

Case Study Analysis – Student Veteran Support and Discrimination

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The Demographics of the New College Student

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Introduction

The case study here is about John, a student veteran who had come back to college after a military tour of duty; his case demonstrates the complex nature of the problems that veterans encounter during their transition into college life. John served his time abroad, but he has trouble fitting into the academic system; he faces social isolation, discrimination, and failure to receive any institutional support. Although he tries hard to do well, he suffers microaggressions on the part of peers and faculty who misinterpret his background or stereotype him, which impacts his academic activities and mental health. The concerns of student veterans should not be overlooked since they have not only incomparable experiences and encounter different challenges that are not always considered in the conventional support system.

Veterans may experience difficulty with returning home into civilian life and dealing with post-traumatic stress syndrome, as well as the culture shock of living on campus when one has no idea about life in the service. They are subject to poor performance or even resignation in cases where they are not given specialized services. This analysis aims to critically discuss the fundamental concerns raised in the case of John, such as institutional discrimination, unavailability of veteran-related support systems, and incidence of cultural insensitivity on campus. Through considering these issues with this framework in mind of student affairs and equity in higher education, the analysis will result in the creation of sound, inclusive recommendations that would encourage student veterans to better succeed in an environment of learning that is more forgiving, respectful, and efficient to their needs.

Identification of the Main Issues/Problems

Among the most significant problems in the case of John, it is possible to identify the absence of institutional support services that will target the individual requirements of veteran students. Although traditional services for students are in place, they do not pay much attention to the non-traditional path and the experiences of the lives of veterans. John's inability to maneuver academic regulations, loss of connection to his peers, and getting access to nearly enough counseling points are inherent flaws in the veteran identity being acknowledged in the system. The failure of institutions to implement and provide specific onboarding, mentoring, or advisory services to veterans has the inadvertent effect of marginalizing this population and subjecting them to the risks of disengagement and dropping out (Werkmeister & Jacob, 2018).

The second issue is that stereotyping and discrimination by the faculty and staff are critical. John is shown various microaggressions and subtle prejudices, such as remarks suggesting that he lacks intelligence or that he is an unstable person because he was in the military. Such interactions create an unfriendly learning environment and work against his confidence. Both open bias and hidden discrimination have a harmful impact on the mental health, academic persistence, and well-being of students. The feeling of alienation due to the faculty being dismissive or unaware of the situation of student veterans in the educational environment only adds to already present obstacles to achieving success (Katon et al., 2024).

The other urgent problem is the low level of cultural competence of campus workers in the sphere of military life and its consequences. Faculty and staff personnel undergo little or no training related to learning about the values, communication styles, and mental health complex problems in relation to military service. Consequently, trying to interact well out of ignorance ends up being perceived as ignorant and even discriminatory. Purposeful professional development about military cultural awareness should be used to support faculty interaction with

student veterans, and it has already been reported that it has some positive effects on the integration and academic achievements of the former (Dillard & Yu, 2018).

Another issue is that of mental health and social integration, which highly impacts a student veteran such as John. The shift between life in the military and academic life can cause symptoms associated with isolation, anxiety, or PTSD-related symptoms. The fact that John has difficulties in socializing with his colleagues and avoids asking a question about his mental health is reflective of the overall mental health tendencies of veterans in higher education. The lack of inclusive and trauma-informed systems of support, which include special counseling, peer communities, and the absence of stigmatization of mental health care, will contribute to the increase of these problems at institutions that do not support them. The application of proactive, veteran-focused methodologies is vital when it comes to resilience and retention among the effective demographic (Alschuler & Yarab, 2018).

Analysis and Evaluation of the Issues/Problems

The situation experienced by John as a result of discrimination and bias has far-reaching effects both academically and psychologically. Veterans can get demotivated due to the discriminatory remarks and the implicit suppositions made about them, emotionally, as well as intellectually. The psychological impact that such bias can have on John would be his reluctance to participate in class and seek support services. According to the report by Carter et al. (2019), when there is discrimination among veterans, these veterans are at high risk of developing mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts, particularly when there is no social support.

The gaps between institutions worsen these problems. Even though the number of veterans in higher education increases, most institutions fail to have a clear policy recognizing or embracing veteran identities. The case of John suggests the lack of formal support arrangements-areas to provide support services to the veterans, i.e., offices of veteran services, veteran culturally competent faculty advisors, or veteran mentoring relationships with their peers. Besides, the campus in general lacks training, the faculty, and staff who would provide them with the tools needed to comprehend the experiences of student veterans. According to Dillard & Yu 2018, student veteran success and integration are greatly contributed to when an intentional faculty development program to create cultural awareness of military life is put in place.

The lack of such actions creates an atmosphere on the campus that could appear to be exclusionary to the veterans, which counters the assurances of diverse and equitable freedoms within the institution. When student veterans feel that their identity is misinterpreted and alienated, then the participation rates go down, and academic persistence cannot take place since the sense of belonging to the educational endeavor is undermined. By the outreach and the veteran-focused programming that Barragan et al. (2022) consider, they see that the proactive, veteran-focused, and inclusive outreach and programming are important in retention, particularly first-year and first-generation veteran students. Failure of these efforts by the institutions is likely to lead to increased attrition rates of this already vulnerable group.

Besides, these are the problems that mirror the greater systemic injustices in the campus atmosphere and student affairs. The absence of institutional processes that approach the situation of John indicates how the experiences of student veterans may be unwittingly marginalized in academia. This exclusion is not only limited to the individual students but also has implications for the ability of the institution to create an inclusive learning environment. Nguyen et al. (2022)

concluded that the impacted learners are much more likely to quit educational programs early, and any attrition is more significant among vulnerable groups, such as veterans. There are often complicated transitions experienced by student veterans beyond academics. They could be treating the injury sustained in the line of duty, dealing with family demands, or suffering post-traumatic stress. Veterans have special needs when it comes to higher education, which are not met with common student support systems, as discussed by Morris et al. (2019). Institutions are a part of an uncontrolled cycle of misconception, underperformance, and detachment, with no purposeful plan and execution of veteran-advisory services.

Recommendations to Better Serve Student Veterans Like John

a. Short-Term Recommendations (within one year)

1. Implement Campus-Wide Sensitivity and Military Cultural

Among the short-term interventions that may be implemented most immediately and have the most significant effects is a campus-wide sensitivity and military cultural competency training conducted on all faculty and staff. Such training is the key to making the institutional staff more aware of the special backgrounds, needs, and problems of student veterans such as John. It cannot only help to increase the understanding of the military culture and demystify the generally held popular images of veterans, but also train in inclusive language and behavior (Werkmeister & Jacob, 2018). The first benefit of this movement is that it allows for a decrease in the number of microaggressions and unintentional biases quickly, and John was a witness to it. With a better-educated campus society, student veterans have higher chances of feeling visible, respected, and supported, which has a positive impact on mental wellbeing and student involvement in studies.

But that kind of training is an investment of dollars and logistics. Laboratories will have to spend money on specialist facilitators or training sessions, which might be financially burdensome. Also, some staff or faculty might not want to take mandatory sessions and consider it as some kind of burden or as something that is not necessary unless they have direct communication with veteran students. These barriers will have to be overcome through strategic communication regarding the relevance of the training with regard to inclusive excellence and student success. It was found through research that military cultural competency training enhances campus climate and also promotes high student veteran retention. In their research on targeted professional development of faculty, Dillard & Yu (2018) discovered that the improvement of the educational experience of veterans and the faculty-student relationship was achieved as a result of targeted professional development of faculty. Through timely observations to remove such misconceptions, this kind of training will ensure that a more open-minded and accommodating academic setting is established, one that would eventually decrease the chances of veterans like John feeling isolated or being discriminated against.

2. Establish a Student Veteran Advisory Committee

The development of a Student Veteran Advisory Committee would be an important short-term measure toward the development of a more inclusive and responsive campus. The committee would consist of the student veterans as well as the faculty and student affairs experts who would act as a channel to assist in identifying and solving the unique problems faced by veterans in the institution (Morris et al., 2019). Its main strength is the fact that it gives veterans the chance to speak their own voice and to influence the institutional policy and programming. The committee would contribute valuable feedback on services, propose improvements, and

advocate peer pressure to recommend that aid strategies be made based on the real-life experience of the veterans.

A possible drawback comes in the form of time and coordination that is necessary to have in place an effective committee. Its effectiveness is linked to active engagement by the student veterans who might already be in the middle of academic, professional, and family duties. Also, it is possible that there is a low response at the initial stage when people do not trust the institution, as was proposed in the case with John. Nevertheless, campuses where such advisory bodies have been established reported a rise in veteran engagement and satisfaction. The results of Barragan et al. (2022) point to the conclusion that the inclusion of veterans in the decision-making process, by creating the formal advisory structure, can improve outreach and retention, especially when exercised among the new and first-generation veteran students. This initiative would therefore be a cost-effective and empowering strategy for organizing institutional practices with the actual needs of the vet population in the institution.

b. Long-Term Recommendations (beyond one year)

1. Create a Dedicated Veteran Resource

The establishment of a specialized Veteran Resource Center (VRC) will be critical to the goal of achieving academic success, inclusion, and well-being among student veterans such as John. A VRC presents a physical, central point where additional academic advising, counseling, peer support, and benefits information on the GI Bill are made available to the veterans (Barmak et al., 2023). More to the point, it promotes the feeling of belonging and community that is frequently lacking in all of the traditional campus ones. Those who served in the military and those who are currently undergoing the process of adjusting to a civilian lifestyle gain a lot of value when there exists a safe and affirmative environment in which their identities can make

sense and be acknowledged as they should be. The main strength of a VRC is that it is holistic in its approach to the support of student veterans. It minimizes the complexities of working through fragmented departments of the campus and assures proper designing of services with military cultural sensitivity by pooling all of its resources. It is also a center of veteran student clubs, outreach and workshops, strengthening peer bonds, and easing isolation.

Nonetheless, VRCs demand both financial resources (which over time are extensive) and spaces that might not be easy to obtain due to the financial limitations of the institutions. Moreover, the establishment of the center should include people who have had education on military cultural competence in order to be actually effective. Nevertheless, despite such challenges, research indicates good results of the institutions that invest money in VRCs. According to Alschuler & Yarab (2018), the presence of these centers helped tremendously with veteran student retention, scholastic achievement, and satisfaction. Institutionalization of this manner of support does more than simply show a commitment to diversity and inclusion by the colleges; they are also building permanent infrastructure to address the needs of their growing veteran student population in a constantly developing world.

2. Integrate Veteran Support into Institutional Strategic Plans

The strategic approach to institutional commitment to the success of student veterans, such as John, would be to make veteran support a part of the strategic plan of the institution as a powerful long-term solution. Colleges and universities can produce coherent policy formulation, funding resources, and performance appraisal when veteran-oriented goals, programs, and accountability strategies are embedded into the strategic blueprint of the college or university (Werkmeister & Jacob, 2018). Such integration indicates that the support of veterans is not only a

minor consideration of the institute as an additional measure but an institutional priority, facilitating a culture of inclusivity and planning in the long term.

The major strength of this suggestion is that it will make support institutional and not temporary or grant-based. Diversity points out that when community-defined needs of veterans are captured in mission statements, diversity objectives, and institutional outputs, the departments will be more likely to match their practices with the objectives. It also sets the stage for long-term investment in services like the Veteran Resource Center, professional development, and specific outreach. Nevertheless, this type of system change may be gradual. The time spent on strategic planning is limited, and many times, proposals have to go through jungles of bureaucracy and conflicting priorities. Nonetheless, institutional compliance with nationally recognized directions, like those provided in the Department of Veterans Affairs and the American Council on Education directions, guarantees best practices and accreditation with changes and advancements (Morris et al., 2019). The translated help would be institutional so that the effects would last more than instant solutions to the problem of veterans.

Conclusion

The case of John shows that there are important problems many student veterans have in higher education: discrimination, lack of institutional aid, lack of cultural awareness, and mental issues. Due to such elements, academic achievement and health are adversely affected, and these issues also form the basis of isolation and disconnectedness. Unless specific measures are taken, institutions may continue to create an atmosphere of marginalization and ostracization of the veterans, which eventually affects student retention and inclusion in institutions. Student veterans require proactive and encompassing assistance in their successful and sustainable

development as students and as an institution. Veterans can add special skills, outlook, and life experiences to the academic setting, but their needs are usually unaccounted for.

It is necessary to develop purposeful strategies that focus on informing faculty and staff on these issues, raising veteran voices, and establishing spaces that recognize them and their experiences. Short-term measures, including the cultural competency training and creation of the student veteran advisory committee, may instantly enhance the situation on the campus. In the meantime, the long-term promises, such as creating a specific Veteran Resource Center and including the work on veteran support in the strategic plans, will lead to sustainable development. Collectively, these steps would be an inclusive strategy to create equity, a sense of belonging, and academic success among student veterans. When focusing on these steps first, however, the institutions cannot only help a worthy people group but also reinforce their foundation of diversity and inclusion as a whole.

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