

Theses and Dissertations

---

2018

**"The mission always comes first": a phenomenological study of active military students in online community college courses**

Marilyn Brock

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/etd>

---

**Recommended Citation**

Brock, Marilyn, ""The mission always comes first": a phenomenological study of active military students in online community college courses" (2018). *Theses and Dissertations*. 929.  
<https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/etd/929>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by Pepperdine Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Pepperdine Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [bailey.berry@pepperdine.edu](mailto:bailey.berry@pepperdine.edu).

Pepperdine University  
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

“THE MISSION ALWAYS COMES FIRST”: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY  
OF ACTIVE MILITARY STUDENTS IN ONLINE COMMUNITY COLLEGE COURSES

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership, Administration and Policy

by

Marilyn Brock

April, 2018

Anthony Collatos, Ph.D. – Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

Marilyn Brock

under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Doctoral Committee:

Anthony Collatos, Ph.D., Chairperson

Linda Purrington, Ed.D.

Doug Leigh, Ph.D.

© Copyright by Marilyn Brock (2018)

All Rights Reserved

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES.....	viii
DEDICATION.....	ix
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.....	x
VITA.....	xi
ABSTRACT.....	xii
Chapter 1. Introduction.....	1
Background .....	1
Problem Statement .....	4
Purpose Statement.....	5
Research Questions .....	6
Theoretical Framework.....	6
Definition of Terms.....	7
Active duty.....	7
Cognitive conflict .....	7
Conflicts .....	7
Conflict of work/ life balance .....	7
Congruence.....	8
Deployment.....	8
Educational progress .....	8
Enrichment.....	8
Facilitation.....	8
Inter role conflict .....	8
Motivational factors.....	9
Online course.....	9
Reflective thinking .....	9
Resilience .....	9
Spillover.....	9
State of resiliency.....	9
Supports.....	9
Operational Definitions.....	9
Conflict of work/ life balance .....	9
Inter role conflict .....	10
Importance of the Study .....	10
Delimitations and Limitations ..	10
Assumptions .....	11
Organization of the Study .....	11
Summary .....	12

Chapter 2. Review of Literature.....	13
Introduction.....	13
Themes.....	14
What Do We Know about Online Learning in the Military .....	14
Motivations.....	16
Supports.....	17
Conflicts.....	17
Online Course Management is Essential to E-learning Success .....	18
Continuous Innovation Meeting the Concerns of the Present World .....	20
Constructivist Knowledge, Conflict and E-learning.....	21
What We Know about OAM Students and their Resilience.....	23
OAM Students and the Conflict of Work/ Life Balance .....	24
The Historical Background of CRE.....	26
Conflict Resolution Education Informs Teaching and Learning .....	28
Conflict Resolution in Online Education.....	29
Models for CRE .....	30
Theoretical Framework.....	31
Conflict is dynamic.....	33
Summary.....	36
 Chapter 3. Methodology.....	 37
Overview of Qualitative Phenomenological Design and Rationale.....	37
Trustworthiness for Study Design .....	39
Setting.....	40
Population, Sample, and Sampling Procedure .....	42
Criteria for inclusion.....	42
Participants .....	43
Human Subjects Protection Considerations .....	45
Data Collection.....	46
Instrumentation: Interview Protocol.....	46
Content Validity.....	52
Data Collection Procedures.....	52
Data Management.....	53
Data Analysis .....	54
Positionality .....	55
Summary. ....	56
 Chapter 4. Results .....	 58
Introduction.....	58
Purpose Statement .....	58
Profiles of Participants.....	58
Tom Hawthorne-Participant 1 .....	58
Motivational factors and supporting influences.....	59

Conflicts and coping strategies .....	60
Brett Emerson-Participant 2 .....	60
Motivational factors and supporting influences.....	61
Conflicts and coping strategies.....	61
Zach Turner-Participant 3.....	62
Motivational factors and supporting influences.....	62
Conflicts and coping strategies .....	63
Harrison Jameyson-Participant 4.....	64
Motivational factors and supporting influences.....	64
Conflicts and coping strategies.....	65
Joe Zavala-Participant 5 .....	66
Motivational factors and supporting influences.....	66
Conflicts and coping strategies.....	66
Carlton Diem-Participant 6.....	67
Motivational factors and supporting influences.....	67
Conflicts and coping strategies .....	67
Themes .....	68
Research Question 1 Findings .....	69
Online Learning Environment.....	70
Online learning environment is critical.....	70
Course design.....	72
Connectivity.....	73
Research Question 2 Findings .....	74
Personal Traits and Goals.....	75
Research Question 2 Findings .....	75
Support Systems and Family.....	76
Research Question 3 Findings.....	78
Conflict of Work/ Life Balance .....	78
Research Question 4 Findings .....	82
Organizational Skills and Coping Mechanisms.....	82
Preparing for the future .....	84
Summary .....	85
 Chapter 5. Analysis, Conclusions and Recommendations for Future Research.....	 88
Restating the Purpose Statement.....	88
Analysis of Key Findings .....	89
Online Learning Environment.....	89
Personal Traits and Goals.....	92
Support Systems and Family.....	93
Conflict of Work/ Life Balance .....	94
Inter role conflict.....	96
Organizational Skills and Coping Mechanisms.....	97
Healthy coping strategies.....	98
Conclusions.....	100
Conclusion One.....	101

Conclusion Two.....	102
Conclusion Three.....	103
Online Learning and OAM Student Best Practice Recommendations .....	104
Recommendations for Future Research.....	106
Final Notes .....	107
REFERENCES.....	109
APPENDIX A: Interview Questions .....	120
APPENDIX B: Interview Protocol .....	122
APPENDIX C: Invitation to Participants .....	123
APPENDIX D: Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities .....	125
APPENDIX E: Representation of Themes and Number of Times Mentioned.....	127
APPENDIX F: Representation of Themes and Number of Times Mentioned	
According to Research Question.....	128
APPENDIX G: IRB Approval Letter.....	129
APPENDIX H: CITI Program Completion Form.....	131



## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Demographics of Study Participants .....	43
Table 2 Literature Table Question 1 .....	47
Table 3 Literature Table Question 2 .....	49
Table 4 Literature Table Question 3 .....	50
Table 5 Literature Table Question 4 .....	51
Table 6 Theme Definitions .....	69
Table 7 Research Themes.....	89
Table E8 Representation of Themes and Number of Time Mentioned .....	127
Table F9 Representation of Themes and Number of Times Mentioned According to Research Question.....	128

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my children, Darren and Madeleine.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I'd like to thank my children for filling my life with love every day and my mother who I could not have done this without. Thank you for all the love, support and kindness throughout this long and important journey.

I'd like to offer huge applause for my dissertation chair, Anthony Collatos, and committee members Linda Purrington and Doug Leigh, for all the encouragement and guidance. Also, appreciation for my original dissertation chair, Robert Barner, who helped me get started in the process and guided me through my preliminary exams.

Thank you to all the United States military soldiers protecting us and fighting for our peace and safety everyday. I will never forget the adventure interviewing the exceptional people who volunteered to participate in the study. These were all great men of character, intelligence, strength, and spirit!

And thank you to all my Cohort 11 professors and classmates for making this experience so fun and interesting. I have so many good memories from the Malibu and LA onsite course sessions. This has been an amazing experience that has enriched my life for all time.

## VITA

### ACADEMIC PREPARATION

Pepperdine University, Malibu, CA

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership, Administration and Policy 2018

University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH

Doctor of Philosophy in English and Comparative Literature 2007

Sonoma State University, Rohnert Park, CA

Master of Arts in English, Creative Writing Emphasis 2001

Sonoma State University, Rohnert Park, CA

Bachelor of Arts in Psychology 1993

### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Coastline Community College, Fountain Valley, CA

Professor of English 2007-present

Orange Coast College, Costa Mesa, CA

Instructor, English 2005-2007

University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH

Graduate Assistant, English 2001-2004

Sonoma State University, Rohnert Park, CA

Teaching Assistant, English 2000-2001

## ABSTRACT

The focus of this study was to develop greater understanding about the unique experiences of active-duty military soldiers who are taking online courses. The qualitative phenomenological study was comprised of online active military (OAM) students taking undergraduate college level courses offered by the Distance Learning Military Programs at a Californian community college. Six participants volunteered while taking online courses from various locations around the world, including sites that were located in an increased zone of conflict. The study's results provided information that may assist with improving future military students' learning experiences while they are facing the conflicts associated with military service.

The results included themes defined as: online learning experience, personal traits & goals, support systems, conflict of work/ life balance, organizational skills & coping mechanisms. The data collected was documented, analyzed and divided into themes that illustrated the potential conflicts and solutions specifically related to the study's sample. The data collected may assist in providing more qualitative study-based framework for research to improve active military students' online learning success.

Three conclusions resulted from the study. First, the learning experience and successful completion of online community college courses by active military students can be supported by college/professors by maintaining a positive online classroom environment, self-pacing options and flexibility with deadlines. Second, organizational strategies and healthy conflict coping mechanisms are key to the successful completion of online community college courses by active military students. Third, challenges/conflicts related to active military students online community college course learning and

completion are inevitable but can be addressed through: active management of conflict and supporting or motivational factors and increased focus on integration between student and military roles, including deployment.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Background

As an increasing number of active military students enroll in online community college classes, it is essential for higher education practitioners to be able to identify these students' needs. Federal data suggests that 73% of service members participating in the Tuition Assistance Program enrolled in online classes (US Dept of Veterans Affairs, 2013), and 43% of active military students enrolled in community college classes (US Dept. of Ed, 2015). However, despite Government Issue (GI) Bill benefits and greater accessibility to online courses (O'Herrin, 2011), military student higher education achievement remains low. Only about one in five military students attending a community college associate's program complete their degrees (US Dept of Ed, 2015). It is important to study the perceptions and lived experiences of online, active military (OAM) students and what kind of motivating factors, supports and conflicts impact their educational endeavors.

Research indicates that OAM students comprise a student population exposed to conflict-ridden circumstances while in the process of e-learning (Zoli, Maury, & Fay, 2015). Military students are eligible to take online courses in deployment and while in conflict zones. The circumstances that OAM students experience may be more stressful than those that traditional online students face, because OAM students may be taking the courses while stationed in international locations rife with violent events, such as Syria, Iraq, or Afghanistan. These students may also be under pressure to complete their academic work within a short period of time or may encounter multiple obstacles to completing and submitting assignments on due dates, such as deployment, which may include extensive military duties or combat. Additionally, OAM students also experience stressful conditions

such as the separation from families, regular home environments, and support systems (Zoli et al., 2015). Online instructors at *Archipelago Community College (ACC)*<sup>1</sup> have commonly taught OAM students deployed to conflict-ridden zones in various levels of pre- and post-states of escalation. A greater understanding of their experience in online classes helps to better assist OAM students to successfully complete their online course work despite the added pressures they face.

*Jameyson Harrison*, a U.S. Naval officer interviewed for this research, reflects on an online learning experience while deployed to Afghanistan,

I was stationed in a remote outpost in Afghanistan. It was just about 25 of us living in a two-story mud hut fortified with sandbags. The nearest major base was 15 miles down the road where the helicopters that brought us our supplies would fly out of. One time, during a severe snow-storm, the helicopters were unable to fly and we had to patrol to the base to get food, water, etc. We had a small satellite that we relied on for internet, but the snow-storm brought it down. I had a final I had to take online that week, so I joined in on the resupply patrol. Extra snow covering meant higher threat of IEDs [improvised explosive devices], so we had to be extra careful.

Our explosives expert along with a bomb detecting dog walked 10 feet ahead of the convoy the whole way in search of IEDs. Crawling along the icy, dirt road took us more than 12 hours to reach the base. That's 12 hours of being on high alert, hoping that the weather was too cold even for the bad guys. Once we reach base, it takes me another day to finally be able to get to a computer to take my final. With most of the internet systems down, you had to reserve a time-slot to use the remaining computers. This base was a lot bigger, housing thousands of soldiers and contractors; all desperate to connect with loved ones at home. After all that, I ended just sending an email to the teacher: Weather and internet problems. Need extra time to take final.

This reflection from Officer Jameyson highlights multiple challenges OAM students face.

OAM students may be immersed in stress, severe weather conditions, or physical threat while in the process of completing course work.

---

<sup>1</sup> All proper nouns are pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of the subjects



Many OAM students may have already experienced traumatic stress due to a variety of potential factors (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). Such factors may include a recent history with violent combat, the loss of a comrade in arms, a personal injury, or having experienced conflict with a supervisor, fellow troop member, loved one, or even with members of the opposing forces while in deployment (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010; Zinger & Cohen, 2010). Other conflicts have included the difference between military routines and college course schedules (e.g. frequency, time of courses, assignment deadlines), psychological and physical traumas, and changes in the identifying roles of the armed services member/ student (Zinger & Cohn, 2010). Increased knowledge about the perceptions and lived experiences of OAM students during their online coursework, including their motivations, supports and conflicts, is an important key to understanding their academic needs.

Studies by Bonk and Wisner (2000) show that the e-learning environment can mediate the effects of stressful experiences on learning, which would benefit OAM students navigating conflicts and balancing many responsibilities. The physical and psychological conditions of learning inform how learning occurs; therefore, stressful circumstances unique to OAM students require study to illuminate the path to finding best e-learning practices relevant to their uniquely phenomenal experience. Emotions such as anxiety, self-consciousness, or fear, which may be present in a conflicted environment, can interfere with online students' basic, cognitive abilities involved in constructing knowledge. Students tend to acquire new information better in a more comfortable learning environment (Wadsworth, 2003).

A recent military-based study found that while a low or moderate amount of stress in response to conflict can sharpen cognitive performance, intense stress could hinder or thwart it (Mueller, Moloff, Wedmore, Schoeff & Laporta, 2012). Individual differences in levels of resiliency will impact whether a student experiences a low, moderate, or severe amount of stress from the exposure to conflict (Rensel, 2015; Zolli & Healy, 2012). An example of a low or moderate stressor would be a disagreement with another soldier, while an example of intense stress may be sustaining an injury or losing a loved one. Moreover, OAM students may occupy conflict-ridden zones that will vary in respect to their levels of pre- or post-state escalation (Galtung, 1996; West, Tjosvold & Smith, 2006). Therefore, each conflict holds its own specific set of dynamics, just as each student is unique in their response to it.

This study focused on OAM students enrolled in online military programs offered by the distance-learning department at ACC. The college is one of the four campuses in the ACC District. It was ranked by a prominent newspaper as America's best community college and as one of the most popular colleges for online students in the military (Altman, 2015). The successful progress of online learning for military students is a particularly important issue at ACC, because it is a common way to complete coursework while in active service.

### **Problem Statement**

OAM students struggle with balancing more duties on average than traditional or other non-traditional students, including veterans. The balancing act includes fulfilling military duties, course assignments, deployment, and family or other life-related factors, that sometimes cause them to drop out or "stop out" of their degree programs or drop out

altogether (Molina & Morse, 2015). Students who “stop out” or take “a break in enrollment...by withdrawing from the college or taking a leave of absence” are often those who leave college just a few courses short of their degree (American College of Education, 2017, p.45). There is a critical need to deepen understanding of OAM students’ online experience while actively serving so that higher education and its related opportunities are increasingly obtainable for them.

ACC maintains “outstanding” active military retention and graduation rates, according to recent data from Archipelago’s Military Programs. In 2016, 89% of OAM students completed their degrees or transferred out, meaning students who transfer from a two-year institution to a four-year institution without completing a degree at the two-year institution. ACC was selected for this study’s research site to find out more about the students’ first-hand experiences that may account for their increased success with educational progress over national averages. As a result, this study sought to investigate how ACC’s OAM students navigated responsibilities between their military service and coursework, in addition to their motivating factors, supports and conflicts to find out more about their perceptions and lived experiences.

### **Purpose Statement**

This qualitative phenomenological study sought to learn about the experiences of OAM students enrolled in ACC’s distance learning military programs department. This study posits that more information about OAM students’ experiences while taking online courses at ACC will increase understanding about how to universally improve OAM students’ educational progress.

This study explored the OAM students' perceptions about their experiences, including motivating factors, supports and conflicts as they completed online courses while actively serving in the military. Study participants included six OAM students who were enrolled in online undergraduate general education courses offered by ACC's distance-learning military programs. This study analyzed the interview responses to research this phenomenon.

### **Research Questions**

There was one central research question (question 1) and three sub-questions (questions 2-4) guiding this study. The research questions were:

1. What are the perceptions and lived experiences of OAM students regarding their online courses while participating in ACC's general education courses?
2. What are the factors that motivate OAM students' educational progress at ACC and what supports do they encounter?
3. What are the primary perceived conflicts with achieving educational progress that OAM students experience at ACC?
4. How can the primary conflicts be resolved or better addressed to improve the educational progress of OAM students enrolled in community college general education courses?

### **Theoretical Framework**

Conflict Resolution Education (CRE) provides a lens to understand the types of conflicts experienced by OAM students. The United States Institute of Peace's studies about CRE served as a primary resource for understanding CRE's critical foundations and

educational history. Since the 1950s, there has been a paradigm shift for the definition of conflict from a negative perception, as if it were something to avoid or overcome, to a more positive perception that views conflict as the window to new opportunity or transformation (Converse, 1968; Deutsch, 1993). This study utilized CRE framework to investigate conflict as an opportunity for transformative learning, including key theories by CRE scholars Deutsch (1973), Morris and Madsen (2007), and Johnson and Johnson (2009). In particular, a multifaceted approach to resolving conflict, developed by Deutsch (1973), posits that conflict is not something experienced uniformly by any given population or person, rather it is a uniquely perceived, lived experience by each individual.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Active duty.** A person in the military serving full time. They may or may not be living on a military base; however, they may be deployed anywhere in the world at a given time.

**Cognitive conflict.** Two incompatible ideas in one's mind (Agricola, 2010).

**Conflicts.** Incompatible or clashing duties or factors that impede academic progress if not effectively resolved. Can be transformational if outcomes are positive.

**Conflict of work/ life balance.** This study utilized Shobitha & Sudarsan's (2014) concept described as, "Work-life balance is the individual perception that work and non-work activities are compatible and promote growth in accordance with an individual's current life priorities" (as cited in Shobitha & Sudarsan, 2014, pg. 3). A conflict with this type of balance is when there is an incompatibility with these demands that hinder growth or progress.

**Congruence.** Explains the idea that variables such as personality traits, cultural forces, socio economic status or behavioral tendencies influence the work-life balance separate from the factors directly involved in the balance (Edwards & Rothbard, 1999).

**Deployment.** When an active duty soldier is sent to another location (e.g. domestically or internationally) in the world for military service. This may include duties such as combat in a foreign countries or assistance with a natural disaster.

**Educational progress.** Persistent progress toward achievement in the completion of an associate's degree or four-year college transfer.

**Enrichment.** Morris & Madsen (2007) describe enrichment derived from affective sources such as mood or contentment, or instrumental sources, such as abilities or values, can be intrinsically transferred to increase the quality of life in another area.

**Facilitation.** The way the amount of engagement in one area deepens the involvement in another area of the work-life balance, due to the transfer of increased knowledge, skills or interests (Edwards & Rothbard, 1999).

**Inter role conflict.** Conflict that exists for a person between two or more roles in the work/ life balance (Rantanen, 2008).

**Motivational factors.** Factors influencing OAM students' continuing higher educational progress and/ or aspirations.

**Online course.** A college-level course taken over the internet. It can be delivered through a computer or hand-held device.

**Reflective thinking.** Bar-Tal and Rosen (2009) wrote that *reflective thinking* "refers to the ability to not take any knowledge for granted but to consider and reconsider various alternatives to reach valid inferences, decisions, or evaluations" (para 29). For the

purposes of this study, reflective thinking is a student's subjective manner of thinking to evaluate, analyze, or critically examine an idea, concept, theory, or decision.

**Resilience.** Zolli and Healy (2012) provided the following definition as "the capacity of a system, enterprise, or a person to maintain its core purpose and integrity in the face of dramatically changed circumstances" (p.126). For the purposes of this study, resilience defines the online student's ability to withstand, resolve or bounce back from conflicts that arise while maintaining the role of student.

**Spillover.** The experiences from one area of the work-life conflict or balance can spill into the way another area is experienced (Morris & Madsen, 2007).

**State of resiliency.** An oft-used term in the military, this is a state that "rests on one or two essential aspects of resilience: continuity and recovery in the face of change" (Zolli & Healy, 2012, p. 7).

**Supports.** All human aspects of supporting an individual toward educational progress; these supports include people, such as family, friends, role models, mentors, counselors, or colleagues, and military and collegiate support resources.

### **Operational Definitions**

**Conflict of work/ life balance.** Indicates the conflict between OAM students' military work and other areas of their life, including college course work. The study's interviews include questions that inquire about what conflicts OAM students encounter while enrolled in online college courses.

**Inter role conflict.** A type of conflict commonly associated with work/life imbalances. The study's interviews include questions that inquire about how participants' roles of military officer interact with college student role.

## **Importance of the Study**

OAM students are involved with conflict and conflicting responsibilities. This has implications for their online learning experience and our ability to guide them towards their aspirations of acquiring and completing higher education goals. In order to best provide an optimal online learning experience and academic e-learning success, more research is required to develop greater awareness about their perceptions and lived experiences, involving their motivations, supports and conflicts. This study gives attention to the first-hand experiences of OAM students and contributes to the body of knowledge about their experiences while trying to further their education. This study will inform institutions of higher education how to best assist these OAM students while they are enrolled. Furthermore, this study has possible implications for other online higher educational programs for students in various conflict situations, such as those in homeless or women's shelters.

## **Delimitations and Limitations**

For the purpose of learning about the perceptions and experiences of OAM students, there were few delimitations or limitations. The researcher strove to ensure the study's trustworthiness by adhering to strict, controlled research procedures and guidelines.

The delimitations were:

- Regionally bound geographic sector for online course college location among military students. While the online military students were taking the course from countries all over the world, the online course uniquely originated in California from ACC's internet server.



- Study limited to OAM students enrolled in ACC Distance Learning Department's Military Programs general education courses during the spring 2017 semester.

The limitations were:

- Idiosyncratic biases unique to the military population. The military is a micro cultural environment that is noted to be distinct from the larger, American macro culture in terms of vernacular, customs, and point of view.
- Number of responses to the call for volunteers
- The participants able or willing to complete the entire study were all male
- Study participants who refuse to answer questions or drop out of the study, which is outside of the researcher's control.

### **Assumptions**

It was assumed that the students' answers were honest and recollections were reality-based. The study functioned on the assumption that OAM students were balancing a number of military, educational and other life related duties at once.

### **Organization of the Study**

In this study, Chapter 1 introduces the specific problem to be researched, the rationale for its design, and research questions. The study's participants are described. The theoretical framework is discussed in addition to the study's key terms, limitations, delimitations, and assumptions. It concludes with a summary that reiterates the main points of the chapter.

Chapter 2 contains the literature review, which explores the historical, empirical and theoretical works related to the problem under research. It provides an analysis of their pertinence to the study.

Chapters 3 through 5 describe the design, the data collected and the analysis. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology and the manner by which the data will be collected and analyzed; Chapter 4 presents the results of the data collection and Chapter 5 analyzes and summarizes the results and conclusions. Finally, Chapter 5 then offers recommendations for future studies.

### **Summary**

In Chapter 1, the researcher introduced the topic of study, defined the problem, research questions, key terms, operational definitions and explained the limitations, delimitations, and assumptions. The purpose and importance of the study were introduced to explain how the research contributes to the body of knowledge about the perceptions and lived experiences of OAM students, including the motivating factors, supports and conflicts. The theoretical framework was introduced to explain the lens by which the research will be viewed.

Chapter 1 is written with the intention to demonstrate the value of this study's purpose. The organization of the study contributes to the credible, consistent way the research was conducted and how the data was recorded for analysis. The study's design ensures its trustworthiness and benefit to future studies.

## Chapter 2: Review of Literature

### Introduction

The surge of OAM students taking online courses exposes the need to increase understanding about their experience during the learning process, particularly due to low educational progress and success rates. OAM students are often faced with managing multiple variables while participating in online courses (Molina & Morse, 2015). Furthermore, there is a lack of educational research studying the perceptions and lived experiences of OAM students, including their motivational factors, supports and conflicts. It is important to find out more about OAM students' perceptions of their educational experiences and how they manage these factors while enrolled in online general education courses.

This study focus examines this phenomenological experience through the lens of CRE theory to study OAM students' enrolled at ACC. It considers how their experiences might inform future OAM students and instructors how to overcome barriers to educational progress. The study's results are purposed to inform the development of online learning strategies that are particular to best serving OAM students' educational needs.

In Chapter 2, the literature review discusses three central themes that emerged from the readings: online learning and the military, OAM student experiences, and conflict resolution. The theme online learning and the military contains the subthemes online learning management and constructivist knowledge. The theme of OAM student experiences includes the subthemes resilience and conflict of work/ life balance. The review then focuses on CRE's theoretical framework and its operationalization in the study. Finally, the review concludes with a summary of main points.

The second half of the chapter gives an overview of CRE and online learning, and how these CRE theories interact and have dynamics and implications for OAM students. Furthermore, the review discusses the definition of CRE and how the theory has morphed over time, as ideological changes that have occurred in the field of CRE reflect pivotal historical events changing the course of philosophy, application and study.

### **Themes**

The literature review is divided into three central themes based on the research literature: online military student experiences, online learning and the military, and conflict resolution. Each area contains multiple historical, empirical, and theoretical perspectives accessed through an analysis of relevant literature to provide a broad, inclusive, and multi-faceted backdrop for the study. This study was focused on bridging these areas of research to better understand the perceptions and lived experiences of OAM students, including the motivating factors, supports and conflicts.

### **What We Know about Online Learning in the Military**

The research literature indicates that multiple factors impact the educational experiences of OAM students. This study will examine OAM students' academic motivations, personal and academic supports, and the conflicts they experience. The literature examines key issues that affect OAM students' perceptions and lived experiences while online learning (Burnett, 2008; Stone, 2015; Zoli et al., 2015). With approximately 76% of ACC's graduates being military students, the online educational experience of service men and women is an important area of focus for ACC. As stated in the introduction, online learning is a different experience for OAM students than students taking courses on typical college campus. OAM students are balancing more conflicting responsibilities than

their traditional and non-traditional counterparts (Molina & Morse, 2015). Multiple studies have found reasons why active duty military soldiers are taking online college courses such as Syracuse University's Institute for Military Families and Veterans (Zoli et al., 2015) and a survey reported by *The Military Times* (Stone, 2015). These reasons include: online learning provides a better route to educational progress because of the accessibility and the amount of resources, such as those offered by ACC, and that military students have reported their needs are not met at traditional colleges (Zoli et al., 2015).

Military students attending traditional colleges have reported that they felt uncomfortable among traditional college student populations (Zoli et al., 2015). They describe reasons such as feeling older or unable to relate to their classroom peers, who are mostly comprised of recent high school graduates. The Syracuse Report asserted that military students did not feel that the college staff understood their backgrounds or skills (Zoli et al., 2015). All of these studies indicated that the experience of the OAM student is unique and should be focused on as a subgroup requiring specialized consideration to best meet their online educational needs.

The trend of OAM students pursuing online college education is predicted to increase (Stone, 2015). The Post 9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 increased higher educational benefits for service members (McIlvaine, 2009), and in the years since, online enrollment numbers have steadily grown. American Military University reported 632 active military students in 2000 and 36,772 in 2010 (Golden, 2009). OAM students report feeling that online courses will further educational progress faster (Stone, 2015). The flexibility and the ability to complete work asynchronously adds to the interest in taking online courses, as an OAM student has the opportunity to complete coursework

when their active duties are low, and then may put their course work aside when they are needed on duty.

Military students also have reported that their experience in the military does not provide the same type of skills they will need as they move into post-military civilian life (Stone, 2015). Therefore, preparing for new career plans through the completion of online courses will help to pave the way for future career goals. Additionally, the range of online course offerings is useful as *The Military Times* also reported that most military students do not see their participation in the military as something that will be permanent. On the contrary, most students report that they plan to do something different post service, and they feel under pressure to prepare for their future careers, especially when many soldiers have families to support (Shane, 2016).

OAM students are also potentially experiencing extreme changes associated with military life (Ballenger-Browning & Johnson, 2010). These changes include deployment, war, traumatic stress, and the possibility of transitioning to a traditional college campus or a new career after service (Ballenger-Browning & Johnson, 2010; Dake, 1992; Danyk & Maliarchuk, 2015; Mackenzie, Fogarty, & Khachadorian, 2013; Mahoney & Granvold, 2005; Starr-Glass, 2011). Furthermore, recent deployments have put OAM students in more direct contact with indigenous populations at their sites of duty than in previous years (Verdiani, 2002). A decrease in conflict or an increase in the resiliency to conflict at the site may create a better scenario for an OAM student taking online courses, given the research on conflict resolution (Deutsch, 1973).

**Motivations.** OAM students are motivated to take online courses due to the availability of military educational benefits and to complete a college education to prepare

for a post-military career (Stone, 2015). Online courses motivate OAM students because they are a convenient way to complete college credits while in the service. According to Pink (2011), these are extrinsic motivators; and motivation is strongest when there are intrinsic rewards. Factors motivating drive to ambition may include strengths building or an increased sense of autonomy. Thus, OAM students may be motivated to increase their education from a personal standpoint. Motivation is decreased when conflict is perceived as stressful or if outcomes are negative.

**Supports.** Military students have a variety of social and academic supports available to them (Karp & Klempin, 2016). OAM students are often married (over 50%) and families are a strong source of support (Molina & Morse, 2015). The military culture fosters an attitude of brotherhood. It offers an array of support resources, such as support groups and specialists in areas such as PTSD to assist soldiers as needed. Online course support includes instructional strategy and technical support. Strong supports in place for online learning increases student progress should conflicts arise from technical difficulties or problems with coursework (Karp & Klempin, 2016). Enrichment due to the increased supports enhances mood and may lead to increased motivation and stress reduction (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002; Morris & Madsen, 2007).

**Conflicts.** The OAM students experience a variety of conflict that often impacts their educational experience (Molina & Morse, 2015). For example, OAM students are often deployed to an unfamiliar location while enrolled in coursework. The call for deployment may happen quickly and courses in progress may conflict with the military scheduling. The deployed OAM student's congruence with these variables influences the level of conflict experienced (Edwards & Rothbard, 1999). The more factors in a student's life that are

associated with dropout rates, the more likely they are to dropout (Molina & Morse, 2015). A focus on transformational learning as an outcome of conflict may be a solution to problems that are factors of conflicts with student progress while taking an online class (Deutsch, 1973). This outcome may include assistance with inter role conflict or the facilitation of knowledge, interests and skills between the variables to increase progress on all fronts (Edwards & Rothbard, 1999). Reflective thinking allows for students to reconsider the alternatives and evaluate, idea, or concept (Bar-Tal and Rosen, 2009). Online learning may facilitate the process of reflection learning to positively benefit those managing conflicts that may impede their educational progress (Dewey, 1993). Resiliency assists with the ability of a student to recoup from conflict and go on to succeed with their education. Students maintaining a state of resiliency while managing their coursework and military tasks and other duties may increase their progress (Zolli & Healy, 2012).

### **Online Course Management is Essential to E-learning Success**

Good online course management is essential to successful e-learning progress. The increased interest in online learning has directly contributed to an increase in online course offerings, in the military and otherwise, and in the art of online instructional design and technique (Swan, 2003). Swan's (2003) research found online learning is just as effective, if not more so, than traditional learning. The embracement of online learning into mainstream education and by OAM and other non-traditional students has provided a great deal of substance for study and research-based literature (Bonk, 2011). A review of this research provided information to define the settings, variables, strategies, and student qualities that are integral to successful online learning, as well as providing online course management support in the context of higher conflict related circumstances.



Since online course offerings have increased dramatically in the last 20 years, educational researchers have developed a number of best practices to assist instructors with online learning facilitation (Bonk, 2011; Bonk & Khoo, 2014). The concept of considering the instructor as the facilitator in the transfer of knowledge is an approach to encourage a style of course management that improves the results of the coursework in terms of increasing learning and online participation and engagement. These practices have proven effective with online learning and can be utilized in conjunction with the conflict-related research that results from this study.

Important strategies available for online learning instruction include: staged opportunities for reflective thinking, or “reflective learning,” a combination of online materials, ongoing assessment, and use of a facilitatory instructional style (Bonk, 2011; Christensen, Horn, & Caldera, 2011; Neuhauser, 2002; Shachar & Neumann, 2003; Swan, 2003). Dewey’s (1993) definition of reflective thinking is the “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusion to which it tends” (p.9). Reflective thinking, along with these other strategies, improves the success of online instructional delivery. Moreover, individual differences in circumstances do not affect the quality of learning as much as the combination of factors involved in the instructional delivery (Shachar & Neumann, 2003). Thus, Shachar and Neumann’s (2003) study offered some good news, if the results are put into the context of conflict and students’ online learning experiences. It could be considered that high quality instructional delivery may help to overcome the interference of conflicts with educational progress.

Future research is needed in terms of defining more variables relevant to OAM students and online instructional technique. Additional research may also be useful to inform the political aspects of online instruction and that included more reference to the national and socio-political circumstances of the OAM student.

### **Continuous Innovation Meeting the Concerns of the Present World**

The present day context for e-learning needs are specified in texts such as Gore's (2013) *The Future: Six Drivers of Global Change* and Bonk's (2011) *The World is Open: How Web Technology is Revolutionizing Education*. Both explain the current e-learning trends from a multi-factorial perspective that affect people, education, and environmental resources. These elements directly speak to the requirements necessary for innovative educational approaches that will provide success in stride with the way global society is progressing and its changing dynamics of conflict. This direction is markedly defined by a need for continual technological advancement in educational offerings that maintain or exceed the pace of the global society's transformative experience with technology and the amount of violence in the world.

Online learning creates opportunities to reach OAM students globally and provide information from a globalized point of view (Asaoka, 2009; Bonk, 2011; Godbey and Turlington, 2002; Gore, 2013; Oravec, 2004). Godbey and Turlington (2002) stated "that universities need to halt their view that students live in a national world and need to exhibit more awareness that international education is an imperative" (p. 98). In Gore's (2013) book, the former Vice-President predicted how certain current trends would affect the future, which he terms the *drivers of global change*. The six drivers are: work, power, the internet, biotechnology, population increases, and climate change. Gore (2013)

explained how each of these drivers will affect the future, what successful citizens will need to know, and what to do in order to adapt to the needs of the future world and the greater, technologically globalized state of society.

These drivers can be considered when relating how to build knowledge through online higher education in a forward thinking frame of mind. Bonk (2011) offered a revolutionary perspective on the rapid changes in technologically enhanced educational practices and its ongoing, transformative processes that will have implications for the purposes of this study and for OAM students in circumstances of conflict. Bonk (2011) began with an analogy about hikers who blog about their journeys, an act that depicts how experiences are globally communicated and the interconnectedness that has resulted from the internet. Bonk (2011) also restated the mantra *we all learn* periodically to emphasize its importance to educators for any learning theory or technologically enhanced educational measure. Additionally, as previously mentioned in the introduction, Bonk (2011) explained how the internet creates an endless stream of resources that can be used in contemporary learning environments, including those of conflict, and how these environments are connected to others by nature of the web's information sharing capabilities.

### **Constructivist Knowledge, Conflict and E-learning**

Beginning in the 1960s, Piaget's theories on constructivist knowledge were seminal to the understanding of how to encourage optimal learning. Piaget discovered the strategies to enable successful collaborative learning, finding solutions to conflict in the scope of social and environmental problems, and encouraging positive individual cognitive and emotional progress (Wadsworth, 2003). Wadsworth's (2003) explained Piaget's

theory on intellectual development, which included descriptions of cognitive, affective, and developmental milestones. Important to this study is the relative emphasis that Piaget's places on the cognitive aspect of intellectual development, while mentioning how important the affective aspect is to a person's intelligence. The affective aspect of development is more difficult to measure scientifically; thus, Piaget spends more time proving these theories in the cognitive realm (Wadsworth, 2003).

The process of constructivist knowledge can be facilitated with a goal of resolving conflict by using the positive motivational techniques to improve the affect toward the intellectual activity. Other factors to improve the affective side of cognition are improving the subject's resilience toward trauma and the aftermath and the rejection of harmful professional paths toward constructivist knowledge that is negative and motivated toward violence and destructive conflict. A focus on the positive aspects of constructivist knowledge building through more study on the affective components of its development is relevant to the goals of this study. Constructivist knowledge can be developed through facilitatory psychosocial, biological and environmental conditions in an online setting.

Cohen (2006) proposed:

Challenging mental activity certainly stimulates neuronal growth...These compounds, in turn, provoke the primitive brain cells to mature into neurons. Prolonged stress, on the other hand, seems to dramatically suppress new neuron production. Studies have shown that both physical and psychological stress reduce the growth of new cells in the hippocampus. Patients with depression or posttraumatic stress disorder also show reduced hippocampal volume, while treatment reverses this trend. (pp. 393-398)

Therefore, eliciting constructivist knowledge through the adaptation to a positive intellectual online environment may simulate a nice refuge to encourage the types of elements needed to affectively and biologically overcome conflict related stress, such as

improving motivation, trust, relationship building, collaborative learning, and promoting the development of positive constructivist knowledge as facilitated by the online instructor, and by technological means sensitive to those in less than ideal circumstances.

Constructivist knowledge may be attended to by drawing on students' skills and strengths with a personalized approach to course work, in order to increase engagement and improve a sense of autonomy, purpose, and mastery. Knowledge, for the constructivist, is never structural but functional (Piaget, 1983). This has vast implications for the online learning because knowledge is dependent on the students' interaction between the environmental aspects of the content and the qualities of their inner, cognitive, and emotional experience. The learning material, to be filtered into the learner's private domain of knowledge, must accept the learning material as authentic and true and assimilable into prior knowledge. Learners are inclined to construct knowledge on the basis of what previous interests have been, such as from a perspective of art, history, or mathematics. For those who are inclined toward the arts and humanities, art skills and creative endeavors are often a good idea in online instruction to provide challenge as they require mindfulness, and these activities reduce stress and aid in new neuron production. Through lifelong learning, reflection, planning, and decision making, which goes into any creative work, participants have a chance to embrace autonomy and self-efficacy, which are elements necessary for constructivist knowledge.

### **What We Know about OAM Students and their Resilience**

Resilience is the much-needed emotional component to finding the success, stability, and equilibrium needed to withstand the potential consequences of conflict. A good concept for resilience is from the Naval Center for Combat and Operational Stress Control,

“Resilience is most easily conceptualized as having four prerequisites: risk or predisposition to bio psychosocial or environmental conditions, exposure to a high-magnitude stressor, stress response, return to baseline functioning and symptom levels” (as cited in Ballenger-Browning & Johnson, 2010, p.5). Furthermore, the report from the Naval Center featured statistics on the prevalence of resilience among military populations, and published key factors, both psychosocial and biological, that were consistent with higher ratings of resilience. These factors associated with higher levels of resilience included: extroverted, conscientious personality traits, higher education levels, lack of childhood mistreatment, active coping style including problem solving and managing techniques, physical exercise, positive outlook, a moral compass or spiritual belief system, social support, cognitive flexibility, cognitive explanatory style that does not misplace blame, ability to reappraise events, tendency to be accepting, and previous stress inoculation by having bounced back by a stressful event in the past (Ballenger-Browning & Johnson, 2010). Increasing resilience protects students from damage due to conflict, just as one would take the necessary steps to protect oneself from a home break in or fire or to protect oneself from contracting an illness (Zolli & Healy, 2012). Knowledge of these specific factors is useful in determining how to view the qualitative data that will be compiled from the OAM students in this study.

### **OAM Students and the Conflict of Work/ Life Balance**

As stated in the introduction of Chapter 1, OAM students balance a higher number of factors associated with “dropping out” than traditional and other non-traditional students, including veterans (Molina & Morse, 2015). This is called a conflict of work/ life balance (Rantenen, 2008). In Rantenen’s (2008) theoretical review of work/ life balance, the

conflict lies in a role imbalance, when the two roles, one of work and one associated with life outside of work suffer incompatibilities. The “conflict hypothesis” suggests that “multiple roles with infinite demands are likely to cause role strain because the resources to they have to meet these demands are finite and scarce” (Rantenen, 2008, p. 28). There is a strong indicator, with only 20% of active military students completing their community college programs in national averages (US Dept. of Ed, 2015), that the amount of conflicting responsibilities has a negative influence on active military students’ educational progress and success rates.

While there are negative aspects of work/ life balance, there are positives that can be attained from the same set of issues (Rantanen, 2008). In facilitation, increased roles may function to facilitate the deepening of involvement in another role based on the amount of engagement in both (Edwards & Rothbard, 1999). In study by Morris & Madsen (2007), enrichment defined a result of work/ life conflict when the success in one role increases the contentment or mood about the other. Enrichment is a part of spillover, where the experiences of one area spill in the way another area is experienced, but the experience is enriching when there is success experienced in one area. In a study by Edwards & Rothbard (1999), personality factors, socio economic status, and cultural forces all have influence on the degree of stress or conflict experienced in work/ life balance.

Resilience is a personality trait that holds resistance to the negative effects of conflict, including that of conflict of work/ life balance. There are many indicators that resilience can be developed to assist with conflict that is experienced by OAM students (Zolli & Healy, 2012). Not only is it possible to assist OAM students with developing resilience to conflict, the conflict of work/ life balance can be transformed into positives

and additional opportunities for growth. These positives can be facilitated through the increased development of conflict resolution skills.

### **The Historical Background of CRE**

CRE is an area of study across academic disciplines with over 50 years of published research (Coleman, Deutsch, & Marcus, 2000; Green & Wagner, 2011; Ury, 1999; Verdiani, 2002; Weiss & Hughes, 2005; West, Tjosvold & Smith, 2008). The area has achieved more emphasis in recent times due to the amount of media coverage about violent conflicts around the world. CRE studies have provided data that supports that their educational strategies are effective for students managing conflict. The positive results of CRE educational strategies are helping people improve their abilities to resolve conflict on many levels, including interpersonal conflicts and intrapersonal (meaning within the self) (Agricola, 2010).

Historically, conflict resolution was first introduced as a study during the Cold War era in the 1950s (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse & Miall, 2012). The threat of nuclear war between the Soviet Union and the United States provoked a sense of purpose and urgency about research into conflict resolution. *The Journal for Conflict Resolution*, started by Kenneth Boulding in the late 1950s, marked a milestone in the field and academic studies about conflict resolution thereafter had an arena for publication and peer-reviewed studies (Ramsbotham et al., 2012).

Information about the studies were propagated among academics and careers developed in areas like the military, business organizations, social work, and school sites to promote, manage, and develop CRE skills. CRE theorists, like Morton Deutsch (1973), developed the idea that conflict could be viewed not only as a problem but also as an



opportunity for growth and creative problem solving. The idea of conflict became associated with positive psychology based on the theory that positive thinking facilitates the success rate of conflict resolution and improves resilience to conflict, encourages collaboration, social learning, and constructivist knowledge (Cohn, Fredrickson, Brown, Mikels, & Conway, 2009; Fleishman, Gerard, & O'Leary, 2008; Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002). Cohn et al. (2009) wrote, "Positive emotions are linked to broadened attention and cognition, more flexible and creative thinking, and thus improved coping with adversity and stress" (p. 146). Fredrickson and Joiner (2002) commented, "As this cycle continues, people build their psychological resilience" (p. 172). This response becomes an upward spiral, because better coping increases positive emotions, and then this further improves coping skills.

Positive psychologists, such as Martin Seligman, helped with developing more strategies that could be used with conflict resolution (Pearlstein, 2012). These positive-psychology-based strategies and skills were taught to instructors in seminars and as part of personnel and educational programs by the 1980s and 90s (Ramsbotham et al., 2012).

In the 90s, the field became even more sophisticated when the specific study of conflict resolution was adopted in many well-known university programs as an undergraduate major. It was also the basis for new graduate study programs, particularly those with an international focus. International groups such as UNICEF and the United Nation further propagated conflict resolution programs and highlighted learnings and strategies from the field. The United States Center for Peace Education began to offer online courses in conflict resolution in the 1990s and continued to complete studies in the field to

help with more knowledge about how to solve all kinds of conflict, particularly violent conflict in turbulent regions such as the Middle East and Africa (Ramsbotham et al., 2012).

Most of the extant data on conflict shows the various types that are exemplified by violent tragedies. The data helps to target where, why, and how violent conflicts occur in order to continue to learn how to avoid them. Because U. S. military were being deployed more than ever to locations where they were stationed in close contact with native inhabitants, CRE became more imperative to help those stationed in these regions to deal effectively with the differences and conflicts associated with living around those in another culture and in the midst of a war zone.

### **Conflict Resolution Education Informs Teaching and Learning**

CRE has a vast history of usage, even before the field was ever titled conflict resolution (Ramsbotham et al., 2012). Persuasive rhetorical strategies used by the ancient Greeks engaged in strategies of argumentation, such as appealing to logos, pathos, and ethos, in order to get their point across and win arguments. Conflict resolution has been applied in almost every field in business, social work, community organizations, and at all levels of education and academia. Some of the more notable historical studies that have shaped CRE are van Neumann and Morgenstern's 1953 study on *Game Theory*. It was research in the field of economics and discusses to how our notion of domination is about possessing the important (van Neumann & Morgenstern, 1953).

It is critical to understand that the way objects, feelings, and opportunities are divided causes conflict because the need to divide reveals a scarcity of resources (West et al., 2006). Consequences such as violence, exploitation, corruption, and cognitive and affective suffering occur due to the attempt for domination over these resources. CRE

supplies an integral set of cognitive, behavioral, and emotional tools to combat the negative consequences of conflict, transform episodes of conflict into opportunities for creativity and progress, and support peaceful and intelligent collaborative relations.

Many of the CRE theoretical texts reviewed revealed that conflict resolving strategies can be taught to increase success with conflict resolution in almost all areas (Hargreaves & Shirley 2009; Palm, 2014; Reigert, 2013). The review also revealed the layers of important underpinnings of conflict resolution, such as put forth by one of the driving questions that begins Mertus and Helsing's (2006) *Human Rights and Conflict*, "How are basic goals as peace, stability, justice, and rule of law prioritized and how should they be sequenced?" (p. xiv). The topics included in this question show how multi faceted the realm of conflict resolution is, including conflict as a factor in pre-violent environments and post-conflict zones.

### **Conflict Resolution in Online Education**

Conflict resolution in online education is most effective when the entire realm of contextual features have been evaluated. In a handbook about conflict resolution, Coleman et al. (2000) presented topical threads integral to CRE such as issues with power, gender, sectarianism, trust, political movements, ideology, philosophy, which all play into the bigger picture of whether or not conflict erupts into violence or diminishes. For the purposes of this study, the concept of CRE is concerned with the OAM student's perceptions and lived experiences, including the motivations, supports and conflicts. Conflict, whether it be in terms of inter or intra conflict or balancing course work and military responsibilities, such as the conflict of work/ life balance (Jones, 2004).

There are a myriad of further subtopics that are part of conflict resolution studies, such as the role of constructivist knowledge, resilience, and positive psychology. These subtopics are relevant to online coursework when factoring in an analysis of OAM student perceptions and lived experiences inclusive of motivating factors, supports and conflicts. It is important to explore how an OAM student's ability to manage conflict impacts his/ her online higher educational experience and the impact of taking courses while potentially in an external environment of violent conflict.

### **Models for CRE**

In the anthology *Contemporary Conflict Resolution* edited by Ramsbotham et al. (2012), there were several examples of CRE models. For example, Galtung's (1996) theoretical models of conflict, violence and peace demonstrated, by the use of three consecutive triangles, the aspects of contradiction-attitude-behavior; structural violence, cultural violence and direct violence; and peace building, peacemaking, and peace keeping. The triangular dynamic is at work in all forms of actual conflict, otherwise the conflict is latent or non-effectual. This illuminates ways to dissolve conflict when the components are present in isolation or in a compatible fashion, but not in the dynamic necessary to create significant problems with conflict.

The editors offer a model of escalation and de-escalation that is useful in determining actual point of conflict in the circumstance; these levels are difference, contradiction, polarization, violence, war, ceasefire, agreement, normalization and reconciliation (Ramsbotham et al., 2012, p. 13). The *hourglass model* is a combination of Galtung's triangular models with the editors' levels of conflict (Ramsbotham et. al, 2012).

There is also a model of the *conflict tree* that includes the effects of conflicts in the branches, the core problem in the trunk, and the underlying factors in the roots (Ramsbotham et al., 2012). Furthermore, there is a comprehensive list of conflict resolution techniques lists to complement each of the phases of the hourglass model and classic methods for approaches such as the “zero-sum and non-zero-sum outcomes such as: win-lose, win-win, lose-lose and lose-win” (Ramsbotham et al., 2012, p.18). The models effectively illustrate the breakdown of these predominant conflict resolution theories.

More recent approaches include the third party intervention model as used in many educational sites as in Ury’s (1999) third side roles developed at Harvard, the “spheres of cosmopolitan conflict resolution” that separates levels of effects to state/society, regional and global levels with Galtung’s contradiction-attitude-behavior triangle at the core and includes the aspects of triggers and transformers (p. 18-30).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The literature review covers the historical background of CRE for the purposes of educating and contextualizing the relationship between the literature and the CRE theoretical framework. The theoretical framework section explains the basis for the analysis of OAM students through its lens. The theory is operationalized to illuminate ways to reduce negative educational consequences for OAM students as they navigate their educational path. Furthermore, the theory is viewed to examine the data of student perceptions for information to universally increase OAM student progress and success.

Deutsch’s (1973) theory on conflict resolution and its constructive and destructive processes serve as the primary theoretical perspective used for the study. Deutsch’s findings suggest that conflict can be either constructive or destructive based on the

circumstances of its variables, dynamics, and results. The findings of his work will be used to view how to consider conflict from a constructive standpoint to improve OAM students' conflict resolution. According to Deutsch (1973), "the application of full cognitive resources to the discovery and invention of constructive resolutions to conflict is relatively rare" (p. 362). Later studies discussed by Johnson and Johnson (2009) state the positivity of conflict for the student, as "conflict is to student learning what the internal combustion engine is to the automobile. The internal combustion engine ignites the fuel and the air with a spark to create the energy for movement and acceleration" (p. 37). Johnson and Johnson's report emphasizes the use of conflict in academic settings to create intellectual controversy that increases learning. The theory is used to view to the circumstances of balancing conflicts in the OAM students' lived experiences while learning. As such, processes of conflict may be used to increase student success due to the intellectual energizing and transformational qualities that conflict may elicit. The report compares study results derived from school-aged children to young adult college students to older adults. The differences in the quality of the resolutions depended on the multi-faceted set of variables experienced by the student in conflict.

Studies by Morris and Madsen (2007) about work/ life balance served to further contribute to the framework. This study is applicable to seeking answers to assist with OAM students balancing the many conflicts that may interfere with educational progress. This study approaches how to improve with this type of conflict through improving integration. Integration is defined as the measure of the success of balance in different spheres of lived experience. The goal is to help "individuals establish, enrich, and maintain healthy responses and/or eliminate unhealthy responses" to the challenges of balancing

work/ life conflict (Morris & Madsen, 2007, p.446). The theoretical framework assists with finding what, if any, conflicts impact educational progress, and what motivates, supports OAM students within their own perceptions and lived experiences. Moreover, other factors under consideration through the framework are the dynamics between online learning, the military and the students as they interact to influence higher learning progress and success.

**Conflict is dynamic.** There are many types and stages to consider in conjunction with the variance of students' individual responses. For example, OAM students may experience conflict while adjusting to the culture of military life during active service in addition to the stress associated with meeting the demands of an online class. The degree of this conflict and the psychological traits of the student are synergistic. A greater understanding of the combination of factors at stake will best inform how the conflict should be resolved in the students' best interests.

Generalizations can be made, however, for the sake of developing appropriate understanding of conflict management in the context of OAM students' perceptions and lived experiences while learning. For example, Coll, Weiss and Jarvis (2011) state,

Having been shaped by a pervasive military culture, individuals who leave the military after many years of service encounter the same type of culture shock that immigrants experience when first arriving to the United States; there is the disorientation, change of status, and a search for identity and meaning. (p. 489)

Other areas of life taken for granted by civilian students may pose challenges for OAM students. For example, Rensel (2015) has suggested that bodily changes that occur during combat can be permanent. These changes may preoccupy military students in ways that are not well understood by educators. In general, then, the skills associated with CRE may

help to mediate the potentially negative effects of conflict, and lessen, or even prevent, the potential problems associated with any aftermath.

In a CRE study in the *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, Jones (2004) suggested that CRE strategies are successful for helping students deal with a variety of conflicts. Aspects of improvement due to CRE contain personal elements such as resilience, lowered violence, increased communicative skills, more peaceful, problem solving oriented attitudes, improved health and personal success due to lowered stress and improved outcomes with conflict (Ury, 1999; West et al., 2006). In a study by UNESCO that collected data on contemporary CRE best practices in a variety of locations and circumstances, results showed that the online delivery of CRE helped decrease violence as measured by results that shows the decrease in the amount and severity of battles in African villages after the villagers had taken the online courses (as cited in Verdiani, 2002). The results of this study shows that there may be a positive effects to be experienced by the inclusion of CRE strategies for OAM students serving while taking college courses on their emotional and/or cognitive states, as part of their lived experience. This strategy could be used to improve OAM students' experiences with conflict in the interest of improved collegiate progress and success.

Conflict resolution skills are the abilities to negotiate, mediate, and collaboratively solve problems in the context of conflict situations (Agricola, 2010). In essence, they provide the ability to resolve and manage the conflict peacefully. Conflict Resolution Skills:

Understanding that conflict is a natural and necessary part of life; Becoming a better conflict manager, that is, knowing which type of peaceful, conflict resolution method is best suited for a particular conflict problem; Becoming aware of how critical it is to understand the perspective of the other side and carry a constructive conflict resolution process; Effectively distinguishing positions from needs or interests;



Expressing emotions in nonaggressive, non-inflammatory ways; Reframing a conflict as a mutual problem that needs to be resolved collaboratively with compromises via negotiation and/or with the help of a third party; and Brainstorming to create, elaborate, and enhance a variety of peaceful solutions. (Bar-Tal & Rosen, 2009, para 37)

These skills provide an outline to inform OAM students' conflict resolving strategies while pursuing online education.

Reflective practices as utilized through CRE in online courses are conducive for increasing higher-level constructivist knowledge by nature of the students' experience with multiple social and technological worlds intermingling in online course discussion work. The military has a culture of its own, and OAM students may grapple with the differences in the experiences between the military and academic cultures, "contradictions may occur between *I* positions of internality and the voices from differing external interactions engendering uncertainty, ambivalence, or conflict" (Messina, 2014, p. 58). These commonalities among the experiences of OAM students may testify to the importance of processing conflicts, such as war trauma, by giving their mental, physical and spiritual pain a relevant existence in their online learning experiences.

It is logical to assume that OAM students may be able to create a more positive learning environment for themselves if they know how to resolve conflict because they are more resilient to the stressors and can more readily acquire knowledge. The relationship is reciprocal. Students' psychological, social psychological, and biological make-up function interactively with the level of environmental turbulence the student is experiencing at the time of the online course (Brandon & Seldman, 2004). Happiness has been measured by studies conducted by psychologists Fredrickson and Joiner (2002) that suggest that increased resilience to conflict is associated with greater instances of happiness. The

studies measured participants' amount of resilience with a survey using the Likert scale for instrumentation. OAM students may be more resistant to the conflicts associated with military duties and online coursework when they are generally happier.

### **Summary**

The CRE literature presented a background of information on the theory, its theoretical variables and offshoots, and its history of use in education. The study of its use brings to light its success in determining how to increase college progress and success for students who are experiencing conflict. The aspects of the OAM students experience studied: the motivations, supports and conflicts, are determined to function as variables for interpretation through CRE. This literature review analyzed the crucial aspects of the current educational needs of OAM students, online education and CRE. This review considered what the effect of the shift to online college education brings for OAM students, particularly in times of increased conflicting responsibilities or a conflict-ridden environment, as what potentially occurs in deployment.

The literature review examined a body of research on knowledge theory and perspectives on conflict, resilience, online learning, constructivist knowledge and reflective learning, military student success rates, and predictions for the future of online learning, including perspectives on globalization and technology. The extent of research on CRE shows its extensive audience, importance, impact and potential usage for increasing collegiate progress and success among OAM students.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

Chapter 3 describes the essentials of a qualitative phenomenological design and the study's setting, sampling procedures and participants. Additionally, Chapter 3 describes the research methods used in the study, the procedures for data analysis and data management, and the protection of human subjects. Finally, the researcher's positionality is discussed and the chapter concludes with a summary.

#### **Overview of Qualitative Phenomenological Design and Rationale**

The study utilized a qualitative phenomenological research design. The phenomenological design is best to "describe the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon" (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). Creswell (2013) explains that the lived experience is both a subjective experience of the phenomenon and an objective experience as shared in common with other people. Subjective consciousness experiences perceptions intentionally, meaning, "consciousness is always directed toward an object...Reality of an object, then, is inextricably tied to one's consciousness of it" (Creswell, 2013, p. 77). Therefore, philosophically, "the reality of an object is only perceived within the meaning of the experience of an individual" (Creswell, 2013, p.78). Phenomenology is interested in the essence of lived experiences. It seeks to get beyond language-based, interpretive psychological structures, such as the cultural organization of ideas, themes, or meanings that are part of consciousness. Consciousness is developed as a process of language acquisition, and is bound in history and time (Gadamer, 1989). Western consciousness, for example, is largely dependent on understanding through binary oppositions (Derrida, 1982). Westerners understand good as what is not evil, and vice versa.

Phenomenology's foundational ideas are derived from its deep philosophical underpinnings, as first developed by German philosopher Edmund Husserl at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Gallagher, 2012). Husserl (1962) perceived the intentionality of consciousness as the means by which knowledge and meaning are founded. This explains why consciousness is more important than reality for the phenomenologist, because the "lived experiences consist of acts which are 'conscious of'. These are lived experiences that have 'reference to something'" (Husserl, 1962, p. 84). Culture and language will shape how one perceives and experiences phenomena, and phenomenologists seek to find a deeper meaning underneath this unconscious gloss. Phenomenology, then, is "a scientific study of the appearance of things, of phenomena just as we see them and as they appear to us in our consciousness" (Moustakas, 1994, p.103). This type of inquiry was best suited for the purposes of this study to find deeper understanding about the perceptions and lived experiences of OAM students.

The experiences of OAM students are best described in their own words to find meaningful units of information about their motivations, supports and conflicts as they are truly lived. The researcher's role in the study was to collect qualitative data in the most objective manner possible rather than to interpret the data in the process or provide intervention. The researcher chose phenomenology due to the subjective nature of the study and the intention to find deeper understanding about OAM students' first hand experiences.

The researcher did not have previous experience serving in the military to compare the participants' responses with, but the researcher reflected on imaginations and prejudgments pertinent to the study, and set them aside. The researcher, as subject to her

own conscious experience, refrained from interpretation and bias as to collect data from a state of openness. This state of openness is called the epoche and it is a state of mind without judgment or bias (van Manen, 1990). Bracketing is what defines the researcher's restraint from preconceived notions (van Manen, 1990). After collecting data in a state of openness, the researcher aimed to understand the meaning of the participants' responses in the context of her own conscious structure and experience. This is called the reduction, and it leads to insights as presented by the participant's descriptions of the phenomenon, i.e. their lived experiences, in the researcher's mind for the purposes of the epoche.

### **Trustworthiness for Study Design**

There are multiple practices in qualitative studies that ensure the trustworthiness of the study design (Erlandson, Harris & Skipper, 1993; Creswell, 2013). This study included several practices to sufficiently provide overall design trustworthiness. First, in this study, strong description of the detail of the participants "allows readers to make decisions regarding transferability" (Creswell, 2013, p. 252). The descriptions of the participants, the phenomenon under investigation and their responses are richly described to the reader. Second, the researcher was highly familiar with the subject matter, by learning about military education culture, its history of practices, theories, policies, support measures, and student demographics and success rates (Creswell, 2013). The researcher has been instructing OAM students for ten years in a community college online setting, and is familiar with educational interactions with this student subgroup. The researcher clarified researcher bias by explaining her positionality and described any biases or assumptions that may affect the study (Merriam, 1998, as cited in Creswell, 2013). Third, the researcher allowed the participants to have access to the findings and interpretations

of the descriptions or themes as outlined in the invitation to the study. Finally, the researcher used well-established research methodology and theoretical framework in the study, including expert review of the interview protocol and data.

### **Setting**

This study focused on OAM students enrolled in online military programs offered by the distance-learning department at ACC. The college is one of the four campuses in the ACC District. ACC opened in 1976 with the purpose of primarily serving distance-learning students interested in transferring to a four-year college or furthering their careers. Since its opening, ACC has expanded to include three more instructional sites that offer online and on-campus courses. Currently, the student population is over 8,000. ACC has been ranked by prominent newspapers as one of America's best community colleges and as one of the most popular colleges for online students in the military (Altman, 2015).

ACC's distance-learning military programs offer a full range of courses that are transferable to most accredited higher education degree programs. There are hundreds of course offerings that fulfill a variety of GE requirements for AA degrees and are transferable to four year California State and University of California universities for OAM students interested in pursuing their BA degrees. The types of course offerings are designed to fulfill general education requirements, such as history or math 101. Benefits for military students taking online college courses at ACC are multiple; it opens up a myriad of educational and career preparatory opportunities.

ACC offers a large amount of resources to support military students, such as the Veteran's Resource Center (VRC), which opened an instant chat application through the VRC website in 2012. This website, called the *virtual VRC* is a mobile site that offers an

online course delivery program for military students taking courses via their cell phones, called PocketED. It also offers access to military and veteran counselors providing ongoing assistance with the educational process, including the transition from military to civilian life after service. There are online programs for each branch of the military: NCPDLP and NCPACE for the Navy, GoArmyEd for the Army, the Gem program for the Air Force, the Afloat program for the Coast Guard and additional programs for students in the Marine's and for the spouses of military students. There are testing options for military students who may be able to pass subject matter testing in order to forgo prerequisites or take entire course, such as DSST tests. The courses at ACC that the OAM student participants had been enrolled in ranged from history to math to English, and were all under the program of online general education courses leading to an associate's degree.

The researcher instructs a community college military program course described as *Critical Thinking and Writing 100* and usually contains 10 to 20 students per course session.<sup>2</sup> Each session lasts eight weeks and there are two sessions available for enrollment per sixteen-week academic semester. The military students are able to enroll in an eight-week session in the first or second part of every semester and during the summer.

### **Population, Sample, and Sampling Procedure**

The data was collected from volunteer participants out of a purposeful sampling of 2,500 OAM students enrolled in ACC's military programs. Purposive sampling is when the researcher chooses the study's population sample on the basis of finding valuable information about the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). The anticipated response rate based

---

<sup>2</sup> This is a pseudonym for the course title, but captures the essence of the class

on the history of these types of studies, according to the IRB department at ACC, was about 50 responses to the 2,500 pool of students. The actual response rate turned out to be only 13, which was much lower than the typical rate. Of the 13 responses, 6 students were willing or able to commit to the completion of the entire interview process.

The study's research sample were OAM students enrolled in ACC's distance-learning military programs. The students had recently completed or were actively enrolled in at least one course at ACC. The use of pseudonyms protected the confidentiality of all study participants.

**Criteria for inclusion.** There was interest in selecting a purposive sample of students that were in active service and representative of different units in the military.

- All of the respondents were OAM students deployed or had been previously deployed to conflict zones.
- The sample was chosen from a pool of possible subjects in response to an email inviting volunteers to participate in the study.
- The military programs section of the college serves only military students, veterans, reservists and their spouses, therefore, the invitation to participants email reached only those enrolled at ACC through the military programs section of the college.
- Location, military unit and rank were noted.

## **Participants**

Participants were selected from a pool of active online military students from ACC's military programs. Each participant: *Tom Hawthorne, Brett Emerson, Harrison Jameyson, Zach Turner, Joe Zavala, and Carlton Diem* was an active member of the military (see Table 1). They had all been taking online courses at ACC's military programs and were either



deployed or recently deployed. Each subject was male and eligible for active service. They were all in the process of working on their associate’s degree with interest in pursuing a bachelor’s degree or beyond.

Table 1

*Demographics of Study Participants*

Name (Pseudonym)	Gender	Rank	Military Unit	Location
Tom Hawthorne	M	Sergeant	Marines	Hawaii
Brett Emerson	M	Officer	Navy	West Coast
Zach Turner	M	Lance Corporal	Marines	Deployed
Harrison Jameyson	M	Officer	Navy	Deployed
Joe Zavala	M	Sergeant	Army	Deployed
Carlton Diem	M	Sergeant	Marines	West Coast

*Tom Hawthorne* is a sergeant in the Marine Corps who likes challenge and adventure like many who enlist in the military. He works as an Imagery Intelligence Analyst. He is married with children and was soon to be leaving for another deployment. Hawthorne intends to transfer to pursue his bachelor’s after achieving his associate’s at ACC. He also plans to apply to medical school and become a physician or physician’s assistant.

*Brett Emerson* is an Information Technologist II for the Navy. He is a second-class petty officer. Ambitious and savvy, he looks for ways to succeed and combining college with military service provided a fast track toward his post-service goals. He plans to obtain an associate’s degree in science network security, and a bachelor’s and master’s in computer science. Emerson was originally from the South and is currently stationed in California.

*Zach Turner* is a Lance Corporal Marines Intelligence Specialist. Turner is preparing for life on the civilian side by getting his education while in the military. He hasn't decided on a major yet, but plans to get associate's degree before getting out of the Marine Corps and obtain a bachelor's at a University of California (UC) campus. He'd like to study supervision and management.

*Harrison Jameyson* is a Tactical Information Operations Operator (TIO-O) in the Navy, Rank E-6. He was currently deployed at the time of the interview. He plans to transfer to a four-year university after completing his general educational courses online at ACC and obtaining his associate's degree. He believes he's learned much from the military about the practical aspects of life, but that his training is "much too specialized to ever be used out in the civilian world." As far as his plans, he does intend to transition post service into a career on the other side.

*Joe Zavala* is an Army UAV operator. He has a strong relationship with his wife and they have one child. He separates himself from his military life when he is not at work and tries to fully engage with his family life. He has previously lived in Virginia and would like to retire there. He is close to completing his associate's at ACC and will be applying to four-year universities to pursue his bachelor's.

*Carlton Diem* works as a combat instructor in the Marines. His is married with children, and resides in California. He describes himself as a lifelong learner and has enjoyed every class he has taken in college. He is completing his associate's at ACC and will apply to transfer to a four-year university to obtain his bachelor's.

## **Human Subjects Protection Considerations**

Prior to the research, the researcher completed a human subjects training course to comply with Pepperdine's IRB requirements (see Appendix H). The researcher obtained permission from ACC's IRB prior to the study and an approval for exempt research was obtained from Pepperdine University's Graduate Professional Review Board's Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix G). A consent form was used to fully inform the students about the purpose of the research and that the results would be studied confidentially, including the use of pseudonyms in the place of any proper nouns (See Appendix D). Participants were able to voluntarily participate and to withdraw at any time and any dropouts from the response pool were accounted for in the data calculations. There was no deception involved in the study as all participants were fully informed in advance about the details of the study and were informed that their names and the name of the college would not be used. The researcher took every precaution to ensure that the study fully adhered to the guidelines set forth in the Belmont Report for minimal risk.

Anticipated threats were minimal to the participants' psychological, physical, legal, economic, or social wellbeing and the benefits were that their responses would add to the body of research needed for this study and others that would follow. Threats to any participant's well being in any of the aforementioned categories would be accounted for and eliminated to the maximum extent. There were no direct benefits nor any anticipated conflicts of interest, unless it was discovered that the student participants were under research by another source, and if so, this information would be disclosed and accounted for, or another participant would be called on to substitute in the research; however, this scenario did not occur. A twenty-five dollar gift card for amazon.com was provided in

exchange for the participants' time. Any non-participants or study dropouts were contacted with an email explaining the importance of the study and how it would be used, and then left alone after two attempts if there continued to be no response.

Once all permissions were received, the researcher collected data from participants enrolled in ACC's military programs for two weeks within the 2017 online spring course semester. The interview questions were delivered in an unbiased, open inquiry style and the researcher recorded the information as data to be used in the analytical stage of the research process. Each interview took approximately 60 minutes to complete.

### **Data Collection**

Methods included a qualitative phenomenological investigation into the OAM students' perceptions and lived experiences while taking online courses, using responses to the interview protocol. All of the data was collected for the purposes of qualitative analysis.

### **Instrumentation: Interview Protocol**

The researcher collected qualitative data through instrumentation of interview questions with a total of 17 questions with six OAM students (see Appendix A). All interview questions were derived from the research literature and supported by the theoretical framework. They were aligned with the research questions and the purpose of the study. The questions were developed to evoke responses to describe the participants' perceptions and lived experiences while taking classes online at ACC. To elicit data to complete a full picture of the experiences, the questions were designed to inquire about the motivations, supports, and conflicts associated with completing college coursework while in active service.

The questions were reviewed and approved by ACC’s Dean of Institutional Effectiveness, who is a subject matter expert in qualitative analysis. Thereafter, the interviews were conducted virtually between the researcher and each of the participants individually. The questions were designed to find out more about the OAM students’ perceptions about the phenomenon under study (see Tables 2, 3, 4, 5). The groups of questions that were related to each research question were asked with the intention of engaging the participants’ imaginative variation of the phenomenon (Husserl, 1962). Interview questions 1, 2, and 3 were developed in connection with overarching research question 1 (see Table 2).

Table 2

*Literature Table Question 1*

Research Question	Interview Questions	Research Literature
1. What are the perceptions and lived experiences of OAM students regarding their online courses while participating in ACC’s general education courses?	1. What is your position in the military and how long have you been in deployment? 2. Please describe your location and some of your responsibilities. 3. Please describe your experience with online learning. What educational experiences have shaped your perspective about online learning while actively serving in the military?	Creswell (2013) DiRamio & Jarvis (2011) Green & Wagner (2011) Moustakas (1994) Stone (2015)

The first two questions were purposed to obtain basic information about the participants' background, such as military position, rank, deployment status, location, and a description of some of their responsibilities. The third question inquires about the specific phenomenon of experiencing online education while actively serving in the military. It began with a prompt serving to investigate the participants first hand experiences with the phenomenon. This question sought greater understanding about the information and experiences that shaped their perspectives while in the process of taking online college classes.

The second set of questions was developed to seek information for research question 2. The fourth question continues under the scope of research question one to gain more information about the OAM students' perspectives, including their educational goals and the influence of any mentors or significant others that may have influenced their online learning experiences. Question 5 was developed to find out about how the OAM student participants evaluate their experience with the phenomenon in connection with their perception of success. Questions 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 pursue answers about the participants' academic motivation and influences, including finding out more about their decision to pursue higher education. Participants were also asked to describe how they felt in their process of realizing their dreams and goals and what motivated them to progress. Additionally, there was the intention to find out about their perceptions and experiences with support services as a motivational component or influence on the OAM students' educational experience (see Table 3).

Table 3

*Literature Table Question 2*

Research Question	Interview Questions	Research Literature
<p>2. What are the factors that motivate OAM students' educational progress at ACC and what supports do they encounter?</p>	<p>4. What are your educational goals? How have others (professors, military colleagues, student peers, etc.) influenced your online learning experiences while in active service?</p> <p>5. Would you consider your online learning experiences to be a successful endeavor?</p> <p>6. How did you come to the decision to pursue college credits while in service?</p> <p>7. Please describe how you became aware of online courses. What caused you to respond?</p> <p>8. Do you feel as if you are on the path to realizing your dreams and personal goals? Please describe.</p> <p>9. What motivates you to achieve your dreams and goals?</p> <p>10. What online learning support resources are you aware of at the military or at ACC? Which, if any, have you accessed and describe those that were most helpful.</p>	<p>Watkins &amp; Sherk (2008)            Zoli et al. (2015)            Fredrickson &amp; Joiner (2002)            Pink (2011)            Radford &amp; Weko (2009)            Radford &amp; Wun (2011)            Rumann &amp; Hamrick (2009)            Tugade &amp; Fredrickson (2004)            Zinger &amp; Cohn (2010)</p>

The third set of questions (11,12, 13) was developed to seek information about the conflicts or challenges that occur with the phenomenon. These questions sought to find out more about the nature of the conflicts associated with OAM students' balancing of multiple

duties and coursework, and any other challenges that may arise that might deter student success (see Table 4).

Table 4

*Literature Table Question 3*

Research Question	Interview Questions	Research Literature
3. What are the primary perceived conflicts with achieving educational progress that OAM students experience at ACC?	<p>11. Have you found your active service to be compatible with the completion of online courses? Please describe.</p> <p>12. Please share any challenges, if any, that you experienced balancing online course work and your military duties.</p> <p>13. Does being away during deployment from your regular support system, such as family or friends, have any effect on your ability to study? Please describe your experience.</p>	<p>West et al. (2006)            Fredrickson,            Tugade, Waugh &amp;            Larkin (2003)            Messina (2014)            Rexford (2007)            Rensel (2015)            Pearlstein (2012)</p>

The fourth set of questions (14, 15, 16, 17) sought to find out more about information that may help future OAM students, such as advice from first hand experiences or the participants' supportive influences and/ or mentors. Participants were asked about their responses to offers of support or the presence of positive role models while coping with uncomfortable thoughts and feelings. Question 16 inquired about OAM students' preferred frame of mind for learning, and Question 17 sought more information about how OAM students' envisioned the future of online learning. The purpose of these questions was to inquire about how OAM responded to conflict and what had caused improved their educational progress while enrolled in community college general education courses at ACC (see Table 5).



Table 5

*Literature Table Question 4*

Research Question	Interview Questions	Research Literature
<p>4. How can the primary conflicts be resolved or better addressed to improve the educational progress of OAM students enrolled in community college general education courses?</p>	<p>14. Can you recall any particular advice or strategy shared that has helped with your e-learning while in deployment or otherwise?</p> <p>15. Do you respond well to supportive comments and positive role models offering assistance to you through the military or college resources when you are feeling upset, or would you rather deal with negative or uncomfortable thoughts or feelings alone?</p> <p>16. What is your best frame of mind for learning?</p> <p>17. How would you describe or envision the future of online learning for active military students?</p>	<p>Arai (2015) Ballenger-Browning &amp; Johnson (2010) Edwards &amp; Rothbard, (1999) Higbee (2010) Morris &amp; Madsen (2007) Rensel (2015) Ungar et al. (2008) Zolli &amp; Healy (2012)</p>

The interviews were completed online to simulate a face-to-face approach, with follow ups, if requested. If the participant did not wish to be on video, the interviews took place by telephone or by online chat. All the responses were transcribed. Each participant was initially scheduled to be interviewed only once, although follow up interviews were a possibility if more information by the researcher was needed, the interview was interrupted for any reason, or if requested by a participant who wished to add more information.

According to van Manen (1990), interviews are useful for understanding lived experience because language is what gives life to experience. Experience in itself is nothing, unless it is translated through concepts and feelings that are all cognitively defined through the biases and limitations that accompany one's unique consciousness. This limitation of conscious perception, only perceiving up to a certain point, is due to consciousness' inception with language; it is called the horizon (Gadamer, 1989). Perception arises from consciousness, and is structured through the development of language. Thus, language is what makes the experience *something* (van Manen, 1990). Van Manen (1990) explains, "you can only understand that of which you care" (p. 7). This is not to say that feeling causes understanding, it is consciousness' interpretive nature that causes understanding, and one's understanding is shaped and determined by consciousness and language. Therefore, phenomenologists prefer interviews where the participant speaks openly about perceptions and first hand experiences. This basis for the data collection is meant to illuminate the perceptions and lived experiences through generalizations across subjective descriptions and meaning units. According to Creswell (2013), an optimal number of participants can range from "3 to 4 individuals to 10 to 15" (p.78). Participants should be from a "heterogeneous group [and] have all experienced the same phenomenon" (Creswell, 2013, p.78). The purpose of the individual interviews is to collect the data and do a horizontalization of the data to find out the essence of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

### **Content Validity**

The instrument's validity is supported by the literature. The research question alignment, list of questions and literature sources are noted in Tables 2, 3, 4 and 5.

## **Data Collection Procedures**

The data collection for the participants in the qualitative phenomenological methodological approach occurred through email and online interviews. There were interview response records, documentation, transcriptions and notes about the interviews. The invitational email contained information about the study, the study's purpose, the researcher and researcher's organization. The students' received information in the email that their identities would be kept confidential and that all interview question responses and other forms of qualitative data, such as online interview transcriptions, emails or notes, would be documented and recorded with names removed, so that any identifying information and all the data collected for analysis would remain completely confidential. The study commenced when there were an adequate number of OAM students willing to fully participate. The students went through the research process for approximately two weeks for the purposes of scheduling and conducting the interviews to collect the data. Here is a chronological list of the study's data collection procedures:

- Network with leadership in ACC's Military Programs to obtain information about needs or questions regarding the study.
- Obtain a verbal agreement to proceed with the study from the manager of military programs.
- Complete human subjects protection course for IRB
- Obtain IRB approval for study at ACC's military programs site.
- Obtain IRB approval for the study from Pepperdine University's IRB.
- Recruit possible participants from ACC's military programs through email.
- Schedule interviews with participants

- Complete all six interviews using the interview protocol (see Appendices A, B)
- Record and take notes on interviews
- Transcribe interviews and store on confidential file on researcher's computer
- Upload transcribed interviews to NVivo
- Code data using NVivo
- Analyze codes for emerging themes
- Write the participants' stories in the findings section of Chapter 4.

### **Data Management**

To confidentially manage the data that originated from the interviews, the researcher stored the responses to the interviews, including the associated recordings, transcriptions and notes in a password-protected file. It was the sole responsibility of the researcher to manage the data, and it was stored on the researcher's computer with all identifying information removed. A hard copy of the key of pseudonyms was stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home. All data will be destroyed three years after study completion.

### **Data Analysis**

The six participants completed the interviews serving as the main source of data that was recorded and then coded for analysis. The codes served as indicators that were converted into themes that emerged from the data. The data collected was not interpreted during the process of the interviews. The interview responses were objectively recorded, transcribed and then coded to find themes. The themes were developed to provide

additional perspective for analysis of the perceptions of the OAM students' lived experiences.

The data analysis included: completing notes about student interview responses, coding for interview responses and writing observations with codebook and technological coding application called NVivo, identifying trends, themes, and changes for further analysis and the discovery of units of meaning.

The coding proceeded with the researcher keeping an open frame of mind as to avoid bias or judgment, called the *epoche* (van Manen, 1990). The researcher fine-tuned the codes by constantly comparing the data and creating new paradigms about the phenomenon to discover issues such as reoccurring ideas and units of meaning. Once the codes and themes were created, the researcher gave the codes and thematic information to two experienced coders to ensure external validity. Participants' interview responses, including their significant statements and the emergent themes were used to explain the essence of the experience. The focus of the interpretation remained on the participants' descriptions rather than the researcher's interpretations (Moustakas, 1994). The results were reviewed for understanding about the perceptions and lived experiences of the OAM student participants. These findings, conclusions and analyses were to be presented in Chapters 4 and 5.

### **Positionality**

I have been an online instructor for approximately ten years for distance-learning military programs and have seventeen years of online teaching experience in college-level English and Literature courses. My understanding of learning aligns with the constructivist knowledge model in that learning is contextual and socially constructed, and with that of

phenomenology. Knowledge building is dependent on what the learner accepts as true and is built upon what is already known. The learner's culture, ideologies, beliefs, perceptions, internalized rules and policies that restrict, reframe or extend their thinking and behavior all combine into their interpretation of reality and how each new lived experience is explained by the nature of intentionality. The concept that learners can increase awareness of the way they process experience and find meaning with it coincides with the researcher's epistemological stance about learners' feelings about the process of meaning. The learner will interpret it and communicate assertions that argue for the learner's personalized meaning to others, mirroring the collective definitions put forth historically and by those around them, into a cohesive and relatively cogent summary of reality that can be accessed and interpreted by others.

I am the daughter of a veteran who first served in the Army for a tour in Vietnam and then 10 years more in the Air Force. I have lived in several cities near military bases during childhood and grew up around the military culture. My father received his B.A. and M.A. degrees while in the service through California state college correspondence courses that have since been defined as an early predecessor of the modern day online courses presently offered all over the world. Therefore, my positionality on the topic is furthermore motivated by personal experience to help OAM students resolve conflict, become more resilient, acquire more knowledge and to be successful with the achievement of their academic aspirations and dreams after military service.

### **Summary**

The qualitative phenomenological analysis was designed to find deeper understanding about the perceptions and lived experiences of OAM students, including

their motivating factors, supports and conflicts. The study did not seek to provide intervention, but to improve understanding of the important meaning units that emerged from the data. The findings may assist in furthering knowledge about how to improve OAM students' educational experiences, progress and success rates.

## **Chapter 4: Results**

### **Introduction**

Chapter 4 describes the data found through six qualitative interviews and the research findings. The responses to the interview protocol are summarized with the findings. The study's themes are described as they relate to the research questions.

### **Purpose Statement**

This qualitative phenomenological study sought to learn about the experiences of OAM students enrolled in ACC's distance learning military programs department. This study posits that more information about OAM students' experiences while taking online courses at ACC will increase understanding about how to universally improve OAM students' educational progress.

### **Profiles of Participants**

This section summarizes the interview findings across several different themes under the heading of each participant. Direct and block quotes illustrate examples of the participants' distinct voices and a selection of their significant statements. As restated in Chapter 3, pseudonyms are used for all participants.

#### **Tom Hawthorne-Participant 1**

Tom Hawthorne is a sergeant in the Marine Corps. He was stationed in Hawaii at the time of the interview and was preparing to leave for another deployment. He was currently enrolled full time at ACC, though had previously taken courses while deployed to Afghanistan and in other parts of the Middle East. Hawthorne plans to complete his general education coursework through online classes and then be eligible to transfer to one of the



University of California campuses after he completes his military service. He then plans to attend medical school.

**Motivational factors and supporting influences.** He chose to attend ACC because “they offered classes that would meet my IGETC requirements, which are needed to transfer to a UC.”<sup>3</sup> He felt comfortable taking online college courses because “a lot of the annual training that we have to do in the military is online.” He believed it would be a manageable transition. He was informed by one of his military leaders that the military pays for free school while serving so he figured he should pursue this opportunity. Hawthorne remembered his leader said, “If you don’t go to school while you’re in, you’re stupid.” Hawthorne said,

I was always told, ‘you get what you put in’, which I’ve found to be true. Especially with online classes, it can be easy to procrastinate and not put in the same amount of effort. And while maybe I could get away with doing the minimum, I refuse to make that a habit that will eventually follow me along my educational path.

Hawthorne actively completes his work, with maximum effort, as stated in the content of his statement.

Hawthorne has a positive self-image and considers himself resilient. If negative feelings or bad memories come up, he prefers to deal with them on his own, although he also feels a general sense of positive support from his family and from the other military members. He is aware of the resources available to him through the military and ACC’s military programs, but he has never used them. Hawthorne feels a sense of support by knowing that others around him are going through the same thing he is while in

---

<sup>3</sup> Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum (IGETC) defines the series of courses California community college students must take to fulfill the general education requirements needed to transfer to the majority of majors at University of California campuses.

deployment and are willing to help one another. He feels helping others pushes him to succeed and works better under stress. His resilience helps him get any job done and help others as well.

**Conflicts and coping strategies.** Hawthorne said challenges he'd experienced with online learning while actively serving primarily included logistics, such as the reliability of an Internet connection. There were issues with connectivity while he was taking courses while deployed to the Middle East. Hawthorne described some of his responsibilities while taking online courses during deployment,

At the time I was an infantryman and my responsibilities were to train new Marines infantry tactics. We were a part of a Tactical Recovery of Aircraft Personnel [TRAP] team, which was used when in the case of an aircraft crashing in a hostile environment. We would go in, clear the area of any enemy combatants, find the pilots and other personnel and extract them as safely as possible.

Hawthorne's story illuminates the pressures he experienced while deployed. However, the experience of his military responsibilities did not negatively affect his performance as a college student. Hawthorne acknowledged that the military philosophy is consistent with "not doing the minimum". This influences his commitment to excelling in his roles in the military and as a student.

Other challenges to online course work were that some classes he had completed would not transfer to his future colleges of choice. Reflectively, he has found that particular advantages to online learning are that he has learned how to facilitate his own learning better and has improved writing skills.

### **Brett Emerson-Participant 2**

Brett Emerson is an Information Technologist II for the Navy. He is a second-class petty officer and has been deployed seven times to locations including: Oman, Afghanistan,

Singapore, Thailand, Australia, and Japan, among others. These deployments have included active conflict zones.

While in deployment, Emerson's responsibilities included troubleshooting and maintaining readiness for communication support. Emerson said he "plans to obtain an associate's degree in science network security, and a bachelor's and master's in computer science." Emerson looks for ways to succeed academically and professionally, and combining college with military service provided a fast track toward his goals post-service.

**Motivational factors and supporting influences.** Emerson finds taking online courses while in the military a "great opportunity to advance his career." He is acquiring knowledge to prepare for his experiences in the future, as he points out, "Technology is taking over and is everywhere from phones to personal computers to corporate America." By the time he finishes his service, he will have completed 60-90 college credits and will be better prepared for more brick-and-mortar college courses and for his career when he is transitioned back into civilian life.

Currently, he is stationed in San Diego. He likes to socialize with others who have been through similar conflicts that he has, and whom have overcome difficult obstacles while in the service. This has helped him feel resilient and he experiences this as a supportive influence. Additionally, he has used military and college military resources for further support.

**Conflicts and coping strategies.** Emerson said that he prefers to take time to do his coursework when he is not in deployment rather than other things he could do outside of the service when he is not deployed. He said, "Time [while at home] is more under your control." Personally, he feels a strong will to achieve. This characteristic has helped him get

through episodes of conflict, such as taking a heavy schedule of courses while deployed overseas. He explains that, "it takes a lot of effort to create a successful career." Like Hawthorne, Emerson expressed a high level of personal ambition that inoculates against experiences of stress and conflict, to a certain extent.

### **Zach Turner-Participant 3**

Zach Turner is a Lance Corporal Marines Intelligence Specialist. He has had two deployments. The first deployment was on a ship in the Middle East and his second deployment was in Asia: Mount Fuji and Okinawa Island, Japan and Seoul, South Korea. His responsibilities included completing briefs for commanders in enemy situations, such as missile launches from North Korea or about tensions in the Middle East.

Turner has not decided on a major yet, but plans to earn an associate's degree before getting out of the Marine Corps. He'd like to study supervision and management and transfer to a university in California. He plans to decide on a major by then and eventually complete a bachelor's degree.

**Motivating factors and supporting influences.** Turner is preparing for his life on the civilian side by getting his education while in the military, and he is motivated to make this a smooth transition. Turner is aware of the educational resources offered by the Marine Corps and says, "There is an enticing program called 'educational assistance.'" Turner said, "They offer a free CLEP test where you can opt out of a college course if you have the skills to pass. Usually, these tests cost money and the Marine Corps pays for the first one." He explained that there is also tuition assistance available and that all of the new marines are oriented with these programs.

Turner says he keeps an open frame of mind, and that his friends from past and present lend support. He said, "I have high school friends that I reach out to every once in a while that I share my problems and experiences with. I have good mentors so I believe I have the knowledge I need." Turner said, in response to a question about what motivates him, that it was his drive for a better quality of life and his significant other. Additionally, he said, "I'm in a plateau phase in my life. Not because of education, because of my work." He has some important role models, and considers himself independent.

**Conflicts and coping strategies.** Turner is able to email his instructors if he has a conflict with a deadline. He did not "expect them [instructors] to be that lenient, but they have been." He maintains a positive self-image and has a variety of coping resources such as working out, listening to music, or taking a shower.

Turner finds that taking online courses and being deployed are compatible, and OAM students can be successful in both at the same time. He adds that the difficulty combining the two "depends on where you are located and what your responsibilities are." He feels he would be doing better in his classes if he were taking them while not in deployment, but he call the situation the "nature of the beast for now, anyway." He wishes there was a better schedule for completing the coursework. He replied, "The Marines always let you take something [in online courses] but not as much as what could be done." He has found some positive strategies for completing coursework while in deployment. He says he knows ahead of time when he will not have an internet connection, so in these cases, he will "email the instructors ahead of time to let them know." However, he has not found many issues with connectivity and has not had trouble balancing course work with deployment responsibilities. He has to be "pre emptive" about completing work otherwise

he may have missed deadlines, but he always looks forward to them and avoids them by completing things early.

As for conflict, he is required to be calm and collected in his job as an air controller instructor. He finds his work and online environments to be an important factor to maintaining his resilience and resistance to conflict. He appreciates a learning environment when he is able to mentally focus on what he's learning, which is what he considers critical for successful course work.

#### **Harrison Jameyson-Participant 4**

Harrison Jameyson is a Tactical Information Operations Operator (TIO-O) in the Navy, rank E-6. He's been deployed to Afghanistan multiple times as well as Africa and South America. He explained his role as follows:

Officially the verbiage for my job is: Provides focused cryptologic and Tactical Information Operations support to NSW [Navy Special Warfare]. Performs signals intelligence, direction finding, and precision geolocation operations in support of Special Operations Forces (SOF) mission sets on ground, air and maritime environments.

He was recently deployed to Special Reconnaissance Team Two in Virginia and he is in the process of completing his general education courses online at ACC. He plans to transfer to a four-year university and obtain his bachelor's.

**Motivating factors and supporting influences.** Jameyson withstands stress well, though at times, it causes him to feel more apathetic, which lowers his motivation levels. He believes that everything is relative, and appeals to his sense of acceptance with thoughts like, "it could be worse," or "at least I have...". Like Hawthorne, he prefers to handle stress or conflict on his own, but can talk to a few trusted confidantes if necessary, for support. He finds that if he communicates more, he may be opening up to more superficial forms of

sympathy, like “I know how you feel” when they actually do not. As someone who is independent and intellectual, he believes he finds better answers for himself from within. He has reached out to chaplains and therapists on occasion, and did feel better just for the opportunity to communicate his feelings. He didn’t want any advice, “just to get things off his chest.” The opportunity to express what he was going through seemed to be enough to support and motivate him.

**Conflicts and coping strategies.** Jameyson expressed some of the conflicts he experienced serving while taking online courses. For example, in the first chapter, Jameyson explained his story about his recent experience with online learning while in Afghanistan. Additionally, he shared some of the technical challenges,

The computers on base didn't have the java needed to access the blackboard software, nor did I have the permissions to install it.

The base was low on supplies too, so the only thing they could give us was the largest box of pop-tarts I had ever seen-we're talking a small cargo ship containers worth. I took the final a week or so later when we got the internet fixed, while eating a pop-tart, and got a B on it.

Jameyson’s experience illuminates some of the challenges faced by deployed OAM students as he struggled to take his final. He also says that he feels more distracted from his coursework while deployed, because he is looking forward to any texts, messages or calls from his friends and family while he is away. He feels he wants to stay more connected because he is gone from them for the moment.

Jameyson also expressed resiliency as an influential factor in his experiences with online learning and active service. He believes that resiliency is contagious, and finds it appealing when others around him seem strong, but can block out when someone is not so that he is not weakened by it. He also exercises often to increase his self-confidence, saying,

“The benefits are obvious and immediate and provide a quick sense of accomplishment.” He learns best by framing the content practically, as in, “Identifying the practicality and reasons why I need to learn x topic before tackling it helps me to stay engaged.” His reflective learning increases his success with learning the material and with educational progress.

### **Joe Zavala-Participant 5**

Joe Zavala is an Army UAV operator and he has been deployed three times to the Middle East. He has a strong relationship with his wife and they have one child. He does not plan to leave the military; he enjoys his career in the military and has plans to eventually retire and enjoy what life has to offer thereafter. He has previously lived in Virginia and would like to retire there. He is working toward his associate’s degree and, then after, is planning to transfer to a four-year university to obtain his bachelor’s degree.

**Motivating factors and supporting influences.** Zavala’s family is what most motivates him. While he does have many relationships with military colleagues, he stays most connected with his wife and a few close friends. For example, Zavala stated that “supportive comments helped a lot but they have to be from the right people.” He has not depended on the military or academic support services often, but is aware of them. Like Jameyson, he only appreciates supportive comments from others if they seem sincere. His attitude to help others and to fight for what is right is the truth, and he doesn’t like insincere responses in exchange. Independently spirited, he feels intrinsically motivated to inspire others and “to be the best person he can” for his loved ones.

**Conflicts and coping strategies.** Zavala experienced conflicts with his online learning course conditions while trying to learn when he was feeling distracted or stressed.



Zavala learns best in an environment that is focused, undistracted, and disconnected from stress. He finds the instant reinforcement from quick online grading helps him stay focused and it one of the most appealing aspects of online course work. His educational pursuits have been compatible with his military career, although he is ambivalent whether or not deployment makes the process more difficult. While deployed, his hours are longer and more demanding, although he is less distracted by those around him to work. If he plans ahead, he is able to get his work done around his schedule with a few exceptions. In those cases, he has found the online instructors to be accommodating.

### **Carlton Diem-Participant 6**

Carlton Diem is a Sergeant in the Marines and has been deployed but did not disclose the location. He is also working toward his associate's degree at ACC and plans to transfer to a four-year college to major in International Politics. Married with children, he is originally from a rust belt state but now resides in California.

**Motivating factors and supporting influences.** He has not used support groups, citing that, "This is a hard form of dependency." He does, however, find support among his friends, family and military colleagues and this helps to motivate him. Sergeant Diem states,

Although many people come and go in a career like mine, nearly everyone that I come into contact with is easy to share personal things with because we are all like minded individuals, dealing with the same things. I prefer to deal with things alone until I feel like discussing them.

Diem is more motivated when he experiences more autonomy and can learn well independently.

**Conflicts and coping strategies.** Hawthorne and Diem had similar perspectives on how to approach military and school conflicts. Diem repeated a version of the phrase

Hawthorne quoted, “You get what you put into it, as for anything like that.” Diem added, “With that being said, I feel as though I can be doing more to accomplish....Anyone who doesn't think that is probably nowhere near being on the path.” He maintains balance and resilience through philosophies such as,

I consider myself to be somewhat self-aware and can improve in many aspects. I try to do what is right. Right as in the ethical and moral parameters of how I conduct myself at work and in society. Great thinkers and those who have made the world what it is today. Those men and women who have done much more than I have with much less. Wanting to leave an impact in the world, which I would like to be on a large scale, but will settle for impacting a person at a time that I come into contact with.

Diem relies on strength of character to progress through life as it comes. He states he is someone who adapts well to conflict and stress and this helps with his educational progress.

## **Themes**

This section describes the primary themes that emerged from the data. The themes are then discussed as they correlate with the respective research questions and the interview protocol. The data was coded by the researcher using NVivo software and then categorized into themes. The relevance of each theme is designated by the frequency of the theme discussed in the interviews. The themes that emerged from the data were: Online Learning Environment, Personal Traits & Goals, Support Systems & Family, Conflict of Work/ Life Balance, Organizational Skills & Coping Mechanisms (Table 6).

Table 6

*Theme Definitions*

Theme	Theme Definition
Online Learning Environment	E-learning instructional setting containing a transaction between computer mediated content and knowledge acquisition
Personal Traits & Goals	Recognition of “self” that includes a unique combination of traits that separates one individual from others, to include the notion of one’s appearance, roles and abilities. “Goals” refers to an individual’s aspirations.
Support Systems & Family	Support Systems are all aspects of supporting an individual toward educational progress; these supports include people, friends, role models, mentors, counselors, or colleagues, and military and collegiate support resources. Family includes the OAM student’s spouses, children or supportive family members.
Conflict of Work/ Life Balance	Conflict between demands of work and other life roles
Organizational Skills & Coping Mechanisms	Skills with planning, prioritizing and carrying out goals and responsibilities. Methods one uses to manage conflict, increase resilience and reduce stress.

**Research Question 1: What are the Perceptions and Lived Experiences of OAM Students Regarding Their Online Courses While Participating in ACC’s General Education Courses?**

Hawthorne, Emerson, Turner and Jameyson specifically reported being involved in demanding military roles while deployed in global areas of tension, or conflict zones, and taking classes. They had to follow strict schedules to allow them to complete coursework as directed by any downtime from military duties. The increased reflection and mental challenge required in online courses provide stress reduction if the conditions were positive learning conditions and the instructors were accommodating. The theme that emerged from the data in response to research question one involved the conditions of the *Online Learning Environment*.

## **Online Learning Environment**

The online learning environment impacts the OAM students' experiences. The definition of the online learning environment for this study is the e-learning instructional setting containing a transaction between computer mediated content and knowledge acquisition. The following paragraphs discuss the theme of the online learning environment and what aspects of this affect the OAM students' experiences while taking courses at ACC. Multiple factors including accommodations, course design, and connectivity influenced how the online learning environment impacted the OAM students' learning experience.

**The online learning environment is critical to OAM student progress.** The participants praised the online course environments for their general education courses at ACC. Only Jameyson and Diem gave an example or two of extra self-teaching, but in the context of overall praise about their experiences. Diem also did not offer his example as a form of criticism of the online experience, rather, he described his self-taught example regarding referring to viewing instructional YouTube videos as a strategy to supplement his learning as needed.

The general consensus among all six military student participants was that their online instructors were usually accommodating to the variable schedules demanded by active duty. The participants were servicemen from the Navy, Marine Corps and Army, and had all experienced variable schedules that made organizing time for school and other life activities a necessity. Deployment was an aspect of active military service that required a demanding line of duties not immediately compatible with the time required for college coursework. Hawthorne and Emerson said their instructors had been accommodating with

deadline extensions. Both men had been deployed while taking courses and had needed to request extra time for assignments when they were prevented from completing them due to active duty requirements. Diem mentioned that he had good experiences with instructor flexibility, “save one or two.” Turner said he “didn’t expect them [instructors] to be lenient, but they have been.” Turner believes there are multiple advantages of taking online courses at ACC. For example, he “appreciates how all the instructors realize that their students are in the military and understand that they are in different situations and time zones. The deadlines are flexible”. It was one of Turner’s colleagues in the marines that recommended that he enroll at ACC, and he has had a positive experience with his online courses.

Turner also considers some of his ACC professors and military leaders as positive role models and mentors. He has found the professors to be “nice and easy to relate to.” They have been open about their lives and “can be hilarious at times and brighten the day”. Turner went on to explain that he is currently taking a philosophy class, and while one might think the online experience is very impersonal, it seems very personal to him. He adapts well to online environment because of the instructors. He described his instructor as someone who,

Goes into feedback.... Then goes off on tangents ...like personal things on tangents. He will be asking questions or providing random facts about philosophers or other subjects. He is talkative and doesn’t care that he won’t meet us in person. It still feels human.

He appreciates how this professor makes the online experience seem personal. He also likes the use of online books, which he had never used until he took online courses through the military. He likes reading better this way and finds his coursework easier to accomplish with technology.

The online course environment was characterized by the experience of instructors' being attentive and accommodating to their issues with schedule conflicts. Turner and Diem stated that they had positive experiences in every class. Zavala had experienced some difficulties with forgiveness when assignments were late due to travel or deployment interferences, but found that they were most often flexible about deadlines. The instructors typically granted extensions to complete work after the end of the courses through the assignment of incomplete grades with time to turn in the remaining work, or by accepting work after due dates.

**Course design.** The OAM student participants reported that the online courses were user-friendly. Zavala mentioned that online courses were easy to learn after already taking the online courses the military offers while in training. Jameyson had previously taken correspondence courses, which he said was the norm prior to the online courses offered from colleges and universities nationwide today. With correspondence courses, the style of learning was self-paced and military students completed packets of coursework. Most present-day online courses require scheduled deadlines. Jameyson stated that the one of the biggest issues negotiating online courses and active deployment was time management. Jameyson said, "They [online courses] are a huge step up from correspondence courses that just gave you a packet of papers and a set time to mail them back." While he appreciated the course design of most contemporary online courses, he said that some of his military colleagues were still interested in taking correspondence courses on the basis of the self-paced feature. He says some soldiers look for courses that offer "mid-terms and finals on your own terms, versus having to log in and turn things in by a certain time." Diem has

found the design of the online courses forces students to be more “intensive and self-driven” than traditional, in-classroom learning. He explained,

It is on the student to seek out external resources that I assume traditional learners may not have to find. For example, the only thing that got me through my biology class were YouTube videos of a high school AP biology teacher’s lessons. I have turned to YouTube a lot, and feel that as an online learner, I am closer to being self-taught than traditional learners. This isn’t to say that professors haven’t been helpful, but the interaction is missing, no matter how many emails and discussions are included. Sometimes it’s better to see someone explain things. I have had professors add videos and PP presentations that have helped out, but that depends on the professor.

Despite his critique of online learning, Diem acknowledges that, “[Online learning] is the only sensible option for military students.” This statement was echoed by Turner, Emerson and Zavala. All of the participants felt that online courses were a necessary part of their college education while in the military, despite issues with scheduling time to complete coursework. The internet-accessible, asynchronous format of online classes was a practicality of any OAM student wanting to further their education. Some participants, such as Hawthorne, Diem and Jameyson, brought up missing the face-to-face classroom interaction despite the ease and efficiency of taking online courses; however, they all reported having positive experiences with the interaction and course design experienced with the instructors online.

**Connectivity.** Hawthorne, Emerson and Jameyson specifically reported that they were challenged to resolve connectivity issues with their online course work while deployed in conflict zones. Internet connections were inconsistent or nonexistent in many of the areas the soldiers were deployed. Jameyson mentioned this as one of the biggest concerns about taking online courses while actively serving, the other being time

management as stated in the previous section. Hawthorne bought a hotspot to counteract issues with connectivity before leaving for the Middle East. He explained,

Basically, one thing that I do every time I know I'm going to be sent somewhere for training is I look up the area that I will be in and check the coverage for my phone provider...Always looking ahead to where I will be next allows me to be prepared with the tools I need in order to continue my online classes, especially having internet.

As far as coursework goes while deployed, I usually ask other who have already been where I am going and see what the options are for internet. Some places have wifi available and some have internet cafés. Luckily my job requires me to work on a computer with internet most of the time, so I am easily able to continue my education. Others are not so fortunate, and their chances of being able to take online classes becomes greatly reduced.

Hawthorne's ability to deal well with course conflict, such as connectivity, appears to relate with his ability to succeed in online courses. He thought ahead to preclude any problems or limitations in this area and expressed a positive outlook about his success and progress.

Jameyson's experiences with online courses varied from course to course. While Jameyson brought up some reports from military colleagues who prefer the self-paced style of online learning, all of the other participants reported positive experiences ACC's courses as long as they experienced good internet connections.

## **Research Question 2: What are the Factors That Motivate OAM Students' Educational Progress at ACC and What Supports Do They Encounter?**

The themes that emerged from question 2 were *Personal Traits & Goals* and *Support Systems & Family*. The soldiers were motivated by completing a college education, maximizing the benefits of the military offered, working toward a career or major, and improving their life and their loved ones. There were a variety of supports in place, but the soldier's family was the main source of support.



## **Personal Traits and Goals**

Personal traits make a difference in the way OAM students experience their online courses while serving in the military. The participants' traits included: level of ambition, resilience, independence, and feelings about taking on challenges. Moreover, online studies are critical to reaching educational and post-service goals. All participants expressed liking to challenge themselves, and that roles as military officers or sergeants and as students were compatible. The theme personal traits and goals is defined in this study as the recognition of "self" that includes a unique combination of traits that separates one individual from others. Self-image includes the notion of one's appearance, roles and abilities. "Goals" refers to the individual's aspirations. The participants had a variety of particular educational and personal post-service goals, and they believed their online studies facilitated these goals. The participants expressed that their online studies and educational progress were a component of completing their long-term goals and furthered their sense of purpose. For example, Jameyson said he believes in "humanity over else, be it politics, religion, nationality, etc." This identified a perception that informed Jameyson's purpose and affected his ambition to complete his goals, including those with online learning. Additionally, Jameyson's responses indicated he believed in his ability to persevere and succeed given the challenges he experiences.

More personal traits and goals emerged when participants referred to aspects of their personal philosophies, such as Diem, who said,

The Marine Corps' offer of assistance with tuition is something that is an absolute waste if not being used by the members. I am 34 years old and see this as the perfect time to pursue an education while I am able to juggle work and school, I also have been tinkering with the idea of being a life-long student, I enjoy nearly every subject that I have taken thus far, and hope that I will only become more interested as the subjects deepen and expands.

Diem's statement evidences strong educational aspirations. Multiple participants described personal traits such as ambition as an underlying factor of taking online courses while in the military. Turner said he was taking online courses while in the military because he was looking to better himself and his quality of life. He felt as though he was progressing toward his educational goals. Zavala holds the attitude to "help others and to fight for what's right." Independently spirited, he feels intrinsically motivated to inspire others. Living up to the best person that he can be includes finding the time to further his education while serving.

The participants' goals were affected by the ease and practicality of taking online college courses while in the military. They developed goals due to the educational benefits offered by the government in exchange for service and to achieve their career goals outside of their immediate roles in the military.

### **Support Systems and Family**

The theme support systems and family as defined in this study are all aspects of supporting an individual toward educational progress; these supports include friends, role models, mentors, counselors, or colleagues, and military and collegiate support resources. Family includes the OAM student's spouses, children or supportive family members. Support services, including military, college resources, other colleagues, and family members supported OAM students' experiences. All participants agreed the availability of educational, financial and emotional support services from the military and college created a sense of added support to their educational experience. All of the participants took advantage of the financial support from the military to complete their education, though only a few took advantage of the emotional support resources.

Family was the central source of emotional support for the participants interviewed. In addition, four of the six participants described how colleagues or significant others were extremely helpful by their support. Emerson stated, "I have a great support group [at home] that I am able to open my concerns to. This helps with negative situations and with being successful in life." Zavala specified that it is his family that most motivates and supports him more than military or college resources. Zavala stated, "I've been working hard to finish as many courses as possible...I keep going because my family depends on me." While Zavala does have many relationships with military colleagues, he stays most connected with his wife and a few close friends. He has not depended on the support systems very often, but is aware that they are available should he require them. He finds this reassuring. Emerson, Jameyson, and Turner all stated that they'd used a myriad of support services available to them through the military and the college.

Hawthorne, Jameyson, and Diem all preferred to handle stress and conflict on their own, without the available support resources, but found they relied on the option to talk to a few trusted confidantes if necessary. Hawthorne said that he supported himself by becoming a shining example when others are not functioning well in a stressful environment. He said this helped improve his own resilience. Most of the participants were expressive about if they needed or had used support services. Diem had not used support groups as he finds the most support from his friends, family and military colleagues. He feels he is someone who adapts well to conflict and stress, and sees himself as resilient as a result of his experiences. Jameyson mentioned that he finds that if he communicates more, he may be opening up to more superficial forms of sympathy, like "I know how you feel" when they do not. He and Zavala both mentioned the importance of feeling authenticity

from others when managing conflict. Emerson likes to socialize with others who have been through similar experiences that he has or have overcome similar challenges. The sense of brotherhood as a result of common experiences was an aspect of their support system.

### **Research Question 3: What are the Primary Perceived Conflicts with Achieving Educational Progress that OAM Students Experience at ACC?**

The data revealed that participants experienced conflicts with work/ life balance. The theme *Conflict of Work/ Life Balance* emerged in response to question 3. The OAM students reported a clashing set of issues that created an imbalance between the demands of the military and their other life duties, such as completing course work. There were multiple conflicts that interfered with the balance, such as scheduling difficulties, and emotional factors including separation from supportive family and guilt from taking time away from the mission.

#### **Conflict of Work/ Life Balance**

The participants experienced conflict in the area of work/ life balance, with educational progress and success hanging in the balance between the learner's organizational skills and other factors out of the learner's control, such as circumstantial factors during deployment. The type of unit the participant was involved with during deployment affects the ability to find study time, including schedule, types of duties and internet or computer accessibility in the deployed setting. The definition of the conflict of work/ life balance in this study was conflict between demands of work and other life roles. Resilience to these conflicts was enhanced as a result of good organizational skills, personal motivation, and a higher degree of autonomy or independence. The following paragraphs describe the areas of focus within the Conflict of Work/ Life Balance theme.

OAM students experience stress and conflict with balancing competing demands while taking online courses. While the responses to stressful experiences varied, there was a common thread that indicated the OAM students were invested in maintaining resilience and discussed multiple strategies they had in place for dealing with conflict, as exemplified by the responses in this section by Officers Jameyson and Emerson, and Sergeants Hawthorne and Diem.

The responses subjectively varied about how the conflict of work/ life balance was experienced when taking courses online. Emerson had been deployed the most frequently, with seven deployments, and had the experience of being able to reflect on how to improve his online learning success and progress in order to improve his grades while on his future missions.

Emerson found it more difficult to complete online courses while in deployment. The conflicts endured are stressful and this interferes with coursework completion. While the instructors are patient with deadlines and agree to extensions while Emerson was engaged in active military operations, he has been required to offer written notice by his superiors for extensions and still does not experience “enough time to focus.” There was an ongoing conflict with scheduling and the availability of the internet to do his course work. It seemed to him that whenever he had free time to work, then the internet would be down. His focus would be on the mission for his branch of service and very time demanding. He only had access to study time during certain hours.

Turner did not have as much difficulty completing coursework while in deployment. It is easier in some groups to take online classes while in deployment than others. He has not had the difficulties that some others have had, so it depends on where one is located

and what the responsibilities are. It is dependent on the individual's circumstances in the military, including their unit or location, etc. When speaking of his experience taking courses while in Afghanistan, Jameyson said,

School is secondary. In fact, anything personal is secondary. The mission always comes first. You're there with a specific skill and job that you're expected to do with 100% dedication. Personally, there's a perceived shame that comes with taking some time to yourself to study. It's just the culture in the conflict zone. Calculus becomes a distraction.

The soldiers all spoke of their dedication to performing at their best, as Jameyson's statement exemplifies. In deployment, particularly in conflict zones, there is no room to be distracted by anything other than the opposing forces. As far as the impact on his grades, Jameyson said, "Definitely detrimental. Fatigue plays a big role." Course work is often rushed or done late at night due to conflict with military duties.

Jameyson explained the conflicts and challenges he'd had with online education while in active service. He said about online education,

It's difficult but I'm thankful to be able to progress in my educational goals via distance learning. It's a huge step up from correspondence courses that just gave a packet of papers and a set time to mail them back.

Besides the intra-personal emotional conflict, he said that the biggest issues were connectivity, time management and some issues with supplies. Jameyson said,

[There's been] lack of supplies. When my calculator broke, I had to use online scientific calculators that weren't as good. A lot of math work was drawn out and done on a tabletop in pencil because we didn't have paper. Two classes is my maximum course load I can handle while on deployment, otherwise it begins to effect the job. There are days when we go out on patrols and not return for 3-4 days which means that a lot of time has to be dedicated to catching up on school-work or planning ahead. There is a certain amount of guilt that goes along with asking for a little time 'off' during deployment to study for finals and what-not.

Jameyson's statements are significant to illustrate his first hand experiences with online

learning and deployment. There are multiple issues that conflict with his educational success and progress if not effectively managed, including: erratic schedules, lack of supplies, time constraints, and emotional factors, such as guilt for taking time away from focus on the mission.

Online learning can be easier during deployment for some participants, such as Hawthorne. Hawthorne stated that he found it better to concentrate when away from his regular life. Hawthorne said the biggest challenges related to online learning while in deployment were mainly logistics, such as the experience he stated earlier when he was an online student at ACC while deployed to the Middle East. When asked if the experience of taking courses was difficult while involved in such difficult measures, Hawthorne replied,

Taking classes while on deployment hasn't really affected me much. I have still been able to get good grades. In fact, because on deployment I am away from my family, I only have to worry about balancing school and work as opposed to school, work and family. I would say I'm able to focus on school more.

Hawthorne had been able to achieve good grades despite the conflicts he had experienced with work/ life balance. He continues to feel as if he is successfully progressing toward the completion of his educational goals despite the interruptions that come with deployment. The responses to experience of online learning while deployed varied among the participants; however, the majority of responses indicated that online learning can be compatible with circumstances of active military service but is dependent on the specific environment, the types of military duties and the military unit while completing an online course.

**Research Question 4: How Can the Primary Conflicts Be Resolved or Better Addressed to Improve the Educational Progress of OAM Students Enrolled in Community College General Education Courses?**

In response to research question 4, the participants discussed having developed a variety of personal strategies for completing coursework under unpredictable conditions. All of the participants reported practicing conflict and stress reducing activities, such as exercising, listening to music, learning new skills and staying organized. The themes that emerged from research question 4 were *Organizational Skills & Coping Mechanisms*.

**Organizational Skills and Coping Mechanisms**

The definition of the theme of organizational skills & coping mechanisms in this study was skills with planning, prioritizing and carrying out goals and responsibilities and the methods one uses to manage conflict, increase resilience and reduce stress.

All of the participants discussed skills they possessed to organize the schedule between their online life and military duties. For example, participants reference completing work early or “touching base with instructors” about upcoming schedule conflicts. Turner has found some positive strategies for completing coursework while in deployment. First, he says he knows ahead of time when he will not have access to the internet, so in these cases, he will email the instructors ahead of time to let them know. Second, he tries to anticipate when he might have trouble with connectivity; however, he has not found many problems with connectivity while deployed with the Marines.

Emerson shared some organizational techniques he developed while going through different deployments that had improved his ability to study. Emerson did feel that his problems with environmental conflict or location, and the balance of duties and



coursework had negatively affected his grades. He considered where he would have the most personal leverage in terms of finding the best way to improve his student progress. He says overcoming these challenges requires exceptional time management, and he studied his schedule ahead of time and began to plan his study time around it. Emerson found that if he “slept less, he could study in the time he was supposed to sleep.” He did not miss an opportunity to complete coursework because he knew that later he would not be able to make up that time and his course work would suffer.

The participants all stated the importance of rigorous planning for study time in the context of a demanding military schedule. Emerson’s grades did improve this way in about 75% of his classes. He says, “It’s never going to be 100% in the type of environment you’re going to be in when you’re serving your country.” Emerson’s statement resounded with that of Jameyson’s, who stated that the mission always comes first; it is “the culture in the conflict zone.” While in deployment or otherwise, the primary goal is to complete military operations over any demands in course work. Moreover, one’s full attention is engaged while completing missions in conflict zones.

The participants had a variety of coping mechanisms in play. Hawthorne explained that he has “built up his resilience due to going through a series of stressful events that required him to let go after each incident so that he would have strength for the next.”

Diem explained his philosophy on coping, He states,

I believe that I am [resilient], although I have not always been this way. I think that age and experience and going through life changes and events have expedited how I deal with events that could be classified as stressful. What I have learned that has made me feel the best after a tough period is learning everything that I can about what causes intrinsic stress to the individual and attempting to combat that through personal growth.

Diem's point of view reveals how his internal beliefs affect his ability to cope with conflict, stress, or the management of multiple tasks. Turner and Jameyson both stated they exercised as a coping mechanism. Additional forms of coping mechanisms mentioned by the participants included: listening to music, taking showers, talking to people with similar backgrounds and experiences, exploring other philosophies, connecting with family/friends, having good personalities around them, being a good person, keeping a positive frame of mind, and being open to change. The participants all kept some focus on the big picture of their lives as part of their strategies for coping with conflicts.

**Preparing for the future.** Each participant had predictions about how online learning will continue in the future and shared several recommendations. Jameyson offered the following observations regarding the state and direction of online education, "I've taken classes at other institutions and really like ACC's approach of having a separate 'military' classes/schedules that offered greater flexibility. Time zones will always be an issue; so pre-recorded lectures are a must." Jameyson provided a more specific example of articulation needed between ACC and UC/CSU campuses,

The largest barrier to obtaining higher degrees is that practical portions such as science labs cannot really be done online. All the UCs and Cal States I talked to say they will not accept any science labs done online so that precludes many students from pursuing STEM degrees while on deployment....so some sort of system to address that, but for everything else, online learning will continue to be the main way we get our education.

In addition, Jameyson believes financial decisions are determining how and when online courses are offered: "On little creek base in Virginia, they've closed the college offices where schools used to come and teach classes in person in favor of strictly online classes. [It's a] money saving measure." Other factors, like the flexibility that online learning offers and its educative quality, also will likely propagate its ongoing existence down the line. Like

Jameyson, Emerson felt positively about the future of online learning for OAM students.

Emerson explained,

The future for online learning is a great thing....without learning happening that part of educational technology implemented will help military members, spouses and family members take advantage of the educational benefits the military offers.

Emerson said that the benefits impact some to join the military and he warns that it will not be as smooth as they thought it would be. He says that those who go for benefits need to be aware of how much effort taking online courses while actively service in the military involves. He thinks students need to be realistic about their educational plans and manage accordingly.

Emerson and Hawthorne mentioned the importance of keeping in pace with the times as part of a successful online education. Hawthorne stated, "The world is always changing and we must change with it in order to be successful." The general belief asserted by all six participants was that achievement in online education offered a means to keep up with the demands of the world to come.

## **Summary**

The participants came to pursue online learning by similar paths. In each case, they responded to information about the benefits of receiving educational credits while actively serving in the military. Obtaining credits while in military service is perceived to be an asset for those who wish to pursue careers that require a college education and for those who plan to transfer out of the military after enlisted service. However, the pursuit of online courses for OAM students does not come without a sacrifice and without the need for multiple personal, academic, and strategies for academic success.

The type of conflict primarily discussed is the conflict of work/ life balance, with educational progress and success hinging on the balance between the learner's organizational skills (such as being "pre-emptive," as mentioned by Turner, about deadlines and completing work) and other factors out of the learner's control, such as internet connectivity and military duty scheduling. The type of unit the participant is involved with during deployment affects the OAM student's ability to find study time, including schedule, types of duties and internet or computer accessibility in the deployed setting. Resilience to these conflicts is reportedly based on organizational skills, personal motivation, and degree of "personal leverage" as mentioned by Emerson in regard to the military setting's learning environment. The online learning environment was sufficient for all six subjects if internet connectivity was good.

The conflict-ridden environments related to the OAM students' deployments have mixed impacts on the participants' academic experiences. It did not interfere for participants Hawthorne and Turner, while Emerson and Jameyson categorized it as harmful. Jameyson described feelings of guilt when course work needed to be completed and he perceived it as a distraction from his focus on the mission. Hawthorne said that he worked better under stress and that he was able to focus well while away from distractions that may come about when not deployed. Turner also responded that his coursework not affected by the conflict in his deployed surroundings, that any negative effect had to do with scheduling difficulties.

In Chapter 5, analysis and conclusions will be discussed on the basis of the themes and how they support, refute or inform the existing research literature and theoretical

framework. Chapter 5 will present the conclusions of the study and offer recommendations for online military education instruction and areas to study in the future.

## **Chapter 5: Analysis, Conclusions and Recommendations for Further Research**

This study sought to learn about OAM students' perceptions about their experiences with online classes while in active military service. These findings may inform online instructors and military serving higher education institutions with more knowledge about how to better meet the needs of OAM students. We know that national statistics show lower than average completion rates among OAM students (US Dept of Ed, 2015). The success rates, which included positive educational progress, at ACC were much higher than the national averages at 89% according to ACC's data. This study sought to understand about the OAM students' perceptions and lived experiences, including the motivating factors, supports and conflicts while taking online courses at ACC.

Chapter 5 analyzes the key findings from this qualitative phenomenological study of OAM students at ACC. Five themes emerged as indicators of their perceptions and lived experiences involving their motivating factors, supports and conflicts. First, the themes are analyzed with regard to the theoretical framework and the literature, and illustrate the range of OAM students' perceptions and lived experiences. Next, three conclusions are discussed. It includes information that may be useful for those involved in present and future OAM student distant learning programs, and recommendations for further research. Chapter 5 concludes with the researcher's final notes about the research experience.

### **Restating the Purpose Statement**

This qualitative phenomenological study sought to learn about the experiences of OAM students enrolled in ACC's distance learning military programs. This study posits that more information about OAM students' experiences while taking online courses at ACC will

increase understanding about how to universally improve OAM students' educational progress and success.

### **Analysis of Key Findings**

There were five themes that emerged from the study: Online Learning Environment, Personal Traits & Goals, Support Systems & Family, Conflict of Work/ Life Balance, Organizational Skills & Coping Mechanisms (Table 7). These themes were important elements of the perceptions and lived experiences unique to ACC's OAM student participants.

Table 7

#### *Research Themes*

RQ1	What are the perceptions and lived experiences of OAM students regarding their online courses while participating in ACC's general education courses?
Theme 1	Online Learning Environment
RQ2	What are the factors that motivate their educational progress at ACC and what supports do they encounter?
Theme 2	Personal Traits & Goals
Theme 3	Support Systems & Family
RQ3	What are the primary perceived conflicts with achieving educational progress that OAM students experience at ACC?
Theme 4	Conflict of Work/ Life Balance
RQ4	How can the primary conflicts be resolved or better addressed to improve the educational progress of OAM students enrolled in community college general education courses?
Theme 5	Organizational Skills & Coping Mechanisms

### **Online Learning Environment**

Research question 1 asked, "What are the perceptions and lived experiences of OAM students regarding their online courses while participating in ACC's general education

courses?” The online learning environment was pivotal to understanding the experience of OAM students taking courses. Defined by the researcher as the “e-learning instructional setting containing a transaction between computer mediated content and knowledge acquisition,” the online learning environment exposed the difference between controllable and uncontrollable variables to the online experience.

The OAM students’ first hand narratives of their online course experiences illuminated the essence of their academic enterprise. There are two aspects to the online course environment, the one that can be controlled, such as technological issues, supplies, scheduling, instructors’ flexibility with deadlines, and those that can not, such as military-based circumstances or other situational events external to the course experience. According to the Deutsch (1973), individuals rarely engage their entire faculties into resolving conflicts at hand. However, students may increase personal and intellectual growth through conflict solving on the controllable side of their experience. The continuing progress of the study’s participants reinforced Deutsch’s theory and Johnson and Johnson’s (2009) empirical findings that illustrated the positive side of conflict. The OAM students experienced increased personal and academic development while they took their courses. All participants expressed how their online course completion positively influenced their higher educational goals and career plans, and created a network of interpersonal ties.

Individual factors crucial to a successful online learning environment were cited as available connectivity, instructor flexibility with deadlines, and having scheduled time to complete coursework. Other factors conducive to the online learning environment on the student side had to do with low distractions, ability to focus and work under conditions of stress or conflict. For example, Turner was able to work effectively during his recent



deployment overseas, but noted that soldiers in other marine units did not have the ability to set aside enough time. Emerson found the stress he experienced during his deployments detrimental to his academic progress and success. In the literature, high quality instructional delivery helps to overcome the disadvantages of a stressful environment (Shachar & Neumann, 2003). The combination of factors related by the participants supplied keen information about creating instructional features that help to combat the educational and military conflicts that OAM students face. In another example referenced in Chapter 1, Jameyson discusses his story about a struggle taking his final while in Afghanistan,

I was stationed in a remote outpost in Afghanistan. It was just about 25 of us living in a two-story mud hut fortified with sandbags...I had a final I had to take online that week, so I joined in on the resupply patrol. Extra snow covering meant higher threat of IEDs [improvised explosive devices], so we had to be extra careful.

As stated, OAM students experience difficult challenges while enrolled in online courses. Both Jameyson and Hawthorne's narratives about their experiences in Afghanistan revealed some of the intense conditions experienced while deployed and taking online classes. These stories were a representation of OAM students' perceptions of the online learning environmental factors that were controllable versus those that were uncontrollable.

Instructors may benefit from the awareness of the experiences OAM students are having and what they can do on the controllable side of the online experience to help them through the online learning process. These strategies include increased communication between instructor and OAM student, a focus on relationship building to increase awareness about the OAM students' situation, such as any setbacks, and more online learning resources. Increased access to specific course-related resources in more a variety

of learning modalities improved the OAM students' online course experience. Jameyson discussed how the YouTube videos helped him get through a certain course.

### **Personal Traits and Goals**

Research question 2 asked, "What are the factors that motivate their educational progress at ACC and what supports do they encounter?" The theme of personal traits and goals emerged from the data in response to research question 2, and it showed the subjects all felt they were on the right track to accomplishing their goals. The participants illustrated how their combination of personal traits interacted with their ability to effectively balance their coursework and military service responsibilities, and what some of the limits were. Uncontrollable limitations were due to interruption from military duties; however, all the participants assessed that their pursuit of online education was successful. They also consistently reported themselves as resilient, both in terms of "continuity and recovery in the face of change" or in response to challenge (Zolli & Healy, 2012, p.7).

Resiliency, as a personal trait, helped the OAM students succeed under conditions of conflict (Zolli & Healy, 2012). For example, Hawthorne indicated he was resilient when he responded,

I believe that it [his resiliency] is mainly because one stressful event is followed by another so I've built some resilience to stressful events. It would also be detrimental if I allowed a stressful event to affect me when moving to another event.

Other indications of resilience were apparent in the participants' responses to conflict, such as when describing a pro-active approach to problem solving. Hawthorne noted he liked to be the one to provide support. The majority of the participants made statements that indicated a feeling a sense of identity and meaning, except for the statement by Turner that indicated he did not feel he was in a fulfilling stage in his life. These personal assessments

were useful with increasing understanding about these OAM students' perceptions of personal fulfillment and success and how these factors affect their educational progress.

### **Support Systems and Family**

The second theme to emerge from research question 2 involved support systems and family. Participants referenced multiple educational, financial and emotional resources available for military students through the military and all six of them were aware of support through ACC's distance learning military programs. This theme applied to exterior resources and, also, to personal support systems, such as family members, significant others, and friends. Each of the participants reflected positively on the status of their support systems, and four out of the six participants had used resources offered by the military and ACC.

Support resources well executed through the military and the college were perceived as helpful with the participants' academic ability to succeed despite the many conflicts, particularly if the participant pro-actively engaged in conflict solving. Stronger support models increase resiliency to conflict and/ or improve the ability to positively transform through conflict (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Additionally, mentors and role models were particularly important to Hawthorne and Turner. Hawthorne said in his interview, "Helping others pushes me to work hard and learn more." Zavala indicated he was most motivated by his desire to succeed for his family. Family figured as the strongest form of support for all of the participants, and was an integral feature of their perceptions and lived experiences.

For participants' perceptions of first hand experiences with crises, according to Deutsch (1973), conflict can facilitate cooperative behavior that teaches coping skills and

improves support among groups. Emerson stated he found a considerable amount of support, “socializing with others who have dealt with difficult life obstacles.” Like Emerson, the other participants related finding considerable support among those who shared common experiences.

The separation from loved ones while in deployment or on active military duty functioned as an aspect of the lived experience common to all the participants. The subjective perceptions varied for this facet of the phenomenon, though the common experience was that the families or significant others were a part of a support system that motivated and inspired them. This spoke of successful navigation through conflict with a blending of organizational and support models. For example, Zavala stated that supportive comments helped a lot but they have to be from the right people. Turner said, in response to a question about what motivates him, that it was his drive for a better quality of life and his significant other. The participants often voiced liking to support others, which functioned as a factor in their sense of resilience and self-image. Strong support systems improve outcomes for conflict resolution and improve chances of success after a crisis (Fredrickson et al., 2003). While the physical reality of those comprising the support systems weren’t always at hand, they still functioned prominently in the participants’ perceptions and as a variable in the experience of the phenomenon.

### **Conflict of Work/ Life Balance**

The conflict of work/ life balance was the fourth theme, and it emerged in response to the group of interview questions related to research question 3. Research question 3 asked, “What are the primary perceived conflicts with achieving educational progress that OAM students experience at ACC?” All six participants discussed conflicts between their

military responsibilities and other facets of their life, including online learning. For example, Emerson said he was “never going to be 100% in type of environment you’re going to be in when serving your country” in a response about his perception of success with online learning. The ability to balance these components was a factor determining how successful students felt in their online learning. In the literature, many forms of conflict were defined, such as intrapersonal, interpersonal, cognitive, inter role, or work/ life conflict (Morris & Madsen, 2007). However, the data in this study highlighted the conflict of work/ life balance, and inter role conflict, which is an aspect of work/ life balance.

The participants’ narratives revealed that the conflict most present in their lived experiences was conflict between demands of the military and coursework or other areas of their lives (Morris & Madsen, 2007). This concurred with the Molina & Morse (2015) study that OAM students struggle with balancing many duties at once while pursuing college. Other issues affecting the work/ life balance conflict as mentioned by the participants, were shortage of time and sense of “personal leverage” (as stated by Emerson). These components factored into the degree of perceived achievement of balance in this area. As referenced in Chapter 4, Emerson, who had been deployed over parts of the Middle East and Asia, stated,

There was never enough time to study...there was more focus on the mission or deployment for that branch of service, and it was a very stressful. Time was demanding (for service) from superiors or higher ranking officers....I did not have enough time to focus.

The ability to control issues in the balance furthered the students’ perceptions of educational progress and success, or not.

There were inter role conflicts indicated between the role of military sergeant or officer and student as indicated by the interferences that occurred between duties and coursework. Moreover, the literature defined conflict of work/ life balance as containing components of conflict such as inter role, and this was relevant to the participants' perceptions of their experiences (Edwards & Rothbard, 1999; Morris & Madson, 2007; Rantanen, 2008; Zolli & Healy, 2012).

**Inter role conflict.** Inter role conflict is exemplified by the incompatibilities between the military roles and the student roles. The goal of improving work/ life balance or inter role conflict is by increasing integration among these conflicts. There were factors that showed improved integration for Hawthorne, who said, "I like to challenge myself. I figured a good way to do that would be to work full time while being able to balance family and attending class full time as well." This indicates a feature of congruence, which positively affects the balance of conflicts and integration of roles. The participants indicated experiencing enrichment in other areas of their life, such as family or spirituality that helped mediate conflict in the balance or among roles (Morris & Madsen, 2007). The participants indicated that the diligence and work ethic they took from the military was brought to their online coursework, as in Hawthorne's quotation of another officer, "you get what you put in." This suggests facilitation between the roles, which could help improve integration and the navigation of work/life conflicts (Edwards & Rothbard, 1999).

Participants discussed how experiences in the military affected their online learning and other areas of their life, which indicated spillover between their military and student roles (Morris & Madsen, 2007). The work/ life conflict was bi-directional between military duties and student responsibilities. Both sides contained incompatible demands, though all

of the participants' voiced their methods of success by dealing with the aspects that they could control through a variety of personal measures.

### **Organizational Skills and Coping Mechanisms**

Strong organizational skills and healthy coping mechanisms are perceived to be critical to OAM student progress and success. Research question 4 asked, "How can the primary conflicts be resolved or better addressed to improve the educational progress of OAM students enrolled in community college general education courses?" The theme organizational skills figured prominently in response to this research question, and illustrated the importance of effectively scheduling course work and military responsibilities.

To resolve the work/ life balance conflict, good organization was a key issue in the ability to succeed in online course work, especially while in deployment. Hawthorne, Emerson, Turner and Jameyson all mentioned being highly pro-active in this area and considered this a significant factor in their successful completion of the courses and good grades. These responses expanded on literature that indicated improved results when people identified strengths and drew on a sense of agency (Covey, 2008; Zander & Zander, 2000). The subjects discussed organizational skills in their responses about online coursework, including citing understanding of their best environment for learning and mental focus. All of the participants responded in ways to suggest that they intrinsically knew what they needed to do well in their coursework. They sought personalized plans or methods to assist them with coursework success as issues arose and defined their best learning environment. Hawthorne discussed how he had come to understand better about his own way of learning.

A natural tension exists between a soldier's military responsibility and their academic coursework. Zavala stated he "planned around other life responsibilities to take classes." Zavala has tried to keep most of his courses scheduled while he was at home rather than deployed, because there was not much time off. The foremost commitment to the military operations was noted by several of the participants. The commitment to the military operations is part of the soldier's culture, as are its rules and rituals. These features are part of an OAM student's life and are part of the balance with the student's responsibilities. The OAM student and OAM student instructor must have awareness that some degree of integration is needed with this aspect of the student's life for greater educational progress and success (Morris & Madsen, 2007). A keen focus on the organizational aspects of OAM student progress and success is crucial. The data illustrated there is an area of responsibility for the OAM student to best organize these conflicting demands toward greater integration. The second half of the theme related to research question 4 was coping mechanisms.

**Healthy coping strategies.** The participants utilized a variety of coping mechanisms to help them function in a high conflict environment, and to cope after such experiences. The participants showed success with evidence made by their statements indicating they'd engaged in conflict resolution strategies. Hawthorne exhibited examples of positive conflict resolution. For example, he stated that he avoided procrastination and doing the minimum, moderated his behavior (completed quality work) and attitude (perseverance) to mediate problems that could result from the issue (potential for low educational progress). He resolved the conflict to improve his online academic success by aligning his attitude and behavior to create a transformational result.



As stated in Personal Traits & Goals, the participants all reported themselves as resilient and detailed a number of conflict resolution skills and coping techniques that they found effective. The literature indicated resilience increases by becoming a personal facilitator in resolving conflict (Deutsch, 1973). Resiliency is a factor that improves success under conditions of stress and conflict (Zolli & Healy, 2012), and several of the participants indicated resiliency as an attitude that helped them manage conflicts and cope with conflicts that arose in their experiences with the phenomenon.

Fredrickson & Joiner (2002) discussed the upward spiral, where positive emotions create better coping mechanisms, and even more positive feelings. The coping mechanisms mentioned, such as Jameyson's statement that he focuses on what he has rather than what he has not, is an example of an OAM student's use of positive psychology to cope and resolve conflict. In Morris & Madsen (2007), the goal for increased integration was to help encourage healthy responses and discourage unhealthy ones, something that the data clearly indicated among the perceptions of the participants as they engaged in various mechanisms, as indicated in the data, to cope with conflict. One example is the statement by Diem, when asked about if his coursework was compatible with his military service, "It depends on how badly an individual wants something...the hours I work are not conducive to online or traditional learning, but it is better than not pursuing an education at all." Like Diem, Jameyson preferred also to concentrate on the positives and on the longer termed goals.

In addition to showing that their courses were successfully completing during these experiences, the narratives further illustrated the participants had a strong grasp on resolving conflict and were attuned to a "culture in the conflict zone" as stated by

Jameyson. Jameyson's retelling of his experience needing to postpone the final while in Afghanistan depicted good conflict managing skills, including expressing emotions non-aggressively and reframing the conflict as a problem to be mutually resolved, such as when Jameyson asked for an extension on the final. Jameyson and Hawthorne's responses spoke of self-determination and they were engaged in a variety of useful, solution-seeking behaviors and cognitions, despite stressful learning conditions (Bar-Tal & Rosen, 2009).

Throughout their online educational experience, all of the participants actively faced obstacles, coped with setbacks, and resolved conflicts because they were driven to further their education in spite of the challenges. As Hawthorne said,

It can be easy to procrastinate and not put in the same amount of effort. And while maybe I could get away with doing the minimum, I refuse to make that a habit that will eventually follow me along my educational path.

Subjectively, the motivational factors varied, but achieving educational progress was the common goal. This data is crucial to concluding that these OAM students considered themselves academically successful, but they were actively making this happen for themselves. This occurred through a variety of coping mechanisms to work toward balance and better integration between their student and military roles.

## **Conclusions**

The conclusions from the study are as follows: (a) The learning experience and successful completion of online community college courses by active military students can be supported by college/professors by maintaining a positive online classroom environment, self-pacing options and flexibility with deadlines; (b) Organizational strategies and healthy conflict coping mechanisms are key to the successful completion of online community college courses by active military students; (c) Challenges/conflicts

related to active military students online community college course learning and completion are inevitable but can be addressed through active management of conflict and supporting or motivational factors and increased focus on integration between student and military roles, including deployment.

### **Conclusion One**

The learning experience and successful completion of online community college courses by active military students can be supported by college/professors by maintaining a positive online classroom environment, self-pacing options and flexibility with deadlines. OAM students must negotiate multiple responsibilities as both an active military officer and an online student. At times, these identities or responsibilities are in opposition to each other. However, successful OAM students working with successful online schools and instructors help mitigate this tension. The OAM students in this study experienced conflict with work/ life balance. The participants were satisfied if they were able to complete their coursework without interference despite having taken extra measures to counteract any circumstantial limitations. For example, Emerson and Jameyson reported that military deployment undermined course work performance, while Hawthorne reported it improved it. Turner reported that it depended on the individual circumstances of the student and their military unit. In the literature, Rantenan's studies (2008) in work/ life balance conflict defined scenarios similar to the lived experiences of Emerson and Jameyson, such as the phenomenon of inter role conflict when responsibilities between military duties and online course work were incompatible.

The OAM students reported themselves as motivated, and were very articulate and expressive about their experiences. In light of what was expressed about their identities,

the role of the student is consistent with their identity separate from the military role, which mitigates the problems associated with work/ life balance. The course work may be supplementing this side of their identities and mediating intrapersonal conflicts. The subjects considered their coursework a part of their path to post military life and career. They expressed an ambitious set of choices, and that they were willing to work hard for them.

## **Conclusion Two**

Organizational strategies and healthy conflict coping mechanisms are key to the successful completion of online community college courses by active military students. Thus, OAM students and instructors need to integrate conflict resolution and organizational skills into their coursework experience. Finding balance between conflicting roles and responsibilities is not easy. Students are best served when creating a clear organizational plan to complete their tasks, such as outlined by Emerson, and practicing conflict resolution skills to effectively deal with any conflicts between the military and coursework. A strategy to practice the conflict resolution skills defined by Bar-Tal and Rosen (2009), assist with these measures. Skills such as understanding that conflict is a normal part of life, becoming a better conflict manager, distinguishing positions from needs or interests and brainstorming solutions to perceived conflicts help OAM students manage incompatible responsibilities (Bar-Tal & Rosen, 2009).

An active approach is needed to manage existing conflicts, increase integration and complete the path of educational progress. Hawthorne mentioned a superior officer saying, "You get what you put in," and had found this essentially true in his experience. Emerson's story illustrated another example that soldiers needed to be effective conflict managers

while actively serving in order to be successful students. Online coursework that incorporates conflict resolution skills, such as in a class like *Critical Thinking and Writing 100*, would be to include assignments that draw on literary responses to conflict (Reigert, 2013). Increased reflection encourages constructivist knowledge and conflict resolution skill development.

### **Conclusion Three**

Challenges/conflicts related to active military students online community college course learning and completion are inevitable but can be addressed through: the active management of conflict and supporting or motivational factors, and increased focus on integration between student and military roles, including deployment. Increased conflict management and coping skills help OAM students resolve the conflicts that reduce online academic progress and success. A significant area of support was the family, which was mentioned as part of the motivation as well as supports that increased coping skills. The management of interpersonal conflicts was improved by pursuing student support resources by four out of the six participants. Studies by positive psychologists Fredrickson and Joiner (2002) support that happiness increases resilience to conflict, which is applicable to the lived experiences accounts of their lived experiences taking courses while in active service. The student role in itself is supplemental to their identity beyond their military role and it is reportedly motivating and promoting personal growth (Edwards & Rothbard, 1999). This assists with post military transition when adapting to civilian life, as well.

The OAM student participants responded with an inventory of traits that were associated with resilience. There were reflections that they understood how different

areas of their life affected the others, along with narratives that demonstrated concentrated efforts to remediate issues and solve conflicts. These strengths were working to their benefit. This was evidenced by the OAM students' responses about their educational progress, and their intentions and plans to go much further. Each participant intended to complete a four-year degree, and in some cases, such as Hawthorne, who planned to become a physician, well beyond.

### **Online Learning and OAM Student Best Practice Recommendations**

There are a number of implications for higher educational practitioners to help guide best practice recommendations for OAM students. For example, the participants were attuned to the online aspects of learning related to personal reflection. This is an indicator of potential success with constructivist styled online learning design. The enlisted often cite their reason to joining the armed services as being due to a sense of adventure. Online content may include more international information to stay present with national socio political circumstances the OAM students are interactive with, and encourage reflections on global or personal conflicts.

The students' were articulate and expressive, and would benefit from developing their personal writing voice in a manner consistent with reflective thinking and knowledge building that draws on their total learning environments. Course content should keep adapting to the prospective needs of a future world (Gore, 2013), as the participants all seemed to be inclined toward thinking about the future. While the participants were not asked about combat related conflict or trauma in the study, course content that serves as platforms to transform experiences or feelings of conflict into innovative concepts, ideas or initiatives might be useful. The narratives about other students' experiences may tell of

experiences others may also have never seen or done, such as exchanges with members of indigenous countries or other unique occurrences.

The online learning environment should maintain a sense of trust, friendliness, and competency, to keep feelings about learning positive. The course site should be a “good space,” and contain a sense of clarity, information and support in order to promote students’ mental focus. Learning works against the development of prejudices, violence and ignorance. The act of learning is in of itself detrimental to the effects of conflict, negative consequences or failed opportunities. It can be viewed upon by as an opportunity in itself, as a spark for ingenuity, and a movement forward. As mentioned in the literature, higher educational levels increase resilience (Ballenger-Browning & Johnson, 2010) and may “stimulate neuronal growth” (Cohen, 2006, p. 39). OAM students have a unique voice with which to express rich experience. In light of the conflict experienced during OAM student military service, particularly during deployment, a focus on conflict and capacity building should be part of online military course design.

Additionally, an increase in self-pacing features may enhance student performance if flexible deadlines are required. Turner was aware of other service members in military units who did not have as much computer accessibility or time to complete courses, so there is a large factor of individual situation and organization, instructor flexibility with deadlines, and military demands that commingle. The variety of conditions required can be accounted for or controlled to create an optimal environment for the OAM student.

The prospects for the future of online learning in the military appear positive as the benefits will continue to draw students and the accessibility of online courses make education compatible with military service. Hawthorne found that the coursework helped

to distract him from stress during deployment, and studies show that educational progress assist with the transition to civilian life post-military. The emphasis on increasing technological skills helps service members succeed in a technologically based world and keep up with an ever-changing technologically dependent society. The online courses are an easy transfer from online courses the military uses and are a readily used method for learning. The online courses offer links for resources that include subject matter assistance and educational information, such as equivalency tests to pass subjects.

In summary, the best strategies include sensitivity to OAM students' limitations, such as global location, time zone differences or time constraints, and their strengths, which may include learner awareness, motivation, and access to multiple types of support resources. Recorded lectures may increase face-to-face simulation, allow for time difference and improve communication. Additionally, using conflict resolution educational methods for managing conflicts that arise during online course completion improve OAM student work/ life balance integration. Include multiple modalities, controversial conflict to spark intellectual reflection, self-pacing options and open communication.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

There are several areas to recommend for future research as a result of this study.

1. A study regarding online course performance and its effect on military transition would benefit increasing military student success in their transition to higher education as a veteran.
2. Phenomenological research that examines lived experiences across branches or gender, and involves comparison between different institutions of higher education.

This may include a larger sample size and descriptions of experiences long term.



3. Study to investigate if male and female OAM students experience similar or different inter role conflicts or conflicts of work life balance when trying to complete online coursework.
4. Research regarding how to include science labs credits taken online as to not discourage STEM degrees among military students. This may include new policy or curriculum design research to find methods for improved science lab transferability.
5. Research concerning the inclusion of conflict resolution education techniques as they relate to the experiences of OAM students to see if this improves students' levels of success in their online coursework. This is to include study on the training of online military programs instructors with an awareness of conflict resolution educational theories.
6. Study regarding military culture's effect on current and former OAM student performance, to include sub cultural, structural and psychological influences.
7. Research concerning the association between OAM students' personal goals or aspirations and higher educational progress.

### **Final Notes**

To close over two years of research on the experiences of OAM students, I hope the study provides greater understanding about their perceptions and lived experiences, including motivations, supports and conflicts. This study should assist future military students with knowledge fundamental to the process of taking online courses and how better to succeed in them. Instructors, administrators and staff members may have a more comprehensive perception of the students' process through the course work while they are balancing military duties or deployed abroad.

The literature review was extremely useful in discussing the importance of conflict resolution education and viewing the perceptions and lived experiences, including the motivations, supports and conflicts of OAM students through its lens. The content was transferrable to providing deeper understanding to how these students may be impacted by their lived experiences, including those as reported as having conflict with balancing online learning and military duties. The literature review allowed me to find models for conflict resolution applicable to the subjects' first-hand experiences while actively serving in the military and taking online courses at ACC. The themes that emerged from the data provided invaluable information to help shape the best ways to assist and educate OAM students. I hope the findings brought forth in the study inspire future military students and online military higher education program practitioners.

## REFERENCES

- Agricola, G. H. (2010). *Designing conflict resolution education: A literature review*. (Master's thesis). Utrecht University, Utrecht, Netherlands. Retrieved from <https://dspace.library.uu.nl/handle/1874/40144>
- Altman, G. (2015, November 9). Best for Vets: Colleges 2016—our top 175 schools. *Military Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.militarytimes.com/education-transition/2015/11/09/best-for-vets-colleges-2016-our-top-175-schools/>
- American College of Education (2017). *Student handbook*. Retrieved from <http://ace.catalog.acalog.com/content.php?catoid=4&navoid=234>
- Arai, T. (2015). Engaging conflict history: Toward an integrated method of resolution dialogue and capacity building. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 32, 277–298. doi: 10.1002/crq.21113
- Asaoka, T. (2009). The contribution of “study abroad” programs to Japanese internationalization. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 13(2), 174–188. doi/abs/10.1177/1028315308330848
- Ballenger-Browning, K. & Johnson, D.C. (2010). Key facts on resilience. *Naval Center for Combat & Operational Stress Control*. Retrieved from <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/8372/2962c34666e5688c9286fc7abf74d30daca8.pdf>
- Bar-Tal, D., & Rosen, Y. (2009). Peace education in societies involved in intractable conflicts: Direct and indirect models. *Review of Educational Research*, 79(2), 557-575. doi: 10.3102/0034654308330969

- Bonk, C.J. (2011). *The world is open: How web technology is revolutionizing education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Bonk, C.J. & Khoo, E. (2014). *Adding some tec-variety: 100+ activities for motivating and retaining learners online*. Createspace Independent Publishing Platform.
- Bonk, C.J. & Wisner, R. A. (2000). *Applying collaborative and e-learning tools to military distance learning: A research framework* (Technical Report 1107). Retrieved from U.S. Army Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences: <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/b6a7/4f7c59ff68e703cd2e69d8b892213db5ff15.pdf>
- Brandon, R., & Seldman, M. (2004). *Survival of the savvy: High-integrity political tactics for career and company success*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Burnett, S. (2008, June 16). Moving up. *Community College Week*. Retrieved from <http://ccweek.com/article-428-02.-top-100-2008-moving-up.html>
- Christensen C., Horn M., & Caldera, L. (2011). *Disrupting college: How disruptive innovation can deliver quality and affordability to postsecondary education*. Retrieved from <http://www.innosightinstitute.org>.
- Cohen, D. (2006). *The development of play*. London, England: Routledge.
- Cohn, M. A., Fredrickson, B. L., Brown, S. L., Mikels, J. A., & Conway, A. M. (2009). Happiness unpacked: Positive emotions increase life satisfaction by building resilience. *Emotion (Washington, D.C.)*, 9(3), 361–368. Retrieved from <http://doi.org/10.1037/a0015952>
- Coleman, P.T., Deutsch, M. & Marcus, E.C. (2000). *The handbook of conflict resolution: Theory and practice*. Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass.
- Coll, J. E., Weiss, E. L. & Jarvis, J. S. (2011). No one leaves unchanged: Insights for

- civilian mental health care professionals into the military experience and culture. *Social Work in Health Care*. 50(7), 487–500. doi: 10.1080/00981389.2010.528727
- Converse, E. (1968). The war of all against all: A review of the journal of conflict resolution, 1957-1968. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*. 12(4), 471–532. doi: 10.1177/002200276801200404
- Covey, S. (2008). *The speed of trust: The one thing that changes everything*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. (3rd ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Dake, K. (1992), Myths of Nature: Culture and the Social Construction of Risk. *Journal of Social Issues*. 48, 21–37. doi: 10.1111/j.1540-4560.1992.tb01943.x
- Danyk, Y. & Maliarchuk. (2015). E-Learning application for prevention, detection and therapy of posttraumatic stress disorder. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*. 5(9). Retrieved from [http://www.ijhssnet.com/journals/Vol\\_5\\_No\\_9\\_1\\_September\\_2015/7.pdf](http://www.ijhssnet.com/journals/Vol_5_No_9_1_September_2015/7.pdf)
- Derrida, J. (1982). *Positions*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Deutsch, M. (1973). *The resolution of conflict: constructive and destructive processes*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Deutsch, M. (1993). Educating for a peaceful world. *American Psychologist*. 48(5): 510–517. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.48.5.510>
- Dewey, J. (1993). *How we think: A restatement of the relation of reflective thinking to the educative process*. Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin Company.

- DiRamio, D.C. & Jarvis, K. (2011). Veterans in higher education: When johnny and jane come marching to campus. *ASHE Higher Education Report*. 37 (3).  
San Francisco, CA: Wiley/ Jossey-Bass.
- Edwards, J.R. & Rothbard, N.P. (1999). Work and family stress and well-being: An examination of person-environment fit in the work and family domains. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*. 77 (2), 85-129.
- Erlandson, D. A., Harris, E. L., Skipper, B. L., & Allen, S. D. (1993). *Doing naturalistic inquiry: a guide to methods*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Fleishman, R., Gerard, C. & O'Leary, R. (2008). Pushing the boundaries: New frontiers in conflict resolution and collaboration. *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change*. 29. Retrieved from <https://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/abs/10.1016/S0163-786X%2808%2929006-3>
- Fredrickson, B. L. & Joiner, T. (2002). Positive emotions trigger upward spirals toward emotional well-being. *Psychological Science*. 13(2), 172-175.
- Fredrickson, B. L., Tugade, M. M., Waugh, C. E. & Larkin, G. R. (2003). What good are positive emotions in crisis? A prospective study of resilience and emotions following the terrorist attacks on the united states on september 11th, 2001. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 84(2), 365-376.  
Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.84.2.365>
- Gadamer, H. G. (1989). *Truth and method*. New York: Crossroad.
- Gallagher, S. (2012). *Phenomenology*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Galtung, J. (1996). *Peace by peaceful means: Peace and conflict, development and civilization*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

- Godbey, G., & Turlington, B. (2002). A Collaborative Approach to International Programs. *New Directions for Higher Education*, (120), 89-99.
- Golden, D. (2009, December 15). Online colleges surge with marketing to the military. *Bloomberg Businessweek*. Retrieved from <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2009-12-15/online-colleges-surge-with-marketing-to-military>
- Gore, A. (2013). *The future: Six drivers of global change*. New York, NY: Random House.
- Green, K.C., & Wagner, E. (2011). Online education: Where is it going? what should boards know? *Trusteeship Magazine, Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges*. Retrieved from <http://agb.org/trusteeship/2011/1/online-education-where-it-going-what-should-boards-know>.
- Hargreaves, A., & Shirley, D. (2009). *The fourth way: The inspiring future for educational change*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Higbee, D. (Ed.). (2010). *Military culture and education*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company.
- Husserl, E. (1962.) *Ideas: General introduction to pure phenomenology* (W.R. Boyce Gibson, Trans.) New York: Collier Books. (Original work published 1913).
- Johnson, D.W. & Johnson, R.T. (2009). Energizing learning: The instructional power of conflict. *Sage Journals*, 32(1), 37-51.
- Jones, T. (2004) Conflict resolution education: The field, the findings, and the future. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 22(1-2), 233-267.
- Karp, M.M. & Klempin, S. (2016). *Improving student services for military veterans*.

New York, NY: Columbia University, Teachers College, Community College Research Center.

- Mackenzie, L., Fogarty, P. & Khachadorian, A. (2013). A model for online military culture education: Key findings and best practices. *Educause Review*. Retrieved on from <http://er.educause.edu/articles/2013/9/a-model-for-online-military-culture-education-key-findings-and-best-practices>
- Mahoney, M.J. & Granvold, D.K. (2005). Constructivism and psychotherapy. *World Psychiatry*. 4(2),74-77. Retrieved from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1414735/>
- McIlvaine, R. (2009). New GI bill transfer options take effect aug. 1. *United States Department of Defense*. Retrieved from <http://archive.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=55232>
- Mertus, J. & Helsing, J. (2006). *Human rights and conflict: Exploring the links between rights, law, and peacebuilding*. Washington, D.C.: USIP Press.
- Messina, V. (2014). *In and out of uniform: The transition of iraq and afghanistan war veterans into higher education* (Order No. 3617571). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global; ProQuest Dissertations and Theses A&I: The Humanities and Social Sciences Collection. (1527636681). Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1527636681?accountid=13159>
- Molina, D. & Morse, A. (2015). Military connected undergraduates: Exploring differences between national guard, active reserve, active duty and veterans in higher education. *American Council on Education*. Retrieved from <http://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Documents/Military-Connected-Undergraduates.pdf>



- Morris, L. N. & Madsen, S. R. (2007). Advancing work-life integration in individuals, organizations and communities. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*,9(4), 439-447.
- Moustakas, C. E. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage.
- Mueller, G. R., Moloff, A. L., Wedmore, I.S., Schoeff, J.E., & Laporta, A.J. (2012). High intensity scenario training of military medical students to increase learning capacity and management of stress response. *J Spec Oper Med*. 12(2):71-6.
- Neuhauser, C. (2002). Learning style and effectiveness of online and face-to-face instruction. *The American Journal of Distance Education*,16(2), 99-113.
- O'Herrin, E. (2011). Enhancing veteran success in higher education. *Association of American Colleges & Universities*, 13(1). Retrieved from: <https://www.aacu.org/publications-research/periodicals/enhancing-veteran-success-higher-education>
- Oravec, J. (2004). Incremental understandings: Warblogs and peaceblogs in peace education. *Journal of Peace Education*, 1(2), 225-238.
- Palm, T.G. (2014). *Peace, love & liberty*. Ottawa, IL: Jameson Books.
- Pearlstein, A. (2012). Pursuit of happiness and resolution of conflict: An agenda for the future of adr. *Pepperdine Dispute Resolution Law. LJ*, 12, 215.
- Piaget, J. (1983). Piaget's theory. P. Mussen (Ed.). *Handbook of child psychology*. (4th ed., Vol 1) New York: Wiley.
- Pink, D. (2011). *Drive: The surprising truth about what motivates us*. New York, NY: Riverhead Books.

- Radford, A. W. & Weko, T. (2011). *Military service members and veterans: A profile of those enrolled in undergraduate and graduate education in 2007–08* (NCES 163). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, D.C.
- Radford, A.W. & Wun, J. (2009). *Issue tables: A profile of military service-members and veterans in postsecondary education in 2007–08* (NCES 2009-182). National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC.
- Ramsbotham, O., Woodhouse, T. & Miall, H. (2012). *Contemporary conflict resolution*. (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.) Malden, MA: Polity.
- Rantanen, J. (2008). Work-family interface and psychological well-being: a personality and longitudinal perspective. *Jyvaskyla Studies in Education Psychology and Social Research*, 346. Retrieved from <https://jyx.jyu.fi/dspace/handle/123456789/19200/9789513934255.pdf?s>
- Reigert, L.W. (2013). *Thinking and practicing reconciliation: Teaching and learning through literary responses to conflict*. Boston, MA: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Rensel, D.J. (2015). Resilience-a concept. USAF. *Defense AR Journal*, 22(3). 294-324.
- Rexford, J.E. (2007). *Conflict and conflict resolution: Theory and practice and the army in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. Retrieved from <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a531447.pdf>
- Rumann, C. & Hamrick, F. (2009). Supporting student veterans in transition. *New Directions for Student Services*, (126) 25–34. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

- Rumann, C. & Hamrick, F. (2010). Student veterans in transition: Reenrolling after war zone deployments. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 81(4), 431-458.
- Shachar, M. & Neumann, Y. (2003). Differences between traditional and distance education academic performances: A meta-analytic approach. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, 4(2).
- Shane, L. (2016). Colleges aren't reacting to student vets' needs, report says. *Military Times*. Retrieved from: <http://www.militarytimes.com/story/veterans/best-for-vets/education/2015/11/18/ivmf-college-survey/75937130/>
- Shobitha, P & Sudarsan, N. (2014). Work/ life balance: A conceptual review. *International Journal of Advances In Management and Economics*, 3(3).
- Starr-Glass, D. (2011). Military learners: Experience in the design and management of online learning environments. *MERLOT Journal of Online Learning and Teaching*, 7(2), 147-158. Retrieved from [http://jolt.merlot.org/vol7no1/starr-glass\\_0311.pdf](http://jolt.merlot.org/vol7no1/starr-glass_0311.pdf)
- Stone, A. (2015, March 14). Elearning advice from four troops who are making it work. *Military Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.militarytimes.com/story/veterans/best-for-vets/education/2015/03/14/e-learning-advice-from-4-troops-who-are-succeeding/23224055/>
- Swan, K. (2003). Learning effectiveness: What the research tells us. In J. Bourne & J. C. Moore (Eds.), *Elements of quality: Online education, practice and direction*. 13-45. Needham, MA: Sloan Center for Online Education.
- Tugade, M. M., & Fredrickson, B. L. (2004). Resilient individuals use positive emotions to bounce back from negative emotional experiences. *Journal of*

- Personality and Social Psychology*, 86(2), 320. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3132556/>
- Ungar, M., Brown, M., Liebenberg, L., Othman, R., Kwong, W. M., Armstrong, M., & Gilgun, J. (2008). Unique pathways to resilience across cultures. *Youth Studies Australia*, 27(2), 63-64.
- U.S. Department of Education. (2015). *National center for education statistics*. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2016/2016415.pdf>
- U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. (2013). *Education Program Beneficiaries: FY2000 to FY2013*. Retrieved from [http://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/Utilization/EducNation\\_2013.xls](http://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/Utilization/EducNation_2013.xls).
- Ury, W. (1999). *Getting to peace: Transforming conflict at home, at work, and in the world*. New York, NY: Viking.
- van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- van Neumann, J. & Morgenstern, O. (1953). *Theory of games and economic behavior*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Verdiani, A. (Ed.). (2002). *Best practices of non violent conflict resolution in and out of school*. Retrieved from UNESCO <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001266/126679e.pdf>
- Wadsworth, B. J. (2003). *Piaget's theory of cognitive and affective development: Foundations of constructivism*. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Watkins, S., & Sherk, J. (2008). *Who serves in the u.s. military? Demographic characteristics of enlisted troops and of enlisted troops and officers (CDA 08*

- 05). Washington, DC: Heritage Foundation.
- Weiss, J. & Hughes, J. (2005) Want collaboration?: Accept and actively manage conflict. *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2005/03/want-collaboration-accept-and-actively-manage-conflict/ar/1>
- West, M.A., Tjosvold, D., & Smith, K.G. (Eds.).(2006). *The essentials of teamworking: International perspectives*. West Sussex, England: Wiley. Retrieved from [http://library.uniteddiversity.coop/Cooperatives/%20International\\_Handbook\\_of\\_Organizational\\_Teamwork\\_and\\_Cooperative\\_Working.pdf](http://library.uniteddiversity.coop/Cooperatives/%20International_Handbook_of_Organizational_Teamwork_and_Cooperative_Working.pdf)
- West, M.A., Tjosvold, D. & Smith, K. G. (Eds.).(2008). *International handbook of organizational teamwork and cooperative working*. West Sussex, England: Wiley. Retrieved from <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/book/10.1002/9780470696712>
- Zander, R., & Zander, B. (2000). *The art of possibility: Transforming professional and personal life*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Zinger, L. & Cohen, A. (2010). Veterans returning from war into the classroom: How can colleges be better prepared to meet their needs. *Contemporary Issues in Education Research (CIER)*, 3(1), 39-52.
- Zoli, C., Maury, R., & Fay, D. (2015, November 18). *Missing perspectives: Service members' transition from service to civilian life*. Retrieved from IVMF at Syracuse University <https://ivmf.syracuse.edu/article/missing-perspectives-servicemembers-transition-from-service-to-civilian-life/>
- Zolli, A., & Healy, A. M. (2012). *Resilience: Why things bounce back* (1st ed.). New York, NY: Free Press.

## APPENDIX A

### Interview Questions

1. What is your position in the military and how long have you been in deployment?
2. Please describe your location and some of your responsibilities.
3. Please describe your experience with online learning. What educational experiences have shaped your perspective about online learning while actively serving in the military?
4. What are your educational goals? How have others (professors, military colleagues, student peers, etc.) influenced your online learning experiences while in active service?
5. Would you consider your online learning experiences to be a successful endeavor?
6. How did you come to the decision to pursue college credits while in service?
7. Please describe how you became aware of online courses. What caused you to respond?
8. Do you feel as if you are on the path to realizing your dreams and personal goals? Please describe.
9. What motivates you to achieve your dreams and goals?
10. What online learning support resources are you aware of at the military or at ACC? Which, if any, have you accessed and describe those that were most helpful.
11. Have you found your active service to be compatible with the completion of online courses? Please describe.
12. Please share any challenges, if any, that you experienced balancing online coursework and your military duties?
13. Does being away during deployment from your regular support system, such as family or friends, have any effect on your ability to study?
14. Can you recall any particular advice or strategy shared that has helped with your e-learning while in deployment or otherwise?
15. Do you respond well to supportive comments and positive role models offering assistance to you through the military or college resources when you are feeling upset, or would you rather deal with negative or uncomfortable thoughts and feelings alone?

16. What is your best frame of mind for learning?

17. How would you describe or envision the future of online learning for active military students?

## APPENDIX B

### Interview Protocol

Prior to commencing the face-to-face interview, the researcher will summarize the nature of the study. Dissertation study participants will be given a copy of the abstract and the consent form to sign.

The following is the dialogue the researcher might use prior to the interview:

1. This research is being conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a dissertation at Pepperdine University.
2. The purpose of this qualitative study is to develop a comprehensive understanding of the experience of active military online students while taking courses at ACC's military education programs through in-depth interviews of selected current and/or former online active military students.
3. Interviews will take 60 minutes.
4. I will utilize a journal to take notes of our conversation. Further, I will record the interview on a transcribing machine to help reference interview content.
5. Any interview questions can be bypassed or either party can stop the interview at any time.
6. I will share transcripts of the interview with you to review for accuracy.
7. The summary of key findings from the interview will be provided to you.
8. The data collected will be stored in a password protected file in the home of the researcher. Data will be destroyed after 3 years of study completion.
9. This information will not be shared with anyone other than the researcher. Responses will be kept anonymous and confidential.
10. Please remember that you will be compensated for participation for the amount of \$25 dollars in the form of an Amazon gift card. Participation is voluntary.
11. We can begin when you are ready.



## APPENDIX C

### Invitation to Participants

Dear Military Student, Archipelago Community College,

My name is Marilyn V. Brock, I am an Ed.D. candidate in the Education, Leadership, Administration, and Policy program at Pepperdine University. My research involves developing a comprehensive understanding about the experiences of online active military students through an in-depth interview of selected current online active military students at ACC military programs. More specifically, this study will explore:

1. a) The experiences of online active military students at ACC military programs as related to their career paths, education, personal and military service-related challenges, and their self-perceptions of their experiences e-learning
2. b) The understanding of online active military students in deployment based on their experiences
3. c) The strategies used by online active military students in meeting the challenges and obstacles encountered while e-learning.

My primary goal as part of this qualitative research study is to interview 6 online active military students during the spring 2017 semester. You have been selected as a possible participant for this study due to your knowledge, background, and experience in this subject matter. I would very much be honored and appreciative of your participation in this study, as it will help me generate a manuscript that will assist in bringing about more awareness about the experiences of online active military students completing online coursework.

Please be aware that your participation is entirely voluntary. Further, you do not have to complete any part of the interview questions if you so choose. However, the information you provide will be important for online active military students. Some other important highlights regarding your participation in this study:

- Your interview will last 60 minutes in an online format
- Your answers to questions will be confidential and you will be provided the opportunity to review and certify transcripts
- You will remain anonymous at all stages of the interview
- Pseudonyms will be used throughout the dissertation
- All interview notes, transcribed records, and informed consent forms will be stored in a locked file cabinet at the home of the researcher
- Three years after the dissertation is published, all records will be destroyed

I will be contacting you personally with a consent form, answering all of your questions, and presenting you with a copy of the interview questions. Please read and sign the consent form first. The copy of research questions is a courtesy for you to know what you will be asked. Thank you in advance for your participation.

If you have any questions about the interview, or would like more information in regard to the research I am involved in, please do not hesitate to contact me at phone number.

Written correspondence can be sent to marilyn.brock@xxxxxxxxxx.edu. You may also

contact my dissertation chairperson, Dr. Anthony Collatos at email  
Anthony.Collatos@xxxxxxxxxx.edu.

Thank you in advance for your assistance in this valuable research study. Respectfully  
yours,

Marilyn V. Brock  
Doctoral Student  
Pepperdine University  
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

## APPENDIX D

### Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities

Principal Investigator: Marilyn V. Brock

Approval Date: March 20, 2017

Title of Research Study: "The Mission Always Comes First": A Phenomenological Study of Online Active Military Students

1. I \_\_\_\_\_, agree to participate in the dissertation research study being conducted by doctoral student Marilyn V. Brock, from the Education, Leadership, Administration, and Policy Program at Pepperdine University. I understand that I may contact Dr. Brock's supervisor, Dr. Anthony Collatos, if I have any questions or concerns regarding this study. Dr. Brock can be reached at email and Dr. Collatos can be reached at email.
2. I understand that the overall purpose of this study is to find greater understanding of the experiences of online active military students while e-learning. I have been asked to participate in this study because I am an online active military student enrolled or recently enrolled at ACC within the last year and I am willing to participate in this study.
3. I understand that my participation will involve the following: the completion of 60 minute uninterrupted, face-to-face interview with the principal investigator. This interview is to be conducted online at a time convenient and agreed upon by both parties.
4. I agree to any follow up phone calls or emails to clarify meaning of my statements so they are depicted in this research as I meant them to be.
5. My participation in this study will be from the approval date listed above through no later than July 2017.
6. I understand that the possible benefits that I may contribute is to future online active military students.
7. I understand that harm to human subjects is not limited to physical injury, and that there are certain risks and discomforts that might be associated with research. The physical risks might be fatigue for sitting for a period of 60 minutes. Psychological risks may include boredom, embarrassment, and anxiety in answering the interview questions. I believe the risks of this study are minimized and are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits of the study.
8. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may refuse to participate and/or withdraw my consent and discontinue participation in the project or any activity at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I also understand that the researcher may find it necessary to end my participation in this study.
9. I understand that the investigator will take all reasonable measures to protect the confidentiality of my records and my identity will not be revealed in any publication that may result from this project. If the findings of the study are published or

presented to a professional audience, no personally identifying information will be released. I understand that the interviews will be recorded only with my permission prior to each interview. The data gathered will be stored in a password-protected file to which only the investigator will have access to in her home.

10. I understand that the investigator is willing to answer any inquiries I may have concerning the research herein described. I understand that I may contact the dissertation chairperson, Dr. Anthony Collatos at Anthony.Collatos@xxxxxxxxxx.edu, if I have other questions or concerns about this research. If I have questions about my rights as a research participant, I understand that I can contact IRB Chairperson, Dr. Judy Ho at judy.ho@xxxxxxxxxx.edu.
11. I understand I will receive compensation of \$25.00 in the form of an Amazon gift card for participating in this study.

All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have received a copy of this informed consent form, which I have read and understand. I hereby consent to participate in the research described above.

Participants Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I have explained and defined in detail the research procedure in which the subject has consented to participate. Having explained this and answered any questions, I am cosigning this form and accepting this person's consent.

Principal Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX E

### Representation of Themes and Number of Times Mentioned

Theme #	Category	Times Mentioned
Theme 1	Online Learning Environment	15
Theme 2	Personal Traits & Goals	20
Theme 3	Support Systems & Family	15
Theme 4	Conflict of Work/ Life Balance	15
Theme 5	Organizational Skills & Coping Mechanisms	33

## APPENDIX F

### Representation of Themes and Number of Times Mentioned

#### According to Research Question

Thematic Categories	Research Question 1	Research Question 2	Research Question 3	Research Question 4
	What are the perceptions and lived experiences of OAM students regarding their online courses while participating in ACC's general education courses?	What are the factors that motivate their educational progress at ACC and what supports do they encounter?	What are the primary perceived conflicts with achieving educational progress that OAM students experience at ACC?	How can the primary conflicts be resolved or better addressed to improve the educational progress of OAM students enrolled in community college general education courses?
Online Learning Environment	8	4	1	2
Personal Traits & Goals	2	7	6	5
Support Systems & Family	3	8	0	4
Conflict of Work/ Life Balance	3	1	10	1
Organizational Skills & Coping Mechanisms	5	3	7	18

## APPENDIX G

### IRB Approval Letter



Pepperdine University  
24255 Pacific Coast Highway  
Malibu, CA 90263  
TEL: 310-506-4000

#### NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

Date: March 20, 2017

Protocol Investigator Name: Marilyn Brock

Protocol #: 17-02-508

Project Title: ONLINE ACTIVE MILITARY STUDENTS IN DEPLOYMENT

School: Graduate School of Education and Psychology

Dear Marilyn Brock:

Thank you for submitting your application for exempt review to Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). We appreciate the work you have done on your proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations 45 CFR 46.101 that govern the protections of human subjects.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit an amendment to the IRB. Since your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite the best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete written explanation of the event and your written response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the IRB and documenting the adverse event can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* at [community.pepperdine.edu/irb](http://community.pepperdine.edu/irb).

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all communication or correspondence related to your application and this approval. Should you have additional questions or require clarification of the contents of this letter, please contact the IRB Office. On behalf of the IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

Judy Ho, Ph.D., IRB Chair

Page: 1



Pepperdine University  
24255 Pacific Coast Highway  
Malibu, CA 90263  
TEL: 310-506-4000

cc: Dr. Lee Kats, Vice Provost for Research and Strategic Initiatives

Mr. Brett Leach, Regulatory Affairs Specialist



## APPENDIX H

### CITI Program Completion Form

#### COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM) COMPLETION REPORT - PART 1 OF 2 COURSEWORK REQUIREMENTS\*

\* NOTE: Scores on this Requirements Report reflect quiz completions at the time all requirements for the course were met. See list below for details. See separate Transcript Report for more recent quiz scores, including those on optional (supplemental) course elements.

- **Name:** Marilyn Brock (ID: 5828782)
- **Institution Affiliation:** Pepperdine University (ID: 1729)
- **Institution Email:** ~~m.brock@pepperdine.edu~~
- **Institution Unit:** GSEP
  
- **Curriculum Group:** Graduate & Professional Schools HSR
- **Course Learner Group:** Graduate & Professional Schools - Faculty Human Subjects Training
- **Stage:** Stage 1 - Basic Course
- **Description:** Choose this group to satisfy CITI training requirements for Investigators and staff involved primarily in Social/Behavioral Research with human subjects.
  
- **Record ID:** 20887101
- **Completion Date:** 18-Sep-2016
- **Expiration Date:** 18-Sep-2019
- **Minimum Passing:** 80
- **Reported Score\*:** 98

REQUIRED AND ELECTIVE MODULES ONLY	DATE COMPLETED	SCORE
Belmont Report and CITI Course Introduction (ID: 1127)	18-Sep-2016	3/3 (100%)
History and Ethical Principles - SBE (ID: 490)	18-Sep-2016	5/5 (100%)
Defining Research with Human Subjects - SBE (ID: 491)	18-Sep-2016	5/5 (100%)
The Federal Regulations - SBE (ID: 502)	18-Sep-2016	5/5 (100%)
Assessing Risk - SBE (ID: 503)	18-Sep-2016	5/5 (100%)
Informed Consent - SBE (ID: 504)	18-Sep-2016	5/5 (100%)
Internet-Based Research - SBE (ID: 510)	18-Sep-2016	5/5 (100%)
Privacy and Confidentiality - SBE (ID: 505)	18-Sep-2016	4/5 (80%)
Vulnerable Subjects - Research Involving Workers/Employees (ID: 483)	18-Sep-2016	4/4 (100%)

For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

Verify at: [www.citiprogram.org/verify/?k65ff2648-24e2-42a6-94da-8a3ad58621cc-20887101](http://www.citiprogram.org/verify/?k65ff2648-24e2-42a6-94da-8a3ad58621cc-20887101)

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program)

Email: ~~support@citiprogram.org~~

Phone: ~~800-590-6323~~

Web: <https://www.citiprogram.org>

## COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)

### COMPLETION REPORT - PART 2 OF 2

#### COURSEWORK TRANSCRIPT\*\*

\*\* NOTE: Scores on this Transcript Report reflect the most current quiz completions, including quizzes on optional (supplemental) elements of the course. See list below for details. See separate Requirements Report for the reported scores at the time all requirements for the course were met.

- **Name:** Marilyn Brock (ID: 5828782)
- **Institution Affiliation:** Pepperdine University (ID: 1729)
- **Institution Email:** [REDACTED]
- **Institution Unit:** GSEP
  
- **Curriculum Group:** Graduate & Professional Schools HSR
- **Course Learner Group:** Graduate & Professional Schools - Faculty Human Subjects Training
- **Stage:** Stage 1 - Basic Course
- **Description:** Choose this group to satisfy CITI training requirements for Investigators and staff involved primarily in Social/Behavioral Research with human subjects.
  
- **Record ID:** 20887101
- **Report Date:** 01-Feb-2017
- **Current Score\*\*:** 98

REQUIRED, ELECTIVE, AND SUPPLEMENTAL MODULES	MOST RECENT	SCORE
History and Ethical Principles - SBE (ID: 490)	18-Sep-2016	5/5 (100%)
Defining Research with Human Subjects - SBE (ID: 491)	18-Sep-2016	5/5 (100%)
Belmont Report and CITI Course Introduction (ID: 1127)	18-Sep-2016	3/3 (100%)
The Federal Regulations - SBE (ID: 502)	18-Sep-2016	5/5 (100%)
Assessing Risk - SBE (ID: 503)	18-Sep-2016	5/5 (100%)
Informed Consent - SBE (ID: 504)	18-Sep-2016	5/5 (100%)
Privacy and Confidentiality - SBE (ID: 505)	18-Sep-2016	4/5 (80%)
Internet-Based Research - SBE (ID: 510)	18-Sep-2016	5/5 (100%)
Vulnerable Subjects - Research Involving Workers/Employees (ID: 483)	18-Sep-2016	4/4 (100%)

For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

Verify at: [www.citiprogram.org/verify/?k65ff2648-24e2-42a6-94da-8a3ad58621cc-20887101](http://www.citiprogram.org/verify/?k65ff2648-24e2-42a6-94da-8a3ad58621cc-20887101)

#### Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program)

Email: [REDACTED]  
Phone: [REDACTED]  
Web: <https://www.citiprogram.org>