

Rehabilitation counselors would be able to use a screener survey as a means for helping the student veteran population gain evidence that they have certain academic deficits creditable of special supportive measures. Should a professor be concerned or notice a student veteran is not keeping pace with a subject such as math then he or she may suggest seeing a rehabilitation counselor to go for a screening to find out if there is an academic deficit.

In summary, Veterans with learning disability many times go undiagnosed.

There are times when veterans make it through the ASVAB and can compensate well enough to survive in a military environment, but when attempting to make it

through an academic environment significant problems arise due to a lack of pre screening diagnostics. I have proposed pre-screening to increase veterans with disability so they can have access to Disability Support Services on college and University campuses. However, there is more work to be done.

Rehabilitation counselors can do several things to help student veterans. They will be able to clearly understand student veteran complaints when they feel they are not being heard by a professor if they are struggling or need extra help on subject matter relative to their deficit. A rehabilitation counselor would be able to tell with a screener whether ability was problematic and use a screener as a means for investigating possible presence of an LD. Support services for those who have a disability have been around on most college campuses for many years. The use of a screener may be a measure of updating a micro area of need such as the student veteran population who may have a Learning Disability. A Rehabilitation counselor would be able to use a screener survey as a means for justifying the greater expense of a VEVA which would give definitive documentation that an LD is present thus opening the way for more support services.

Future studies would include empirical validation testing of the screening tool. Development of such a tool would have a significant impact on student veteran access to special services. It also would significantly impact the field of Rehab counseling in providing a useful tool for working with the student veteran population nationwide.

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