

IMPROVISE, ADAPT, AND OVERCOME: THE STUDENT VETERAN AND
CONSIDERATIONS OF IDENTITY, SPACE, AND PEDAGOGY

by

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of Corporal John Bishop. You continued the fight no matter the consequences. I will continue to support our brothers and sisters in arms.

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CHAPTER I

Improvise:

Introducing the New Student Veteran

When I was in the military, I was disconnected from the civilian-world both physically and mentally. I served three tours in Iraq in 4 years; the time I spent away from the Continental United States (CONUS), I spent this time performing duties that are beyond the spectrum of the normal civilian-world; however these duties, patrolling in a combat zone, clearing houses in urban combat, calling for indirect fire on enemy locations, are the norm for the military – these actions, or situations, are what helped me to feel connected to the military. When I left the military, I was no longer performing these duties – I was no longer participating in the norms of the military. When I entered the college environment, I felt completely disconnected from my cultural (military) roots.

The first time I entered the Writing Center at my undergraduate institution, I was nervous. I might not have been recognizably nervous, but I was definitely dealing with some internal stress. The Writing Center was set up as a series of tables where the tutor would naturally sit with his or her back to the wall, and the tutee would sit with his or her back to the door. To clarify, after going on urban patrols in Iraq, where the threat of an enemy attack is a 360-degree consideration, my head was on a swivel--especially towards large traffic areas. Being that I was at a large university, the volume of people who walked by and through the one point of entry and exit in the writing center was vast. Now the important part of this story to remember is not whether or not the tutor was able to overcome my stressors; in fact the tutors in lab were unaware of my needs as a veteran – the writing center was unprepared and unaware of my needs as a SV. Because going to

the writing center, or other academic services, can be construed as the norm for a college environment, and I was unable to participate, I felt disconnected from the civilian-world as a whole.

After leaving the writing center that day, I never returned to receive tutoring. The situation that the writing center presented to me was not the one I was prepared for. I further isolated myself away from the student population; I started to skip classes and started to call my uncompleted homework, “busy work.” I sought help from family members, therapists, and pastors, but in the end, I felt that the burden I carried was my own to bear. There weren’t a lot of academic programs that recognized the trouble I was in. I entered the lab expecting to work on my paper, but instead I was subconsciously forced into working on a complete transition and assimilation into the civilian world - a task that I was not ready to take on, especially by myself.

I joined the Marine Corps right out of high school and right after the attacks on 9/11; like a lot of high school students at the time, I felt that I had a civic duty to join the service. And although my mother would have classified me as kid with his head on straight, I knew that I was not mature enough to go to college. I chose the Marines, because I had heard that they were the toughest. I wanted to test myself - I wanted to serve my country in the best way possible. I think it is important to mention that before I had left for boot camp, my ambitions for life hadn't surpassed a childish dream of becoming a rock star. I had no real purpose in life; I had no drive to find one. When I stepped off the bus at Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego with 40 other recruits, my life would never be the same. I stepped off the bus, and with the other hopeful Marines

around me, I stepped on to the iconic yellow footprints, held up my right hand and read the following words:

I Micah Wright, do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; and that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to the regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice . So help me God.

Boot camp lasted 13 grueling weeks, but at the end of it, I was a Marine. I finally had a purpose in my life, and that purpose was to stand in defense of the country that I swore an oath to. After boot camp, I attended the School of Infantry (SOI), where learned to be hyper vigilant at all times. I learned how to patrol in combat areas - I learned how to seek out and destroy the enemy. 2 weeks after completing SOI, I was headed to Iraq to meet up with my unit, the 3rd Battalion 1st Marines, who had been mobilized to take part in the invasion of Iraq. Although my first deployment was uneventful, the preparation for my first trip to Iraq was nerve wracking. I had just graduated from the school of infantry, and I was already preparing for to see real combat. By the standards set forth by the Marine Corps, I was ready, but I did not feel ready. I was proud to be a Marine, but I was scared at the possibility of death and dismemberment; I was 19 years old. The two weeks went by too quick. Before, I knew it, I was sitting at an air base, waiting to board the plane that would take me out of the country to war for the first time.

I sat by the phones, waiting to call my parents, with my head hung low. I did not know what to expect. How could I define war - I was only 19. As I sat and waited to use

the phone, I stared at the floor and rested my head on the muzzle flash suppressor of my M-16. I was scared and I felt alone. A Marine Corps Warrant Officer, who was standing there also waiting for to use the phone placed his hand on my shoulder and simply told me that everything would be all right and that I would always have another Marine by my side. I didn't have to admit my fear; I didn't have to seek out help. My fellow Marine understood the fear that I felt.

On my second deployment, my battalion had been remobilized for a tour of duty in Iraq. I was one of the only Junior Marines who had been on a deployment, so the task of recognizing the fear of the Marines was mine. We were in country for only a few months before we started Operation Phantom Fury. On November 7, we were staged on the North side of Fallujah – we would take the train station first; this would be a critical (strategic) point for our unit; in other words, the train station would be a safe area for us to start our mission. It was also a place where we medevac'd our wounded. The train station was an integral part in accomplishing our mission.

For two weeks, my battalion cleared the city of Fallujah – we lost 33 Marines in 2 weeks. For two weeks, the “Thundering Third” conducted urban combat operations to clear the city of Fallujah of enemy operatives. In the duration of the testing situation, 33 Marines from my battalion paid the ultimate sacrifice and many more were wounded; every single Marine who entered that city passed the test of that reality with flying colors and is now considered a “Fallujah Marine.” In the words of my former Section Leader, Sergeant Tony Rosalez, from the iconic book *We Were One* (written by Patrick O'Donnell) that accounted for the awe inspiring bravery of my battalion:

It was about the man to your left and right. We don't do this for freedom, apple pie, but for the man to the left and right. The privates, lance corporals, and sergeants stand shoulder to shoulder in the face of the enemy, the honor among men. We grew into a brotherhood. What we had was completely free and clear, there was no race, no bills that had to be paid. It wasn't about money; that was all gone. We worked side-by-side to destroy the enemy who was trying to destroy us. (201)

On my third deployment, I was wounded two months before our scheduled trip back home. My squad was patrolling the main supply route for our battalion for most of the morning. The sun rose, and the temperature began to spike. We turned our Humvees off the main highway down a completely random spot in the desert. Every vehicle passed over the sand with swift and effortless movements; however, my vehicle rolled over an anti-tank land mine. The explosion was thunderous and massive; the grey smoke covered the sky, blocking out the sun. I predicted my time on this earth to be about to end. I started to feel my limb bulge. My mind began to race; my body started to spasm. I was alive, but I was broken.

As I lay wounded on the ground, the rest of my platoon realized the agonizing threat of ambush and began to act accordingly. Marines extended to form a protective perimeter in order to protect me from an ambush; the Corpsmen, and 4 other Marines ran to my mangled vehicle to assist in patching me up and calling for a medevac. The other Marines around me protected my life and identity. In my darkest moment, I was pulled from the wreckage of my Humvee, and allowed a second chance to get back in the fight.

I spent four years serving with the 3rd Battalion 1st Marines; I was an Infantry Assaultman (0351). My battalion deployed three times to Iraq in four years. Although I loved my job, three tours were starting to take their toll on me. After my second tour, I started having nightmares, and I started to trust people less; the nightmares and feelings of mistrust continued on to the next tour. One year, almost to the date, after being wounded, I started as a freshman in college. I remember telling my wife after my first day of school how the campus was filled with a bunch of “damn college kids who couldn’t find their own asses with their own hands.” I was obviously disgruntled about my current situation in life. “What the hell are these PhDs going to teach me that’s worth a damn?” My wife assured me that it would get better, and while this sentiment was true in the long run, the fact of the matter was that I could not see the light at the end of the tunnel, and that scared the hell out of me.

My first semester at my undergraduate institution I registered for fourteen hours – I knew that whatever the school had to throw at me would be nothing compared to the tasks I had completed as a Marine. As a Marine, I was meritoriously promoted to Corporal, and I was awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal for actions in combat. I had survived three tours in Iraq – school would be a joke. Being a married man, I also worked forty hours a week – I was hell bent on succeeding in this world. In *Called to Serve: A Handbook on Student Veterans and Higher Education*, Florence Hamrick, Corey Rumann and Associates state that veterans, “As a group... appear to be entering college with skills and dedication necessary to succeed” (72). Those challenges include meeting academic expectations, establishing balances between academic and

life... relating to nonveteran students, and coping with service-related mental and physical disabilities” (72).

Unfortunately for me, the toll of juggling work and schoolwork started to prove more difficult than what I expected. I was turning in homework late, and I wasn't reading. I was failing my classes. After a while, I started to feel apathetic towards the idea of school; I didn't see the point. However, I was not offered help by the faculty or administrators who knew I was failing: “This lack of engagement with faculty could potentially affect veterans' personal and social learning outcomes” (Hamrick 73).

Although I knew about the tutoring services on campus, I avoided them at all cost. However, my Freshman Composition teacher required the students in his class to receive help from the writing center. The lab was in the library; I typically avoided that side of campus because of the large crowds. Instead, I came to class and went directly home every single day. Making the trek across the busiest part of campus was a large ordeal for me. During my deployments, it was very important to stay away from crowds; when you are in a crowd, you can't see everyone around you. In a crowd, you can't tell if someone has a weapon, you can't see everyone's movements, and you can't move out of the “kill zone” quickly enough. Needless to say, I didn't like crowds.

Because going to the writing center was a requirement, I had no choice. I prepared my backpack to include everything I might need while at the writing center: pens, pencils, paper, highlighter, etc. I moved through the campus as quickly as possible. Because there was a large open area right in front of the library, I stayed close to the buildings so that I had a way to digress with adequate cover. I made sure that I watched the movements of the students I encountered. I entered the writing center already feeling

anxious, already wanting to leave. Unfortunately, the pattern of avoidance did not stop at the writing center.

Hamrick states, “The two planes of personal identity (military identity and student identity) and existence are brought into conflict when student service members demobilize and return to campus... student service members begin to leave intense friendships and the now unfamiliar highly structured, hierarchical military culture behind” (55). Veterans who now have to also call themselves students may feel disconnected from not only the military culture, but they also may feel distant from the now dominant civilian/college culture.

I was uncomfortable in an academic environment because the spaces students occupy are created for the dominant civilian class. As a result, veterans do not fit in. For example, Joshua Lang, a student at Shippensburg University, states, “I woke up at 5:30 a.m., just as I did in the military, to prepare for the first day. I dressed in slacks and a buttoned shirt – prepared and ready to go... The stares I received (or felt) from other students gave me an empty feeling in my stomach I counted the minutes until class was over and sat close to the door so I could leave as soon as class was dismissed” (40). The anxiety that veterans feel when entering this new environment is real. Although, like Lang, I was prepared physically to go the writing center, I was mentally unprepared to deal with an environment that I deemed to be unsafe.

Both the numbers make the importance of addressing the needs of veterans in higher education evident in attendance and the dire consequences if they do not succeed. In an article in *USA Today*, Mary Beth Marklein discusses the growing numbers of veterans attending school: “The Post-9/11 GI Bill, enacted in 2008, has paved the way for

hundreds of thousands of recent veterans to enroll in college. Of 928,836 service members who received federal education benefits last year, 555,329 served after 9/11, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs." However, "July 2008 brought the announcement from the VA that 22,000 vets called its suicide hotline during the previous year... by June 2009, soldiers were 'taking their own lives in record numbers'" (Caplan 229).

Because of the increase in veterans registering at colleges around the country, the need to understand their culture and how they learn is even more important. "It is vital that higher education staff, faculty, and administrators understand that service members are challenged to balance these identities in addition to navigating both personal and bureaucratic transitions and processes" (Hamrick 65). By creating programs that are aimed supporting veterans, universities will be able to help SV adapt to civilian life, thus helping to combat the dangers of isolation.

However, as I mentioned before, I left the writing center at my undergraduate institution and never returned. The experiences of Student Veterans (SV) must be taken into account when creating a learning environment: How does learning space in a writing center reflect the needs of the military culture? Could it be perceived as a dangerous location? What if a program had been set in place to retain veterans in the writing center? What if there was a way a writing center could create a space that veterans could call their own? This space would have to strive to understand the vast military culture and how space and the safety are important when considering the identity of the Student Veteran (SV).

In January of 2013, I created a veteran-to-veteran tutoring program called the Writing Center Tutor Corps (WCTC). This program was not only aimed at helping veterans to understand the benefits of going to the writing center, but it was directed at creating a space in which veterans' identities would remain an important part of the academic process. I envisioned that this program would help bring veterans together in a space that they once found threatening, so that they could finally reap the benefits of inhabiting that space. This space would be an area that the members of the Texas State University Military/Veteran Community could reclaim their military identities. In "Renewing Our Commitment to Connecting to Student Veterans," Kristy Liles Crawley talks about the importance of supporting our student veterans: "The presence of the new generation of veterans in our classrooms supplies English instructors and nonveteran students with new opportunities to welcome veterans back to civilian life and show support for our veterans" (24).

Summary of Chapters

In Chapter 2, "The Rhetoric of Transition and the Returning Veteran," I will be discussing not only the creation of identity for the military service member, but I will also be discussing how the identity of the veteran is created and recreated through what I will call testing situations. I focus on the academic world's use of the term transition and the singular action of movement (from one identity to another) that it promotes. I will also suggest that the term *Remobilizing* be used to describe our returning veterans.

In Chapter 3, I will discuss the veteran-to-veteran tutoring program that I created at the Texas State University Writing Center. I will show how I transformed elements of space, which were deemed unsafe by some veterans, to reflect more of the military

identity. I also talk about the elements of the pedagogy that I utilize when tutoring veterans

Literature Review

As a precursor to suicide risk, the VA explains that, “PTSD is often associated with withdrawal from participation in social activities, limited friendships, and reduced emotional intimacy. Some research also suggests that veterans with PTSD have greater rates of social anxiety disorder. Poor social support predicts development of PTSD and a more chronic course of the disorder,” the VA continues later with, “Optimizing existing social supports is helpful in the settings of acute stress and may decrease the risk of suicide in PTSD” (50-51).

According to Lynn K. Hall in “The Importance of Understanding Military Culture,” there are vast differences between the military and civilian worlds; “The unique culture of the military is, indeed, a diverse group of people in American society that must be understood as uniquely different from the civilian world” (Hall 5). In order to comprehend the depth of a service member’s loyalty to the military model, one must “consider why people join the military - There are four key reasons why young people make that life changing decision. These are (1) family tradition, (2) benefits, (3) identification with the warrior mentality, and (4) [to] escape” (Hall 5).

Mental health care practitioners should be well versed in military culture in order to properly promote a productive life to the patient (Hall 4). While Hall’s explanation is certainly not exhaustive—because of the many different facets of the military, a true cultural model would take years to complete—she accurately presents the core values of

the military: "Social workers can make a significant contribution to military service members and their families, but first it is essential that the worldview, the mindset, and the historical perspective of life in the military are understood" (4).

Hall also encourages practitioners to understand how the warrior mentality influences the minds of our military men and women. She informs her readers of the intensity of the psychological makeup that is accompanied with the "warrior mentality." "When a young women chose to join and then make the military a career (Hall, 2008), she said she came from a military family so she understood the culture and she explained that she was rather anxious about the possibility of living in the civilian world" (Hall, 6).

The aggressive mental state, in Hall's terms, provides "service members with security, identity, and a sense of purpose" (7). Moreover, "Throughout the history of warfare, combat is often seen as a test, and certainly in some cultures the test of manhood" (7) Understanding that the success of the mission is always placed above the selfish concerns of the individual service member, Hall explains, "It is also these concepts of honor and sacrifice that helps us understand the inherent stigma that is so predominant in the military. 'Military personnel are expected to 'soldier up' and get through the rough times on their own'" (15).

In an article in USA Today, Mary Beth Marklein states, "A 2010 Senate analysis found troubling withdrawal rates at eight for-profit colleges that enroll the largest number of veterans. Dropout rates for one company were as high as 69%." Although, according to Marklein, the numbers of not-for-profit schools are not typically recorded, she states that "the Post-9/11 GI Bill, enacted in 2008, has paved the way for hundreds of thousands

of recent veterans to enroll in college. Of 928,836 servicemembers who received federal education benefits last year, 555,329 served after 9/11, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs" (Marklein).

In *Called to Serve: A Handbook on Student Veterans and Higher Education*, Florence Hamrick, Corey Rumann and Associates also discuss how the post 9/11 GI Bill (Chapter 33) has allowed more veterans to go to school: "The Post-9/11 GI Bill, referred to as chapter 33 by the VA, is certainly the most financially generous education benefits package since World War II program and will likely have a significant impact on contemporary veterans... The new benefit pays tuition and fees in full at in-state tuition rate at a public institution or up to 17,500 per year at a private institution; provides a monthly housing allowance during the term of enrollment" (26).

"Colleges and universities, as well as higher education associations... recognize that student veterans and service members are a growing student population" (Hamrick 73). Through the recognition of different cultural and familial experiences, campuses might be able to help the student veteran population: "The ultimate aim of creating a campus that is 'veteran friendly' goes beyond establishing service offices or program and instead seek to transform the larger campus climate into one that is welcoming and attentive to the needs of enrolled service members, veterans, and family members" (Hamrick xvi).

"Although the benefits enable them to go to college, some veterans say it's the camaraderie and support they get on campus that determines whether they finish" (Marklein). The type of support needed, according to Marklein, is from other veterans who have similar life experiences: "Acevedo, who struggles with short-term memory

lapses caused by an explosion in 2006 outside Baghdad that hit him into a wall, is a campus success story... who offers what he calls 'little wrinkles and strategies' for navigating the red tape and managing coursework."

Larry Abraham, an NPR National Security Correspondent, talks about how although the Post 9/11 GI Bill has increased the number of veterans who are going to school, not all of them are having an easy time assimilating: "Yaw says many of the vets showing up at her door were the first in their families to go to college and they brought new challenges... 'So, I asked him how he was doing. And he said I can't get through the parking lot.' And he meant was, this space is not secure for me, given my training and combat experience."

Explaining the student veteran in further detail, Abraham states, "Many also bear scars from their years of service Dan Standage started in this office in 2008. He lost his vision while in the military, and as a blind student, the first thing Standage had to learn was how to ask for help." He later posits that this is not just an individual sentiment: "'The training that we received teaches us to be part of a team, not to be an individual,' says Standage. 'So anytime you do anything for yourself, it just feels awkward.'"

Hamrick, Rumann and Associates discuss the difference of today's veterans: "With respect to current enrolled service members and veterans, times have changed. For example, service members may experience multiple deployments and returns plus the corresponding withdrawals" (xii). The new student veteran, "...represent all five branches of the armed forces and a variety of affiliation statuses as military personnel or veterans, and also include officers and enlisted members at all ranks. Some student service

members are active duty personnel who are returning to campus after recent deployments in the Middle East and elsewhere" (Hamrick 43).

The student veteran is in a constant state of transition, navigating two different identities: "The common thread, however, is that all student service members experience transitions and, as a result, will face some level of challenge as they navigate between the roles and identities of student and service member. Although they speak about the transition between student and veteran, the authors also further complicate the issue of identity: "Women now constitute 14 percent of the active duty military force and 8 percent of the total force deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan; over 150,000 women have served in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2002," and these women, along with racial and LGBTQ veterans are also attending college (Hamrick 90).

In "Renewing Our Commitment to Connecting to Student Veterans," Kristy Liles Crawley discusses the importance of connecting to the student veteran: The increasing number of veterans entering our classrooms adds another layer of diversity to the already diverse classroom and prompts instructors to consider strategies for engaging student veterans" (20). She believes that an understanding is important for anyone who interacts with veterans at college campus: "Reading and discussing these recent works told from the point of view of veterans may help nonveterans to understand the wars and imagine themselves in the position of the soldiers.

"Many veterans experience frustration when they encounter civilians who are misinformed about events that have occurred in Afghanistan or Iraq" (Crawley 23).

Crawley firmly believes that by striving to understand veterans and their experiences, instructors will be more efficient in the classroom: "In an effort to support and retain

student veterans, instructors must continue to explore new approaches for connecting our student veterans" (24).

Abraham discusses a veteran's initiative that is underway at the University of Arizona: "At the University of Arizona in Tucson, vets and administrators built their own vets center... there's a couch, a TV and a bunch of computers. In the corner, clocks tick off the time in Baghdad, Kabul, Tucson, and Muskogee, Okla. That's where the government processes GI Bill Benefits." The center is built for veterans to have a space of their own: "Despite his baby face, Copeland, 29, is a lot older than many students on campus. Does he feel like an old man here? 'In classes, yes, I do,' he laughs. 'But up here [at the vets center], I feel right at home'"

Although the scholarship for student veterans in a specific space like the writing center is not a widely publicized topic, Marilyn J Valentino talks about veterans in writing programs in, *Serving Those Who Have Served: Preparing for Student Veterans in our Writing Programs, Classes and Writing Centers*: As writing teachers, we often serve on the front lines as student's first point of contact and often the most personal college experience. Thus we have a direct responsibility to be prepared ourselves in order to help veterans stay in college and be successful" (164).

"As writing program administrators, you can make a special impact. After all, you work with writing and, writing center staff, WID and WAC instructors, Directors of Special Needs Services, and hopefully Veteran Administrators" (Valentino 167). The benefit of communicating with all of these services, is that the veteran receives a higher level of combined support: "At the very least, you can educate others to avoid these three blunders: profiling all veterans as unstable, outing them in class (even with good

intentions, even after they have told you their status), or politicizing them or the war in discussion" (Valentino 167 -168).

Valentino posits, "Avoiding the topic of war altogether does not free us of our responsibilities, for general discussions can become awkward in small groups with veterans. As older students, veterans do consider themselves more mature and experienced, although in college, they certainly are experiencing a loss of status. Military culture affects their perceptions" (173). Veterans not only dislike associating with the traditional student body, but, as Valentino describes, "They like order. They get frustrated when the professor isn't in control. They may openly challenge teachers in class particularly, says Lisa Langstraat, if the instructor is a grad assistant and female. Do you see how this information and the chance to share experiences and resolutions would be useful in faculty workshops" (173).

"What surprised me in my research is that many student veterans may be reluctant to seek help at the Writing Center, which is outside their 'chain of command.' They'd rather go to the professor" (Valentino 174). Not seeking help from the tutors at the Writing Center, as Valentino explains, does not always stem from just a negative view of the writing center: "They also may feel that others need tutoring more, the same mindset of sacrificing in battle: when wounded to check others first. Teachers have to find ways to get them there if they need it" (174).

CHAPTER II

Adapt:

Remobilizing the Student Veteran

To understand the nature of veterans' changing identities and how they are affected when they remobilize into the civilian world, we must first understand how their identity is created and recreated through the implementation of testing situations (situations that validate and create titles) and the completion of military missions. We must also understand how to utilize the identities that are created in the military to ensure the Student Veterans' (SV) success in the civilian/academic worlds. For example, a defining feature of the Veteran/Military Member's identity is the need to serve the United States and to stand strong next to fellow service members during combat operations. By recreating this characteristic of the military identity, the administrator of a writing center is allowing for what I will call later, the implementation of a "testing situation," which will give the veteran the space he or she needs to reclaim their military identity and to grow into becoming a successful student veteran (SV). If we do not acknowledge the strengths of the military identity, we are subsequently telling the veteran to "transition" - a singular term that marginalizes the strengths of the military identity and places the unfamiliar (to the veteran) student persona at the forefront of the dominant discourse.

The Effects of Transition

The resistance and perception of the SV of not belonging to academic and civilian cultures has negative consequences. In a recent article, Moni Basu, a writer for CNN, reports on the VA's recent findings on the suicide rate among veterans. Basu explains the statistics posited by the VA: "Every day, 22 veterans take their own lives. That's a

suicide every 65 minutes,” Unfortunately, Baru explains. “As shocking as the number is, it may actually be higher.” The statistics, according to Baru, is skewed based on the methods the VA utilized to compile the data:

The figure, released by the Department of Veterans Affairs in February, is based on the agency’s own data and numbers reported by 21 states from 1999 through 2011. Those states represent about 40% of the U.S. population. The other states, including the two largest (California and Texas) and the fifth largest (Illinois), did not make data available. Who wasn’t counted?

The purpose of showing these statistics and how they are flawed, for the purpose of this thesis, is not to just bring awareness about the growing epidemic of suicide among our nation’s veterans, but instead, I want to show the dangers of exclusion and how it affects our returning veterans. The military identity, which should be considered as an important inclusion to an academic (student) identity, is what is in danger of being excluded through the process of transition.

In *Rhetoric of Motives*, Kenneth Burke explains that identity, being a rhetorical device may be dependent on how language is used in the dominant discourse: “ironically, with much college education today in literature and the fine arts, the very stress upon the pure autonomy of such activities is a roundabout way of identification with a privileged class” (1329). The service member who is now out of the military and who is new to the college environment may be unfamiliar to the discourse used in the college environment. Complete transition or assimilation to that what Burke describes as the privileged class (non-military) identity could equal academic failure. Burke describes how this identity is

rhetorical: “we are clearly in the region of rhetoric when considering the identifications whereby a specialized activity makes one a participant in some social or economic class. ‘Belonging’ in this sense is rhetorical” (1329). Without question, the rhetorical identification used in the military (Soldier, Marine, Sailor, Airman) creates a powerful and never-ending identity; Unfortunately, when a service member enters the college environment, no one expects him or her to be a Soldier, Marine, Sailor, or Airmen; in fact, soldiers are expected to, transition, to leave the life of the military and join the college life. The veteran is thus stuck in between worlds, constantly trying to move from one to the other.

Burke, explaining the link between two separate entities, utilizes the term consubstantiality (1325). He explains that two people who may be linked in some sort of way should still be seen as individuals: "Here are the ambiguities of substance. In being identified with B, A is 'substantially one' with a person other than himself. Yet at the same time he remains unique, an individual locus of motives. Thus he is both joined and separate, at once a distinct substance and consubstantial with another" (1325). The service member is thus both a veteran and a student; the need to transition to the dominant one is diminished. Both identities are brought together, through the concept of consubstantiality. Both identities are taken seriously: “Identification is affirmed with earnestness precisely because there is a division. Identification is compensatory to division. If men were not apart from one another, there would be no need for the rhetorician to proclaim their unity" (Burke 1326). If the service member is not able to become the SV, instead of just the service member or just the student, the strengths of the individual person (the identity) will not be recognized. The identity of the military and

the student must be considered as a dual identity – the student veteran has not been transitioned, instead the veteran has been remobilized to adapt to the college environment/culture he or she is now a part of.

I know that focusing on one word, transition, may seem to be too fastidious; however, it is important to understand the implications of language and how it represents the ideology of the dominant group. In “The ‘Ideograph’ a Link between Rhetoric and Ideology,” Michael Calvin McGee discusses the facade of group ideologies and the persuasive “ideographs” or rhetoric that is used to persuade or exclude their popularities: “An analysis of ideographic usages in political rhetoric, I believe reveals interpenetrating systems or ‘structures’ of public motives” (427). In other words, the language being used represents the motivations of a particular societal structure. McGee continues, “Such structures appear to be ‘diachronic’ and ‘synchronic’ patterns of political consciousness, which have the capacity both to control ‘power’ and to influence (if not determine) the shape and texture of each individual’s reality” (427). For a SV, both identities (Student and Veteran) need to work together instead of being forced through a singular stage of transition. McGee defines the difference in past and present social identities as “synchronic” and “diachronic.” In other words, the relationship of the historical past (diachronic) and rhetorical present (synchronic) language use is what defines an individual’s current ideologies: “One ideology is a ‘grammar,’ a historically-defined diachronic structure of ideographic meanings expanding and contracting from the birth of the society to its ‘present’” (434). The identities of a Student and a Veteran are what define the current diachronic structure of an SV. “Another ‘ideology’ is what is a ‘rhetoric,’ a situationally-defined synchronic structure of ideograph clusters constantly

reorganizing itself to accommodate specific circumstances while maintaining its fundamental consonance and unity” (McGee 434). In other words, the synchronic term, the term that has the ability to determine power, "transition," is being utilized by the academy to bring one identity (student) to the forefront of the academic world.

For the Writing Center, the use of this term, transition, represents the idea that service member's new identity must be based on the ideologies of the civilian world. The term, representing a singular action does not represent the need to carry on the traditions of the now past military identity. McGee posits that "Human Beings are 'conditioned,' not directly to belief and behavior but to vocabulary of concepts that functions as guides, warrants, reasons, or excuses for behavior and belief" (428). If the service member has been conditioned to understand a particular set of concepts, but is now expected to change his thought process, the ability for the SV to participate in the academic community and the likelihood of the SV isolating him or herself away from the civilian population is high.

In this chapter, you will see the word remobilization when I refer to the nature of a military service member moving from the military culture to college. This word represents the need to reflect the military culture in the process of collegiate acculturation. Burke explains how rhetorically alterations may be a social need: The *Rhetoric* deals with possibilities of classification in its *partisan* aspects; it considers the ways in which individuals are at odds with on eachother, or become identified with groups more or less at odds with one another” (1326). The term *transition* reflects the civilian culture’s idea that the service member needs to change to reflect the civilian ideals; however, the term remobilization rhetorically motivates the service member to

move from one mission to the other. This term includes the military identity in the civilian discourse.

Similar to when my battalion was mobilized and then remobilized for combat tour in Iraq, I am suggesting that instead of utilizing the term *transition*, the term *remobilization* be considered as a more appropriate definition. The service member, when leaving the military, is at danger of losing his or her identity; this identity is important in the success of any mission, which includes graduating from college. Burke posits, “Their very universality becomes transformed into a partisan weapon” (1327). The weapon Burke is talking about can be used for the betterment of the service member or it can be used as a tool for marginalization. The weapon we must choose to provide student veterans (SV) in their fight to earn their education lies within the process of remobilization.

Testing Situations

Each branch of the military is different with variations of training that all produce particular characteristics within the service members who carry with them specific titles that they have earned by experiencing various situations. For example, each branch gives out specific titles (Soldier, Marine, Sailor, Airmen) to the recruits who pass recruit training. Boot camp (another term for recruit training) is a testing situation that a recruit must pass in order to receive an important title, or even to be allowed to participate in the military discourse community. The title in, this case is rhetorical; it shows not only the military community, but also the civilian community that the service member has passed a test and has earned a title that now represents a new identity (Soldier, Marine, Sailor, Airmen). The military traits that are developed (discipline, drive, integrity, etc.) are traits

that are learned through the process of passing these testing situations. The recruits earned their titles by proving themselves worthy of being compared to service members who passes the same tests before them; in other words, the titles and honors that are received only exist due to the importance of the reality.

In "The Rhetorical Situation," Lloyd Blitzer discusses how the prominence of the discourse being used is dependent upon a variety of situations that are presented (218). Boot camp in this sense, is situational; the titles that are received bring importance to the passing of the testing situation: "In order to clarify rhetoric-as-essentially-related-to-situation, we should acknowledge a viewpoint that is common place but fundamental: a work of rhetoric is pragmatic; it comes into existence for the sake of something beyond itself; it functions ultimately to produce action or change in the world; it performs some task" (Blitzer 219). The action or change that is made is shown in the changing of the recruits' identity - they change from a civilian to a Soldier, Marine, Sailor, or Airmen. Blitzer explains that the validity or importance of the situation is shown by the rhetoric being used (219). The title in this case is rhetorical (it can be changed) and is very important to its recipients; it represents the hardships they have been through to receive their new title; it represents the testing situations they endured and passed, which allowed them to wear the uniform and call themselves a Soldier, Marine, Sailor, or Airmen to their fellow military service members and to the public who is unable, due to not being a part of the testing situation, to hold these specific titles. Blitzer's explanation of the rhetorical situation also accounts for what happens when a recruit is unable to pass the testing situations. Blitzer explains that, "While the existence of a rhetorical address is a reliable sign of the existence of a situation, it does not follow that a situation exists only

when the discourse exists” (217). In other words, the situation, or in this case, the passing of a testing situation, is what "...calls the discourse into existence" (218). If a recruit is unable to pass and obtain the discipline and strength of the military identity, they are unable to receive the appropriate titles.

After passing the initial testing situation, boot camp and receiving the appropriate title, the ability of the service member to retain the title is continuously tested. There are requirements to pass training exercises and combat situations. The title, through the explanation of the rhetorical situation is, is reconfirmed through the recurrence of testing situations: "Due to either the nature of things or convention, or both, some situations recur. The courtroom is the locus for several kinds of situations generating the speech of accusation, the speech of defense, the charge to the jury" (225). The courtroom, in Blitzer's explanation, represents the situation, and the persuasive nature of the discourse (the prosecution, defense, and the charge of the jury) all represent the discourse that is called into action. In the case of the service member, the testing situations are now collaborative in nature. The unit, representing a military ideology called unit cohesiveness, passes the testing situations together. Like the trials in the courtroom, the training and combat situations are all reoccurring; like the persuasiveness of the prosecution or defense, the military unit must work together against a negative force (the possibility of failure) to receive a specific title (like the charge of the jury).

In the case of the Veteran/Student who has remobilized to an academic environment from the military, the roles in the rhetorical situation are altered. The student identity, through the concept of transition, is placed over the military identity. When veterans are told to transition or change to civilian life, their cultural and rhetorical

situation changes, thus altering their identity and their perceptual agency. The reoccurrence of the military testing situations is no longer available, thus the strengths associated with the military can never be reconfirmed. Although one's agency can never be truly diminished, the perception of power may decrease or even restrain the actions of a student. A good example of how the perception of agency changes through the marginalization of identity is the example of a Low GPA. Although not damaging enough to actually cause a veteran to fail at being an efficient civilian, a low GPA can relate well to the measurement of perception of power through the passing or failing of testing situations. Identity is what helps determine whether or not the SV will have a change in attitude towards school and will have feeling of acceptance into the civilian/academic-world.

Utilizing Strategic Essentialism

To clarify my point of utilizing the strengths of the military identity, I understand that there are implications of essentializing the specific characteristics of the military identity to each individual. My point here is not to say that everyone's experience in the military is the same; instead, my aim is to explain that the different *collective* identities that are created by the military can be used to reaffirm the confidence of the SV. In "Post Colonial Interventions in the Rhetorical Cannon," Raka Shome utilizes Gayatri Spivak's notion of *Strategic Essentialism* to give a solution to the dangerous possibility of totalizing identity: "Spivak suggests that while it is true to engage in a postcolonial criticism that challenges the misrepresentations of racial 'others' in hegemonic discourse, one does to a certain extent end up essentializing, nonetheless that essentializing is only a

necessary 'strategic' essentializing - a risk that the critic must take in a scrupulously visible political interest..." (597).

The term essentialism is used to represent the inevitable action of placing a group of people in certain categories. The SV, for example, may be automatically placed into the category of a combat veteran who has PTSD. The essential stereotypes that would be associated with the SV would be the assumption that the veteran has been diagnosed with a mental disorder because of the things he or she has seen in combat; the assumption of need (or the way a tutor may simply approach the SV) is that this veteran needs to receive help through a singular process of *transition* where these characteristics, and subsequently the need for the military identity, would be essentially erased. The characteristics of the military identity, in other words, are seen as abnormal and not useful in the academic world. The returning service member is then transitioned or changed into a student (not an SV), leaving his or her confidence, discipline, and other similar characteristics out of the discourse practices of the writing center. The term strategic essentialism is utilized to combat the inevitability of essentializing a particular group. The writing center, in this case, would be creating services that recognize specific strengths of the military characteristics. "Strategic essentialism, then, is only a political tool that the postcolonial critic often has to adopt to resist any kind of hegemony" (597). The essentializing thus becomes tactical by the administrators and tutors, rejecting the common stereotypes of the SV, and becoming self-reflexive on their understanding and misconceptions, accept the specific military traits that would promote the advancement of the individual SV.

While it may be difficult to place the topic of SV into a post colonial discourse that focuses mainly on the marginalization of race, understanding that the cultural differences the SV has been accustomed to in the military don't readily fall into the dominant categories of discourse in the academic community will help connect the SV to Shome's definition of post colonialism: "It is about cultural indeterminacy and spaces in between. Resisting attempts at any totalizing forms of cultural understanding (whether imperialistic or nationalistic), the postcolonial perspective argues for a recognition of the 'hybrid locations of cultural values'" (594). In other words, the military identity of the SV, through Shome's definition of post colonialism, must be considered a cultural ideology that is at risk of being marginalized by the dominant discourse. Due to the extreme differences of the military and academic cultures, the difficulties in the classroom do not only come directly from the colonization of the military identity, but also when the Veteran is unsuccessful at school. If the identity of a service member is transitioned to the identity of a failing student then, as Shome states, "The postcolonial individual is thus cultureless and yet cultured because she or he exists in a culture of borderlands" (595). The Veteran is marginalized and left without an academic identity and without a uniform, thus left out of both worlds. Because the Soldier, Marine, Sailor, or Airmen have left the military and are no longer taking part in the cultural activities of the military, if he or she is expected to *transition* to the identity of a student, leaving behind the military traits of courage, honor, strength, drive, and discipline, the student becomes stuck in a liminal space where he or she is neither a student or a veteran.

The consequences of not utilizing the military identity in the academic environment also go beyond the service member not being successful in school. Shome

discusses the existence of hybrid locations – areas where individuals are stuck between cultures. She posits, “Living between two (or more) cultures or between two nations, and yet not being of either one, the postcolonial ‘subject’ is forced into a nomadic, diasporic position...” (595). Because this “nomadic position” is undefined through the ideology of transition, the veteran is left without the strengths of the military that could be carried to the identity of a student, thus creating the Student Veteran.

The language used in any given environment represents the motivations of a particular group of people; at a university, the language being used (when veterans are told to transition) represents the motivations of the academy, not the groups participating in the academic discourse. To be clear, Marines, Soldiers, Sailors, and Airmen, when told to transition, are stripped of a consciousness that defines the most powerful parts of their identity. Instead of being expected to co-exist through the process of remobilization in an environment as a Marine/Student, the military member is told to transition, void of any previous identity. Because the SV's strengths have been created and recreated through the process of military acculturation, not recognizing the military strengths that could aid in the success of the student should be considered detrimental to the continued success of the SV and writing center.

CHAPTER III

Overcome:

The Writing Center Tutor Corps

I started the Writing Center Tutor Corps as a way to not only promote the benefits of the writing center to the military/veteran population at Texas State University, but to also give veterans who feel separated from the academic environment a space that allows them to comfortably adapt to the norms of the civilian world. To be honest, I had never thought about the creation of a veteran-to-veteran tutoring program before early November 2012.

In late November 2012, I met Nancy Wilson, the Director of the Texas State Writing Center. Although Dr. Wilson was aware of the need for veteran's initiatives, like me, she hadn't thought about the creation of a veteran-to-veteran tutoring program. While our conversation started off with basic introductions, it didn't take long for Dr. Wilson to start asking questions about my unwillingness to utilize the writing center at my previous institution. Like any accomplished academic would, she started asking questions. She wanted to know not only why I was reluctant to use the writing services, but also what changes in the writing lab would have helped me to feel more comfortable; I told her about the many different reasons I had for becoming an isolated SV; I confessed to her that I would have been more comfortable utilizing the writing center if I knew that I could have been tutored by a fellow veteran. Without hesitation, she asked one question: Do you want to tutor veterans at the writing center?

While it might have seemed like any easy transition to start tutoring veterans at the Writing Center, the fact of the matter is that I didn't approach Dr. Wilson again until

another month had passed. After leaving Lockhart, I was unsure of not only myself, but I was uncertain that the writing center was the best place to approach some of the troubles with identity that veterans, including myself, had been experiencing. I knew from personal experience that the identity of a veteran is what is in danger of being lost when left alone in the civilian world. How can writing center help recreate the identity? How can the rhetoric of transition be altered to fit the idea of remobilization?

The Texas State University Writing Center Tutor Corps is a veteran-to-veteran tutoring program. As the Veterans Coordinator, I exclusively tutor veterans who enter the writing center. *In Called to Serve: A Handbook on Student Veterans and Higher Education*, Florence Hamrick, Corey Rumann, and Associates discuss how this type of structure does not exist for the SV: "The military's formal grouping of units and training conveys the military are more focused on unit and mission than they are on individual experiences; the college environment is quite the opposite" (59).

Developing Camaraderie

One purpose of the veteran-to-veteran tutoring is to help recreate the camaraderie that is evident in the military testing situations; in other words, when a veteran tutors another veteran, the concept of unit cohesion is recreated. The writing center becomes a critical (tactical) point within the university. When a veteran walks into my office, he or she may be stuck on the completion of an assignment; it is my job to run to the aid of the veteran, giving him or her a chance to get back in the fight. The writing center, in other words, is a place where a *unit* develops strategy; the veteran leaves this critical point in order to continue on his or her mission of graduating.

In a USA Today article entitled, "After Service, Veterans Go on to College," Mary Beth Marklein discusses that although the government provides veterans with education benefits, an SV is more likely to succeed if they feel the same sense of camaraderie they felt in the military: "Although the benefits enable them to go to college, some veterans say it's the camaraderie and support they get on campus that determines whether they finish (Marklein). The type of support needed is from other veterans who have similar life experiences. It is important to note that I do not believe that "civilian" tutors are unable to tutor veterans; however, the camaraderie that SV feel is more likely to be recreated in a veteran-to-veteran environment.

A critical point, as I discuss in Chapter I, is a strategic point that a unit utilizes as a safe zone in its completion of a mission. For my battalion, the critical point was the train station to the north of Fallujah; for the SV, the critical point is now the writing center; the mission of graduating is partially conducted within its walls. If we consider that veterans may not feel like they are a part of either the military or academic worlds (they are stuck in a liminal space), then the creation of a critical point in the writing center makes sense. The critical point is a place where the SV can be reconnected to the military culture, giving them the strength to become successful in the civilian world.

An Airman whom I tutor on a weekly basis first entered my office asking for help on every paper that he would be writing that semester. The Airmen informed me that I was his last hope. He professed that he had been in the Air Force for 9 years and was now pursuing his Master's Degree. He let me know that he had already contemplated quitting school and was thinking about going back to the previous job he had in the Air Force. He did not tell me that school was hard or that he had other priorities; in fact, he only wanted

help on APA formatting. Because this Airman has been able to meet with me in the writing center, he has since forgotten about the idea of quitting. In an email, he let me know, "Thank you for your continued help and support. Knowing that you are here and willing to help makes this process exponentially less anxiety provoking."

In fall 2013, I presented information on the student veteran to other tutors across the Texas State University Campus. My presentation started with what I like to call a "shock and awe" beginning. I do this not to scare the tutors who are listening, but instead, I want them to be able to understand the mindset of some of the returning veterans who may or may not utilize their services:

My name is Corporal Micah Wright, and I am walking into your writing center; I want you to know one thing - I don't like you! You make me nervous. I have been forced to come here by some PhD who thinks you can help me. What the hell are you going to teach me? I just walked through the quad with a thousand kids who are just like you - you are nothing but a punk college kid to me who hasn't served anything but himself for the last couple years. I served my country on three combat tours, serving with the Marine Corps Infantry. What the hell have you done to serve your country? How the hell are you going to teach me? You better know the answer, and you better be confident, or I will not return to this writing center.

Now without pointing the obvious fallacies in my thinking, I explain to the tutors, after shocking them enough, that this was how I considered the tutors and supplemental

instructors at my undergraduate institution when I started college right after the Marine Corps. The anxiety of veterans was not the norm of the dominant society, so the university and the writing center had not considered it when designing their facilities. And veterans are less likely to admit what they may deem to be a weakness – a fact that is perpetuated by the belief that veterans, who are anxious, are mentally ill:

“Unfortunately Most Americans, including those in the military and VA, believe that all the vets need, once diagnosed is to be sent behind therapists closed doors...” (Caplan 281). This line of thinking is what leads veterans to feel outside of the norms of society.

Considerations of Safety

When a writing center is unprepared and unaware of its veterans, the recreation of testing situations is unavailable, and the veteran might be less compelled to enter the writing center or to even seek help with an assignment. If we consider that the stability of the veteran's identity is based on the success of the mission, the implications of receiving a failing grade on a paper are worse than that of traditional student. I didn't want to seek help at the Writing Center not because I was unaware of the importance of turning in a well-written paper; instead, I was less convinced that the tutors were adequate enough to help me with my "mission." I needed a critical point for me to “stage an assault;” I needed a safe environment that would allow me to regroup and continue on my mission of graduating.

Last year a Student Veteran (SV) made an appointment with one of the writing center's experienced tutors. The SV entered the writing center needing to work on a paper. (At this point SV has yet to identify himself to any of the tutors as a veteran.) The SV sits on the couch in the waiting area with his back to the corner of the room, facing

the door - a fact that is important to remember, because combat veterans rarely like to have their backs to a possible avenue of approach. Still not identifying himself as a Veteran, the SV silently and nervously sits and waits for his assigned tutor to greet him for his tutorial. After a few minutes, the tutor accompanies the SV to one of the cubicles in which sessions are normally conducted. Note: the cubicles are small individual areas that are enclosed - the tutor sits with his or her back to a big window, and the tutee sits facing the window (where there is often a lot of movement) with his or her back to the door of the cubicle. Recognizing the increase in danger, the SV denied the tutor's request to move. The SV requested that the session occur in the corner of the room where he had been waiting. Fortunately, the tutor, being as experienced as she is and understanding the need for a comfortable space to learn in, graciously accepted the student's request; at this point the student identified himself as a Veteran.

There are a few points to consider here. First, the student didn't automatically identify himself as a combat veteran to the tutors at the lab; while this may not seem like a big deal to some, it is important to remember how a student forms his or her learning preferences is sometimes based on life experiences. Hamrick posits, "Similarly Livingston (2009) found that service members very selectively disclosed their military experiences to others because they wanted to be known as college students rather as student service members" (57). The veteran may not have disclosed his service connection because of feeling uncomfortable in the space he was in and not knowing the tutor very well (the veteran might be weary of political status). Upon walking in the door, the student automatically viewed the writing center as an unsafe place - a fact represented by him putting his back to the wall and his face towards the door; this not only creates a

poor learning environment for the student, but it also runs the risk of damaging the veteran's identity if the problem is not rectified. Lastly, the veteran was keen in noticing the increase in danger if he moved to the cubicle (the move would not have been tactically efficient). The tutor was lucky that the veteran felt comfortable to deny the request.

If the writing space I enter is focused on the singular term "transition," instead of recognizing the progressive nature of my transitioning personality, and I am not a "successful" student, then my voice becomes silent in a homogenous academy; in other words, I have failed the test of my reality, and my cultural identity is subsequently damaged. The idea of singularity in creating a space in the writing center diminishes the writing center's ability to preserve the identities of a diverse population. If the student in the previous example had not felt comfortable enough to request a different learning space, the tutoring lesson would have been unsuccessful, and the veteran would have run the risk of failing. To help SVs, the writing center must consider and the tutoring space being utilized and investigate the negative and positive rhetorical effects that space might have on veterans.

"Creating conditions on campus for veterans and service members to succeed requires that college administrators and faculty members understand how to create better outcomes for this student population by creating environmental or cultural bridges to help students make meaning of their previous and current ways of being in light of the expectations of college life" (Hamrick 82). Writing centers must consider the perception of the Student-Veteran who enters the writing center space. Because the writing center at Texas State had not employed many veterans before, they had not considered how a

veteran might perceive space. For a civilian, the task of understanding the military becomes more difficult; according to Hamrick, Rumann, and Associates, "...campuses are likely to home some faculty or staff who serve or have served in the military. These individuals can their credibility to an institution's message about supporting student veterans and service members" (270). For me understanding the concepts of safety is easy: I simply do this by remembering what it means to be a veteran who is just entering the college environment.

The Writing Center's Role

So what can a writing center do to help SVs? Unfortunately for the veteran and for the instructor, the military identity (unless you are in the midst of a discourse with someone in uniform) is not easily recognized – a fact that needs to be considered when a veteran walks into a writing center. Think of a person who is in a "transition period," between cultures, and whose identity is not marked by color or nationality; this person is in academic limbo, lingering behind a shroud of cultural understanding. I have entered classrooms where the instructor was completely oblivious of my military affiliation; subsequently, when the tutor is unaware of one's veteran-status, he or she will be unable to create an academic environment suited to the military culture. Shome expresses the importance of this self reflexive understanding: "...it requires seeing ourselves not sequestered in an academic institution, but connecting things that we think or not think, say or not say, teach or not teach, to the larger political and ideological practices of our nations in their interactions with the rest of the world" (596). Directors, Coordinators, and tutors must make an effort to not only understand the military/students in their classrooms, but they must also strive to comprehend how they approach this different

culture; the words instructors choose, and the actions they make need to be directed at the advancement of the veteran with a mission to graduate from college.

When I first started as the Veterans Coordinator at Texas State, I was introduced with a precarious moment when I walked into the writing center and found that a series of anti-war art pieces had displayed on the walls of the lab; my Director asked how veterans would feel about these pieces. My first inclination, surprisingly, was that the art pieces should stay on the walls. As an educator, I believe free speech, especially in an area where students write, is incredibly important. However, as a Veteran, I was annoyed and frustrated at the political statements. Although I have never believed that war is a good thing, I have understood that in the midst of combat, the political statements against the war were often construed as political statements against the Soldier, Marine, Sailor, or Airmen. Although the art pieces were from a veterans group that was against the war, I had to consider the implications of the political pieces being in front of my office, a place that serves veterans and is not a political arena. The perceptions of SV population had to be at the forefront my thought

The symbols that were placed in front of my office, while construed as innocent to some, may be construed as an offensive gesture to veterans who entering the writing center to receive with their papers, not to discuss the various political topics of the day. In “Renewing our Commitment to Connecting to Student Veterans,” Kristy Liles Crawley states, “Many veterans experience frustration when they encounter civilians who are misinformed about events that have occurred in Afghanistan or Iraq” (23). When trying to connect to and retain the student veteran in the writing center, directors and administrators must work to “...explore new approaches for connecting to student

veterans” (Crawley 24). It is important to note, that after informing my Director of the impending failure of retaining veterans in the writing center should the political art stay on the walls, she insisted that they be taken down immediately. This type of discussion is what needs to occur when the retention of veterans is being considered

In order to consider how symbols like the political posters are perceived, directors and administrators should not only consider what the veteran may feel in response to the posters, but they should also consider their own reasons for displaying the political images. Shome utilizes Gayatri Spivaks’ notion of “Strategic Essentialism” to represent this need self reflexivity: “Spivak suggests that while it is true that to engage in a postcolonial criticism that challenges the misrepresentations of racial ‘others’ in hegemonic discourses, one does to a certain extent end up essentializing, nonetheless that essentializing is only a necessary ‘strategic’ essentializing” (597). In other words, the military identity should be recognized and utilized within the writing center in order to help the veteran succeed. When the culture of the military is misrepresented through highly politicized statements and symbols, the ambition of helping our veterans become successful becomes a more arduous task.

Annie Rose Badder, a student at the university of West Georgia states, “I served in the navy for eight years and though I have never been on a real deployment (such as Iraq or Afghanistan), I’ve seen and experienced things that other people my age would not be able to relate to” (114). Badders view, like mine, separates her from the rest of the student population – a fact that might leave her feeling distant from the civilian world: “During that time, I felt alone and nobody could possibly understand what I was going through. Overnight, I went from military acronyms to civilian jargon. Instead of stepping

out of my comfort zone, I had taken a flying leap” (115)! If Balder’s identity as a Sailor would have been recognized in the discussions she had with faculty and administrators, the school services would have been able to essentialize the confidence she had in the Navy, so that she could direct it towards her school work.

Our comprehensions of someone’s cultural identity are automatic, and a rhetorical power structure is inadvertently created between the writing center (tutor) and the student. Through the concept of essentialism, my military identity not only informs my pedagogical needs, but it also drives my educational goals; if this identity goes unnoticed and I am expected just to conform to the academy, I will be left at the bottom of an antiquated hierarchy without power. However, if a writing center is prepared for veterans, then the inhabitants of the created space will be able to strategically recognize their own biases and misunderstandings; at this point, the power structure placed upon the transitioning veteran can be altered.

Creating a Battalion

The recreation of unit cohesion and identity just through veteran-to-veteran tutoring unfortunately is not enough. Although I may be able to relate well to a veteran sitting across from me, making the veteran feel less anxious about receiving help, I have not completely recreated identity through cohesion - I have simply created camaraderie, which is just a small part of unit cohesion. The Marines in my platoon, who helped pull me from my mangled Humvee, were not only acting on the idea that I was a fellow Marine; they were also acting because I was a part of the same battalion (unit) and same mission. I had trained for combat with these Marines for countless hours. We had

endured the same testing situations - and were proud to be a part of the 3rd Battalion 1st Marines (3/1), the Thundering Third.



Fig 1.0 Depiction of the 3rd Battalion 1st Marine Regiment Symbol

Every Marine in my battalion proudly wore t-shirts, tattoos, and other forms of identifying marks to show their allegiance to 3/1. Being proud to be a part of your unit and showing off that pride is a part of what creates camaraderie; this symbol, in other words, creates an ideology of service, cohesion, and brotherhood/sisterhood to the other Marines who bear the mark.

In Chapter Two, I explained how the identity of a military service member is created and recreated through testing situations. Boot camp, training, and combat are all examples of this testing situation. However, because these testing situations are obviously more common in the military, recreating these situations in the writing center becomes increasingly more difficult. The testing situation that a veteran takes part in is different than the situation a civilian is a part of. Because the testing situation (combat, training, etc.) has been altered to reflect the dominant civilian population, then the affirmation of being a Soldier, Marine, Sailor, or Airmen is lost within the writing center walls. McGee

talks about how ideologies are created, rhetorically, through the invention of ideographs or representations of certain belief structures: “The important fact about ideographs is that they exist in real discourse, functioning clearly and evident as agents of political consciousness. They are not invented by observers; they come to be as a part of the real lives of the people whose motives they articulate” (7). So the motives of the Marines who helped me when I was wounded were articulated by the cohesion of my battalion. The marks of 3/1 persuaded them to act cohesively in response to the testing situation.

Recreating this in the writing center was challenging because the unit I was a part of has a history that dates back before the Korean War. Making a symbol that represents a unit requires an understanding of the different parts of unit’s symbol. For example, the bull in the picture of the 3/1 symbol is moving forward and is emitting smoke through its nostrils – this depiction not only shows a powerful animal, but it also shows this animal in action. This represents the mission-oriented mindset of the service member:

“Throughout the history of warfare, combat is often seen as a test, and certainly in some cultures the test of manhood” (7) In other words, The aggressive mental state, in Hall’s terms, provides “service members with security, identity, and a sense of purpose” (7).

Not shown in the picture is the term “Semper Fidelis,” which means “Always Faithful.” This motto of the Marine Corps promotes the idea of unit cohesiveness – a Marine is “faithful” to his fellow Marines.

Representing the titles associated with the bull, the name of the battalion curves above, completing the ideograph or symbol of the 3/1 Marine’s identity. “Understanding the military culture of armed service organizations provides insight about the lenses which enrolled veterans and services members may view and interpret higher education

environments” (Hamrick 75). Therefore, the unit cohesive environment that is created in the writing center must not only be represented through direct language, but it also should be represented visually, giving the veteran a new symbol to carry through his or her time in college.



Fig 1.1 The Symbol of the Writing Center Tutor Corps

The image that was created for the Tutor Corps incorporated the same type of imagistic rhetoric that the 3/1 symbol incorporated. The eagle, a symbol of knowledge, is perched with its wings in motion – an image that I hoped would represent the need for veterans to continue with their academic mission, despite of certain challenges. Above the eagle are the words “Semper Bellator,” which in Latin means “Always the Warrior.” I consider the bull, in the 3/1 logo, to represent my warrior spirit; because I felt that I had lost the warrior spirit when I first started feeling distant from the civilian world, I wanted to ensure that the motto for the program promoted the feeling of the warrior spirit.

Finally, like the 3/1 logo, the symbol is surrounded by the unit's name: "Writing Center Tutor Corps."

When students enter the Tutor Corps office, they are automatically presented with shirts, posters, and other items that utilize this marker; everything having to do with the implementation of the program is first represented by the Tutor Corps logo. As McGee observes, community is formed when "each member of the community is socialized, conditioned, to the vocabulary of ideographs as a prerequisite for 'belonging to the society'" (15).

After successfully creating a symbol for the Tutor Corps, my next goal was to market the new veteran-to-veteran tutoring as a program that helps Soldiers, Marines, Sailors, and Airmen with the testing situation of writing a paper. I wanted to show veterans through text and images that I was able and willing to watch their backs as they pursued higher education (See Figure 1.2). The poster was created to promote the Writing Center Tutor Corps and the veteran-to-veteran tutoring that was being offered. The picture in the poster is of my section (I took the picture in 2004) heading out the gate of Abu Ghraib Prison on patrol.

I used the image at Abu Ghraib to depict the start of the testing situation: just like the Marines are heading together out into a combat environment, student veterans are preparing to test themselves by writing an academic paper. The picture also represents the presence of the identity a veteran is at danger of losing in a homogenous academic environment: "The subtle display of military affiliation by the very student service members who were trying to blend in can imply that their military identities remain important" (Hamrick 58).

WRITING CENTER TUTOR CORPS VETERANS TUTORING VETERANS

Are you losing sleep over writing a paper?

**"I don't lose any sleep at night
over the potential for failure. I
cannot even spell the word."**



- General James "Mad Dog" Mattis

SEMPER BELLATOR

All Veterans who are attending Texas State are able to schedule an appointment with the Writing Center's Veterans Coordinator/Tutor:

Phone: 512.245.4185
Email: mcw63@txstate.edu

Hours: Tues and Thurs 8 – 5
Mon 3 – 5:30

Fig 1.2 The Marketing Poster for the Writing Center Tutor Corps

The combination of the question ("Are you losing sleep over writing a paper") and the quotation from General Mattis ("I don't lose any sleep at night over the potential for failure. I cannot even spell the word") connects the military and civilian worlds. I wanted to combine the need to utilize the writing center with the veterans' need to

reclaim identity through a testing situation. If the veteran fears failing because of a paper, he or she will know that the Writing Center Tutor Corps was designed as a collaborative way, veteran-to-veteran, to complete the mission of receiving a good grade. The inclusion of the Writing Center Tutor Corps' logo and motto are examples of the continuity of unit cohesion.

The Creation of a Space

When I created the program, one of the biggest issues I took into account was the issue of space. I thought back to the day when I entered the writing center at my undergraduate institution. I was concerned with not only being able to face the door, but I was also concerned with the large window that was behind me. As discussed in Chapter 2, the elements of space are concerning because of the danger that veterans are used to experiencing:

Whether or not we have ever listened to a vet describe what it was like to be at war, we've all seen war movies or clips on TV, so we may think we know. But if we have not been there ourselves, it's a good bet that at some point while watching a video... we go numb, tune out, stop watching. Vets can try to go numb, and some do, but as soldiers they were not free to escape the scene. (Caplan 527)

I took into account how the rooms at the Texas State Writing Center were set up and imagined how I would react when if I were sitting with a tutor. My intentions were not to change or modify the existing rooms: I wanted to, if necessary, create a room separate from the existing cubicles that would serve as an exclusive military space.



Fig 2.0 The Normal Tutoring Cubicle at the Writing Center

The cubicle space represented in figure 2.0 shows a space that would be daunting for veterans with anxiety issues to enter. The tutor sits with his or her back to the window facing the door of the cubicle; the veteran sits with his or her back to the door, or avenue of approach, of the cubicle and faces a large window, which would indeed be a distraction with all of the people walking by.

The Writing Center Tutor Corps office is at the end of the hall across from the cubicles. Although the veteran typically sits with is or her back to the door, and I sit facing the door (see Fig 2.1), I am able to, as another veteran, watch their back. I am also able to, in some cases, close the door, shutting off the world that makes them nervous. My room is filled with symbols of the military culture: American Flags, Military Posters,

military awards (See Fig 2.2). My office also has a statue of an owl, representing the symbol of the Tutor Corps (See Fig 2.1).

According to Hamrick, “higher education administrators should work to create symbols and messages within their campus cultures that indicate to veterans and service members that they are respected, appreciated, and welcomed” (Hamrick 82). Although the symbols within the Tutor Corps office may be generalizing the concepts of patriotism and sacrifice, the motifs that are essentialized are used to promote the same feelings of power and confidence that are evident in the military population. The flags and the posters all represent and honor their service to our country; the awards I have on the wall are my promotion warrant to Corporal, my Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal, and my Purple Heart – these awards serve as an assurance to the veteran that the person who is tutoring them understands who they are and where they come from.



Fig 2.1 An Image of the WCTC Office



Fig 2.2 A Different View of the WCTC Office

These environmental messages are critically related to how this student population will be socialized into campus communities. When a veteran enters the Tutor Corps office, the characteristics of strength, unity, and confidence are strategically essentialized and the veteran becomes an active part in the writing center community.

Teaching and Mentoring

The veterans who enter my office typically tell me the same thing: “the civilian tutors in the lab do not know how to teach; they won’t even answer my questions.” Although I was upset to hear this, I thought back to when I was an undergraduate and the reasons I posited for not going to the writing center: I never imagined that a college student, who wasn’t a professor, could teach me anything. In *Serving Those Who Have Served: Preparing for Student Veterans in our Writing Programs, Classes and Writing Centers*, Marilyn J Valentino talks about veterans in writing programs: “As writing teachers, we often serve on the front lines as student’s first point of contact and often the most personal college experience. Thus we have a direct responsibility to be prepared

ourselves in order to help veterans stay in college and be successful” (164). By understanding the military culture, a tutor can adapt and overcome and form the pedagogy to meet the needs of the veteran. “What surprised me in my research is that many student veterans may be reluctant to seek help at the Writing Center, which is outside their 'chain of command.' They'd rather go to the professor” (Valentino 174). The perception of the veteran is that they would rather receive help from the professional.

But is this all a matter of perception? Do veterans actually believe that a tutor is unable to teach, or are they speaking from experience? Recently, I had a female veteran who made an appointment with me after swearing to never return to the writing center. She came to me because she had been very unhappy with her past appointments. She told me, “They never answer my questions.” So I asked, “What questions did they not answer?” Believing at this point that veterans’ reluctance to receive tutoring was a matter of perception, I was surprised to hear her answer. She told me that she had asked how to format a paper in APA. The tutor, who is more experienced in MLA, first asked the veteran what she knew about APA and informed the veteran that they would need to look the answer up together, but that would happen after the two of them read over her paper first. The tutor delayed finding an answer to the veteran’s question; the veteran tuned out and never wanted to return.

The problem here was not that the veteran had a preconceived notion of the tutor, the problem originated when the tutor did not work to address the needs of the tutee and failed to ask if her chosen method of instruction was in fact teaching this veteran. In the military, learning is done in a straight-forward environment. The service member teaching the class asks a question and expects to hear an answer; the scenario would be

the same if the student asked a question - the teacher would answer and then move to an explanation. In this case of the civilian tutor and the SV, the pedagogy being utilized is actually excluding the veteran. If the tutor follows the paradigm that reviewing content should come first before grammar and formatting, the veteran's perception may change to a negative view of the tutor. The big issue that is ignored when instructing SV is that the military is a very direct and collaborative place, which is different from the academic culture: "Many student service members characterized college culture as loose, independent, and self directed, whereas the military was characterized by its rigidity, structure, formality, conformity, and uniformity" (58). When the veteran informed the tutor that APA was the concern of the day, the tutor should have addressed the question first; instead, she answered indirectly (with a question) and lost the trust of the veteran.

When the veteran entered my office and informed me that she needed help on APA. I immediately informed her that we would work on APA first, and then we would go over her paper to look for ways to improve her writing. As a writer, I firmly believe that content should be the most important part of the paper; however, without acknowledging the question from the SV, I may not be able to go over content. Essentially, I flip the traditional paradigm of "content first." When discussing the different aspects of APA formatting, I was very direct with my explanations. I showed her how to create a running head, a title page, reference page, etc. I ensured that I never answered any of her questions with a question (Socratic Method). If she is breaking the chain of command (not going to see the professor), I need to make sure that she trusts me as a tutor; the fact that I am a fellow veteran is not the only way I must gain trust. I must ensure that I inform her confidently and directly, or she will consider my services to be

obsolete and she will isolate herself from the writing center. The last half of the session was spent showing her different ways that she could improve the content of her paper; she returns to my office for regular appointments.

Unfortunately, there are few writing services that are aimed at helping specifically veterans: “Regrettably, Alexis Hart and Roger Thompson in their 2011 CCCC study of institutional support in writing classrooms found that only 3% of the 439 CCCC members surveyed were aware of any such groups on campus” (Valentino 169). What this means is that tutors and teachers alike have to be committed to doing their homework on available veterans resources on campus. The tutors and many of the teachers at the Texas State Writing Center are aware of the Tutor Corps program and routinely refer SVs to it. However, tutors and teachers must also understand and recognize through speech and actions the culture of military.

As stated before, non-military students and teachers may have a hard time recognizing the military culture. This is why the creation of the Writing Center Tutor Corps is vital to the success of SV in the Writing Center. By creating a Critical Point, I have extended veterans’ familiar spaces to include the writing center. The culture, the pedagogy, the space, and the language all take the SV into consideration. However, the writing center does not have to be the only critical point that is created. The veteran-to-veteran tutoring model that I have created can be, and should, utilized in tutoring labs across the discipline.

CHAPTER IV

Conclusion

I am a Marine – there is no doubt in my mind. Even after being a part of the civilian world for seven years, I still prefer the military culture to the civilian life. Being the Veterans Coordinator and creator of the Writing Center Tutor Corps has been an experience that has taught me a lot about myself. I found that even when I tutor and mentor veterans, I in turn gain a better understanding of myself as a veteran and as a student. In a way, part of this program is my own selfish ambition to obtain the military identity; I feel like a veteran when I am with other veterans.

I would be remiss to tell you that this topic is incredibly important to me. My passion to help veterans is not based solely on the simple fact that I served in the military. I have seen the worst parts of this world; I have experienced the greatest kinds of victory only through experiencing the ultimate kind of sacrifice. At the end of 2006, I left the Marine Corps bitter about the world in front of me. I entered the college environment with equal amounts of confidence and low self esteem – I knew that I was perfectly capable of accomplishing the task at hand, but I was daunted by the unfamiliar place I would be residing. Imagine a task that you are confident in completing, but then imagine that a minefield stands between you and that task. Wouldn't you avoid the minefield?

This issue is beyond statistics for me: between 2006 and 2011, two veterans with whom I served in the Marines committed suicide. I blame myself for these deaths; I carry them with me in everything that I do. I know that I did not have a direct impact on whether or not they survived this world, but the fact of the matter is that I did nothing. As a member of a community of veterans, I was placed in civilian world alone; my survival

rate started off as low as anyone who leaves the military. I was affected emotionally by being disconnected from the military and feeling socially separated from the civilian population – I told no one of my true feelings, and no one asked how I felt. I became isolated in school because there wasn't another veteran in place to guide me in the right direction. Once I became successful in my undergraduate degree, as member of a community, I did not reach out to help other veterans.

The Writing Center Tutor Corps is my way of reaching out to the military/veteran community. In “After Tactics, What Comes Next?” Paula Mathieu discusses the need to form community-based projects that are aimed at making a difference: “The crux of my argument in *Tactics of Hope* is that rather than starting all community projects from the lens of university needs or mission, we might begin service-learning or other engaged forms of public rhetoric within universities from a *tactical* approach, which relies on personal relationships, mutual needs, and a shred sense of timing” (17). Mathieu is explaining more than just the need for tactical projects and how they have the propensity to foster community partnerships (she talks about this idea in more depth in *Tactics of Hope*) (17). Mathieu is positing that these programs need to address the *current* need of the community being helped. The Tutor Corps’ main purpose is to recreate the camaraderie between service members who are in a college environment by creating critical points for the veteran to regroup and recharge. By accomplishing this, the strength and power of the veteran is strategically essentialized and combined with the identity of the student. The need for this service is right now and in order to promote the health of the community, this process is paramount.

Thoughts on Sustainability

When I started tutoring veterans at the writing center, I was fully aware of the probabilities of success with the creation of a veteran-to-veteran program. There was definitely risk involved: What if veterans don't utilize the program? I was worried of its success not only because WCTC is a program that I created, but also because I truly want to help veterans succeed in college/civilian worlds. Unfortunately, the problems with risk are that there will never be an accurate measurement. How could I tell how successful the program could be, and more importantly, how could I convince the university administrators of the programs pending success?

The creation of this program and the continuation of this program both have the same simple purpose: to help student veterans. When discussing the end of her community literacy program, Mathieu posits, "theoretically, working from a tactical approach to community service – one that prizes rhetorical appropriateness to respond to a need or opportunity, and to change or end when that need changes – the ending of my work at *Spare Change* should not have been surprising or even cast as failure" (22). Mathieu is explaining not only the importance of her program, but she is also explaining that her program was only good while it was relevant to the need.

The Writing Center Tutor Corps, as of now, is responding well to the needs of the SV; however, as the needs change, the program must adapt and overcome to stay relevant and to always remember that the point is to help veterans succeed. In the second semester of my tutoring, I was introduced to a soldier who had experienced some rough times after separating from the Army. He wanted me to look at his memoir, which he had started to write a couple of years back. Unfortunately, he had lost steam and had stopped writing. When he came into my office, he was under the impression that I was going to help him

revise the work he had done thus far. Instead, I told him that I really enjoyed his story and had found a lot of inspiration in how he told it. He was uninhibited; he wrote cathartically with description and emotion. I was inspired because I have experienced difficulty in writing about my experiences in combat. In fact a lot of veterans I know have the same difficulty. I told the veteran to continue writing, that his story was important because it had the possibility of inspiring other veterans like it inspired me. He wrote me the following email after leaving my office: "I just wanted you to know that I sat down tonight, put on some Waylon and started writing again. Thanks for the conversation today." He is now planning on helping other veterans write cathartically.

In the fall of 2013, a female veteran came to me for help on an assignment. We worked on the paper for about thirty minutes. Towards the end of the tutorial, she confessed to me that she did not feel like a veteran. She pointed at my Purple Heart hanging on my wall and said, "I never did anything like that." I immediately let her know that she is definitely a veteran, and she informed me that all she ever did was "turn wrenches." "I was a POG (Personnel Other than Grunt)," she told me. Considering that we live in a society with images of veterans where they are equated to images of Rambo in the civilian world, this veteran very keenly realized that she did not fit in to the idea of what a veteran is. I let her know that when I received that Purple Heart, I was medevac'd on a helicopter and C130 aircraft that required a "wrench turner" to ensure that it worked properly; I let her know that the up-armored Humvee that saved my life by absorbing most of the blast from the landmine worked because of a POG. I made sure that before she left my office, she knew that another veteran appreciated her service to this country. She returns to my office regularly for appointments.

The purpose of telling these stories is to promote the idea that veterans are better helped when they are reunited with their community of veterans. As I stated before, a Marine is never alone in combat, so why should a singular idea of transition be promoted within the walls of not only a writing center, but also with the confines of society? Is it not important to serve the warriors who so bravely served this country? With programs like WCTC, veterans will have a space to eliminate the need to navigate the minefields of the college environment.

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