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Offering a First-year Composition Classroom for Veterans and Cadets: A Learning-Community Model Case Study

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Abstract

Military-based, academic learning communities housed in first-year-composition courses represent a fairly unexplored curricular model. This article discusses one university's creation of first-year-composition courses designed with a learning community or cohort approach for student veterans, service-members, and cadets. At this locale, neither Composition I nor II provided a military population with a common student community, customized readings based on members' interests, flexible attendance policies, and seamless communication with university veteran services. Yet, such factors could facilitate the transition to college for some student veterans. This program piloted linked composition courses for a service-member, veteran, and ROTC learning community, with the latter course also enrolling a general nontraditional-student population. In a year-long study, I investigated the impact of enrolling military-affiliated students in linked courses within a traditional classroom to interact under a continuing instructor, engage with military-based readings, and opt to write about their military backgrounds. In presenting emerging patterns, I argue that these experimental learning-community courses, contingent upon some local factors, supported many military-affiliated students' engagement with first-year composition, as well as facilitated their transition to academia, through a loosely-structured, cohort model promoting aspects of students' common but broadly-defined identities.

Keywords: First-Year Composition; Student Veterans; Cadets; Learning-Community Model; Cohort Group; Linked Courses; Persistence Factors

Introduction

More veterans are attending college than ever (National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL)), even if some writing program administrators (WPAs) and first-year-writing (FYW) instructors have not reconsidered the landscape of traditionally structured composition courses as a consequence. Student veterans are often "mature, motivated, and experienced" (Cleary and Wozniak) leaders, "'mission-oriented,'" and regular in submitting assignments (Hart and Thompson, "Ethical" 4). Sixty-five percent graduate with associate or bachelor degrees (Cate 5), compared to almost forty-three percent of students under age thirty (U.S. Census Bureau). Nevertheless, compared to their other nontraditional counterparts, sixty percent of veterans report greater issues becoming acculturated to the university (Fain).

For many, entering college represents the "most difficult transition of all" (Ackerman et al. 8). There are reasons for this. For instance, many student veterans represent adult learners juggling school, jobs, and families (Blaauw-Hara). Eighty-five percent of student veterans are aged twenty-four to forty, almost half are married and have children (NCSL), and forty-two percent work full time (American Council on Education (ACE)). Sixty-two percent are also first-generation college students, as opposed to forty-three percent of their non-military peers (NCSL 3). Moreover, in small percentages, student veterans are addressing medical and psychological issues (Rudd et al.). Given

this dynamic, universities must continue to investigate factors bolstering students' persistence and success rates. In 2012, only a quarter of colleges could explain reasons for veterans' withdrawal from academia (Fain).

In line with a consideration of factors associated with student veterans' backgrounds, traditional FYW courses may not serve all veterans equally well. In her 2010 Conference for College Composition and Communication Chair's Address, Marilyn Valentino called upon WPAs and writing faculty to support veterans as a "new" student base and "react responsibly" to their stories (368-69). Likewise, other scholars ask writing instructors to create inclusive classrooms where veterans can discuss their experiences (Grohowski; Leonhardy). A growing number of colleges are educating administrators, faculty, and students about student veterans' strengths and challenges (Hart and Thompson). Yet despite an interest in the concerns that veterans and service-members face, this population remains peripheral in higher-education arenas. Linda Smith argues that the discipline of composition and rhetoric locates veterans "outside the academy," depriving them of the community and respect of teachers and peers (29). For WPAs and faculty wishing to provide student veterans with choices concerning their FYW coursework, one possibility is to create military-purposed classes offering a military learning community (LC).

At my midsized, Midwestern, comprehensive-research university, FYW provides students with a uniform curriculum. Standard first-year composition (FYC) courses do not offer student veterans the following possibilities: 1) a common student community, 2) a continuing instructor over both semesters, 3) customized readings based on a military interest, 4) flexible attendance policies, or 5) seamless communication with university veteran services. Nonetheless, would student veterans find such course elements to be attractive and beneficial as they transitioned from the military to academia and especially to the FYW classroom? Would they discover their military experiences and backgrounds to be meaningful to college writing contexts if employed within a cohort? Moreover, would student veterans wish to interact with ROTC cadets[i] or later welcome a group of nonveteran, nontraditional students in Composition II via a cohort model promoting collaborative classroom efforts? Overall, does providing military-focused sections of FYC affect how student veterans engage these courses? These represented the research questions guiding my study.

Literature Review

Today, universities are revamping their mission to provide "as many options for learning as possible" (O'Banion 13). Some colleges have engineered basic and FYC courses for veterans that offer a military-related curriculum catered to students' interests and/or promote an inclusive classroom meant to dispel the anxiety some feel about revealing their status. This literature review describes veteran-oriented, writing-classroom support models; defines academically-related cohorts and LCs; and discusses university initiatives, including LCs, for student veterans.

Veteran-purposed Course Models[ii]

As a key article about "programmatic approaches" utilized to impact student veterans, Alexis Hart's and Roger Thompson's piece, "Veterans in the Writing Classroom," discusses models for facilitating student veterans' transition processes. To provide choices for students, institutions have offered "veteran-friendly," "veterans-only," and "veteran-focused" courses to foster military-oriented students' college entry (350). All students may enroll in veteran-friendly classes, affording a "safe," purposeful space designed with student veterans' assets and "challenges" in mind (357). In veteran-friendly courses, the theme and audience are open (357). In turn, four percent of institutions provide restricted writing classes for veterans (Hart and Thompson, "Ethical" 9-10). Veteran-only classes bring together a group of student veterans to dispel the alienation they might feel on campus and

promote a venue in which they can consider common, military-related topics (351-52). Finally, veteran-focused courses are open to both veterans and others, such as family members or war survivors, influenced by military conflicts (Hart and Thompson, "Veterans" 356). Veteran-focused sections take military-related issues as their topic and may provide students with choices in undertaking classroom assignments, thematically and logistically (356).

Implementing a veteran-friendly course model, Darren Keast created an open-enrollment, military-themed, FYC course at City College of San Francisco, which attracted veterans, students with a military lineage, and those interested in war narratives. Keast wanted to foster an environment in which all students, both military-affiliated and civilian, could hold conversations about war-related issues in order to "bridge the civilian-military gap that many critics have observed" (Keast n.p.). Regarding the mixed-course population, Keast found that the veterans responded positively to the class dynamic. On a related note, institutions may prefer scheduling veteran-friendly, as opposed to restricted, classes due to a fear of decreased student diversity; the possibility that the classes could be envisioned via a "deficit" model in which veterans are construed as students requiring assistance for stereotypically-applied medical or psychological factors (Hart and Thompson, "Veterans" 353); or the dictate for veterans to conceptualize themselves according to military roles (359). Moreover, some student veterans dislike the idea of veteran-restricted or veteran-focused classes, too. Sarah Gann writes about a veteran who did not believe a cohort would aid his college "transition" but might function as a "crutch" (225), while Hart and Thompson explain that others worry that veteran-affiliated courses could be "remedial" in manner ("Veterans" 354).

Despite the spaces for camaraderie and shared interest that military-friendly configurations offer, institutions have also explored veterans-only FYC courses, in which a military-service population might forge bonds based on members' common background and military-styled education to facilitate their university transition ("Veterans" 351; Valentino, "Serving" 164). Such students, including adult learners with full-time jobs, families, and exposure to international cultures, may feel isolated from others on campus, especially traditional students (351). In this context, offering restricted courses may foster a climate in which higher education itself becomes a location for dialogues about recent wars (Hart and Thompson, "Ethical Obligation" 11). Indeed, one advantage of veterans-only courses is that their teachers have probably received training on responding constructively and ethically to students revealing military identities (Hart and Thompson, "Veterans" 352). While veteran-specific courses have represented a "promising" trend (10), colleges promoting them have also reported dilemmas, including navigating diverse definitions of the term "veteran" that disrupt classroom dynamics (11), addressing administrators' and teachers' fear of veterans' separation from the greater campus, and predicting enrollment (Grasgreen). For these reasons, some veterans-only courses have been cancelled (Grasgreen; Hart and Thompson, "Veterans" 353). Still, at two unnamed institutions, faculty orchestrating veterans-only classes have identified positive results. A community-college teacher found the LC-based class to be a "success," with students discussing war-related readings in one section and a college education in the other, while a regional university faculty member believed that her students were inspired to write in the course, describing it as "safe" ("Veterans" 352-53).

Like the veterans-only model, the veteran-focused class approach identifies veterans as a target audience without being restricted to them. As a course objective, student veterans may write about their military background. Unlike with veterans-only classes, however, veterans can decide whether to disclose their status (356). Student veterans may also ask for alternate readings to avoid potential discomfort (356). Furthermore, faculty may design coursework allowing student veterans to attend to such matters as National Guard or reserve duty, medical visits, family matters, and work duties (356). Similar to those teaching veteran-restricted sections, veteran-focused course instructors

may also have received training for engaging a military-associated population. Recently, at the University of Southern Mississippi, Ann Shivers-McNair fashioned an Expanded Composition I course with a veteran cohort and a peer mentor. Describing a successful outcome, she located her cohort within an otherwise traditional classroom, in terms of its offering open enrollment, to provide greater diversity (Shivers-McNair). Nonetheless, Hart and Thompson argue that in both veterans-only and veteran-focused classes, students are called to perform a "veteran's" role because of the course's nature, and this outcome represents a moral dilemma (Hart and Thompson, "Veterans" 359). The efficacy of creating a FYC curriculum aligning with the third category, being veteran-focused and also involving a LC, remains an area for investigation, however. Of the programmatic approaches available for providing writing courses for veterans, offering veteran-focused classes represents an alternative to either open or closed courses.

Cohorts and LCs

Academically-based cohorts or LCs founded upon student identity can assume various forms, but I will discuss them in terms of their composition as a group of identity-related students taking linked classes spanning consecutive semesters. In separate articles, Vincent Tinto and Karen Kellogg both give five models for nonresidential LCs, the first of which is based upon pairing courses. Within a linked-course configuration, universities often include a "skills" course, which might represent a writing class (Tinto, "Learning Better Together"; Kellogg). Administrators and faculty fashion LCs to present curriculum in innovative ways, redesigning how students spend their classroom time and engage with one another in this space (Smith 32). By linking classes or coursework through LCs, institutions can provide greater coherence in educational materials, foster more occasions for peer work, and bolster collaborative practices between teachers and students (32-33). In an academic-based LC, members identify similar values and objectives and work together regularly in producing classroom assignments (Goodyear, De Latt, and Lally).

Cohorts and LCs can generate valuable outcomes. By building long-term relationships with peers, students may help to establish a caring environment, increase their confidence (Roueche et al.), and formulate individual and collective identities through inquiry and reflection (Merriam et al.). In an academic LC, members can construct knowledge and address complicated concerns by playing teacher and learner roles (Hugo; Knight; Stein; Wilson and Ryder). Furthermore, students often engage in mentoring relationships (Pothoff et al.) and delineate the teacher's function (Bersch and Lund), factors promoting student-centered classrooms. Finally, cohort students may demonstrate a more favorable reception to course topics, view their relationship to learning more positively (Mello), and learn "skills and knowledge relevant to living in a complex, messy, diverse world" (Lardner and Malnarich).

Cohorts and LCs for Student Veterans

Nationwide, some students are more likely to join cohorts than others. These include first year (FY), younger, and native students (as opposed to transfer students), racial minorities, women, fraternity and sorority members, full-time students, pre-professional majors and those with multiple majors, on-campus students, and those having parents possessing lower educational levels (Zhao and Kuh). While I found no literature discussing the rate at which student veterans join LCs for veterans or other groups, student veterans may present an interest in LCs for a range of factors listed above. Furthermore, one might assume that some would also value military-affiliated cohorts. During the transitional period in which veterans enter college, some are making "individual changes as well as [facing] emerging and contested senses of self" (Rumann and Hamrick 434), as are many new students investigating LCs during this time period. By developing their writing skills collaboratively

in a welcoming location, such as a FYC classroom cohort, veterans and service-members might structure their experiences as part of a confederation. Discussing veteran writing groups outside the university, Eileen Schell suggests that "[w]hat is . . . as powerful as the act of writing itself is writing *with* a community of veterans, . . . those who can understand . . . in a way that the larger society . . . may not" (n.p.). Of course, veteran-writing-group members and student veterans taking FYC represent distinctly differing populations composing for unique purposes, with many writing groups outside academia offering therapeutic opportunities. Yet veteran writer Jonathan Raab argues that some veterans hide their status in civilian life because they feel as if their "profession" is "of little consequence to the average American" (n.p.). While silence represents a valid strategy for representing oneself (Thompson), and some veterans just want to "blen[d] in" (DiRamio et al. 88), many yearn to be "acknowledge[d]" and "understood" by faculty and classmates (89).

Previous research, if sparse, identifies that university classes and community writing groups for veterans can promote a sense of collaboration and belonging amongst learning community members. Thus, in this paper, I will discuss a set of veteran-focused, FYC courses with a military-based LC as a still unexplored curricular model. No veteran-oriented writing courses catering to a shared population of both veterans and cadets have been addressed in the literature either. As WPA, addressing my research questions, I conducted a year-long study concerning the impact of providing FYC I and II courses for a service-member, veteran, and ROTC cohort, with the latter course adding a nontraditional-student, nonveteran segment. Military-affiliated students enrolled in the linked courses within a traditional classroom space to interact under a continuing instructor. Students engaged some military-based readings and composed writing assignments giving them the possibility of discussing their military-associated identities. Using my FYW pilot as a case design model concerning a set of veteran-focused courses whose outcomes were contingent upon some local factors, I will explore how the classes supported student veterans' engagement with FYC and facilitated their university transition as related to my research questions. In the classroom, veterans from different backgrounds contributed to a military-affiliated LC to help themselves acclimate to college and navigate new paths together stemming from their mutual but broadly-defined identities.

Methodology

Existing Research Models

To define my study, I identified two course-design models from veteran-related, lower-level composition classes. In a descriptive, first-person essay following an informal case-study framework,[iii] Keast offers a rendering of his veteran-friendly, military-themed, FYC course. Comparatively, in an instrumental case study, Shivers-McNair discusses her veteran-focused, Expanded Composition I class, containing a veteran cohort. Keast was concerned with how student veterans and civilians would blend in a military-friendly class having an open enrollment. In a LC context, Shivers-McNair was interested in how student veterans would bond with a military cohort as well as collaborate with the larger class. Each author identified camaraderie as a possible uniting factor amongst student veterans selecting the courses. Utilizing a case study, one can analyze a programmatic approach holistically and fully to generate an understanding of it and its relation to participants (Merriam, "Case Study"). Shivers-McNair conducted an instrumental case study, choosing a select case to garner an understanding of a particular phenomenon (Stake, "Qualitative"), because her pilot group was limited in size and bounded (see Cresswell, "Educational") by a common interest factor, that of the LC's function.[iv]

By implementing a case-study methodology, the authors approached their related research concerning the potential need for FYC classes for a student-veteran audience holistically, allowing for a description and comprehension of their cases (see Baxter and Jack; Tellis). By writing their

articles, Keast and Shivers-McNair share their studies in order to communicate their course-design approaches with writing faculty and WPAs interested in similar methodologies. Both authors represent participant observers (Cresswell, "Educational"), teaching the students in the studies.[v] To present his narrative, Keast describes holding the same course over three years, while Shivers-McNair portrays a single account (see Cresswell, "Qualitative . . . Approaches") of a consecutive course sequence to provide insight of it (Stake, "The Art") as a veteran-cohort model.[vi] Besides foregrounding their personal ethos in the articles, both authors delineate their schools' institutional context, the availability of services and writing courses for student veterans, and the student veteran population itself as factors affecting their studies' designs and outcomes.[vii] Moreover, the authors present their curriculum and purpose for offering the classes. Keast selected "a standard course in the composition sequence and tailor[ed] the readings and essay topics for students with military experience," while Shivers-McNair created a space for a veteran cohort within general, linked-course sections. In considering their classes' results, Keast "provides a discussion of the course and considers the challenges and successes he has faced" (n.p.), while Shivers-McNair details the obstacles and outcomes she encountered.[viii]

Both Keast and Shivers-McNair implemented a case-study methodology to investigate their classes' outcomes. A case study involves the in-depth collection of data from multiple sources to provide a case description and themes (Cresswell, "Qualitative . . . Approaches"), and the authors gathered diverse data forms to generate results (see Patton; Yin), including documents, observations, and interviews (Merriam, "Qualitative"). Keast presented his students with a pre-survey concerning their rationale for taking the class and a post-survey regarding their response to the theme. As a participant observer, he describes in-class exchanges between student veterans and civilians concerning his military-related class material, as well as offering anecdotes about the former group. Furthermore, Keast references some student veterans' writings as artifacts showcasing the military-related topics they addressed. Lastly, utilizing his syllabus and course documents, Keast foregrounds policies defining his course as "veteran-friendly." Taking a broader approach, Shivers-McNair utilized a beginning-of-the-semester survey to collect demographic data concerning all students in her university's FYW classes to identify those with a veteran status in order to gauge interest for cohort courses. Additionally, just as Keast spoke with faculty to propose a veteran-interest course section, before launching her study, Shivers-McNair also surveyed her department to determine whether faculty perceived a need for greater institutional support for student veterans. Lastly, three student veterans participated in Shiver-McNair's study, and she observed them in the classroom and engaged them in semi-structured interviews.[ix]

Research Site and Pilot Courses' Rationale

For Keast and Shivers-McNair, identifying one's institutional context and existing services for student veterans is important in formulating veteran-directed courses and studying their impact. My university, rurally located, serves both urban and rural populations having assorted educational experiences. In 2016, the undergraduate enrollment represented approximately thirteen-thousand students, mostly state residents. Some undergraduates possess first-generation, low-income backgrounds, and forty-eight percent are minorities, mostly African-American. During the study, the freshmen retention rate was over sixty-eight percent, with almost twenty-seven percent of students graduating within four years ("Factbook"). Fifteen percent of undergraduates lived off-campus, creating a fair-sized, non-traditional student population ("Factbook"), including a student veteran component. The institution offers a Veterans Services (VS) center with a clinical social worker from the Veteran Affairs (VA) Hospital, peer-support specialist, and financial-aid counselors; a lounge; veteran study groups and tutoring; and a Student Veterans Association branch. It is a "military-

friendly school" with a moderate veteran enrollment of just over two percent.[x] The university houses Army and Air Force ROTC programs, and nearby bases contribute to a military presence.

Still, in fall 2013, the department offered no veterans courses based upon any model, and there was little sustained communication between Writing Studies and institutional units serving student veterans. At my locale, FYC teachers utilize standardized prompts and readings. The courses produce effective outcomes, but I had spoken to instructors and student veterans about the dissatisfaction some of the latter had expressed with FYC, since they wanted: 1) veteran peer classroom support; 2) a context foregrounding their adult-learner status; 3) instructors who could appreciate students' military identities; and 4) teachers who would easily accommodate circumstances related to attending drill, being called up, or being deployed. Moreover, I had identified scenarios concerning veterans who were failing FYC due to undocumented absences or missing work because they had felt uncomfortable documenting medical/counseling appointments with their instructors, who, the veterans believed, had not presented the classroom as being explicitly military-safe. In envisioning a FYC course sequence for veterans, I was mindful of the current context while acknowledging that, anecdotally, my university's student veterans did not miss more classes or turn in less work than the "typical" student. Here, I avoided applying a deficit model to student veterans (see Hart and Thompson, "Veterans"). Nonetheless, I saw a military-cohort, course sequence as a space for student veterans desiring to engage with classmates and an instructor openly supportive of veterans. I had directed other FYC sections involving discipline-based and college-sports-based, Freshmen Interest Groups (FIGs), an approach in which two or more freshmen courses are linked, and had found the cohort model to be helpful in allowing students to connect their writing assignments to their majors and interests, as well promoting students' course participation and persistence patterns. Across campus, other FY classes geared toward specific populations were also being offered, including a fall University College (UCOL) "Foundations for Inquiry"[xi] course with a veteran/nontraditional student section.

To identify ways to serve military-affiliated students expressing concerns with the FYC curriculum, I communicated with VS, as well as two departmental, veteran, graduate instructors; faculty teaching the UCOL veteran/nontraditional student section; and administrators to launch the pilot sequence. I also investigated the campus's number of veterans and G.I. Bill users to gauge how many veterans might be interested in FYC cohort courses and identified institutional services to see how the classes might augment them. Additionally, I read work concerning student veterans, nontraditional students, FYC course design, and academic LCs to generate a background for my study. Such literature discussed many student veterans' need for camaraderie, the obstacles that adult learners face in engaging coursework, and the pedagogical and communal values that academic cohorts provide for FY students and underrepresented populations. In fall 2013, the English Department created one Composition I section for veterans and ROTC cadets. In the spring, the department offered two Composition II sections directed not only toward veterans and cadets but also serving some civilian, nontraditional students, who enrolled after a given week to fill the classes. In the fall, some veterans in the Composition I cohort enrolled simultaneously in the veteran/nontraditional student section of "Foundations."

Research Methods

Having IRB approval, I designed my study as a single, instrumental case study (Cresswell, "Educational") of a LC course model. An instrumental case study offers an "opportunity to learn" (Stake, "The Art" 6), and I hoped to understand how the FYC cohort sequence would function for my institution's student veterans (see Baskarada). Concerning my study's aims, I investigated 1) whether military-affiliated students would self-select military-focused composition courses and, if so,

their rationale for this; 2) whether military-associated students would feel a greater comfort in being with peers sharing this identification, as well as an instructor dedicated to them; 3) whether student veterans would wish to interact with cadets or later welcome a group of nonveteran, nontraditional students in Composition II via a LC model promoting collaborative classroom efforts; 4) whether student veterans would discover their military experiences and backgrounds to be meaningful to college writing contexts; and 5) whether the pilot sequence would improve course completion and student retention rates, at least during the first year. Although my study addressed both Composition I and II, I placed a greater consideration on the Composition I section's nature, since there is little literature regarding FYW, service-member, cohort courses.

I gathered data regarding the single Composition I section and the two Composition II sections from students as well as the instructor. Here, I utilized criteria-based sampling (Corbin and Strauss), since I wanted all participants to be involved with the same class sequence during a given time period. In filing data, I gave participants pseudonyms and kept the list of pseudonyms and associated names in a password-encrypted file. My study instruments included field notes, surveys, [xii] interviews, course papers, syllabi and curriculum, and university webpages (see Yin; Cresswell, "Qualitative Approaches") about services and programs available for student veterans and cadets. (See appendices 1 and 2 for selected FYC survey questions and results.) For Composition I and II, I surveyed students and analyzed their papers in line with my research questions (see Merriam, "Qualitative"). Furthermore, I contacted Composition II students, a population including veterans, cadets, and civilians, to solicit willing cadets and veterans for engagement in a survey similar to the one offered in Composition I, with Composition II's course focus being somewhat different in its inclusion of a civilian-student component.[xiii] After participants completed the survey, I presented them with the option to undergo a follow-up, forty-five-minute interview (see Merriam, "Qualitative"). In the interview, participants expanded on survey information by addressing a set of semi-structured questions (Rubin and Rubin).[xiv] Besides gathering student data, I collected information from the instructor, who I call "Kyle," through a survey and an interview concerning his pilot course goals and the sequence's efficacy. Additionally, I communicated with Kyle about his students' progress at regular intervals and kept field notes. As the WPA, I also played a role as a participant observer (Cresswell, "Educational") of the course sequence.

In the data collection stage, I utilized various strategies for gathering information. In analytical memos, I generated initial thoughts about the study and posed emerging findings (Strauss). Furthermore, I utilized a reflective journal to track the courses' implementation as well as reflect on the study itself, since qualitative research may "reflect the participant's perspective" (Merriam, "Qualitative" 116). I also created documents about items of potential interest before analyzing them.[xv] Here, I used a grounded theory method to collect data and locate themes in my transcripts, documents, and surveys to allow for flexibility and adaptation (Strauss). As the study continued, I searched for recurring strands having "issue-relevant meaning" amongst the materials and watched to see whether these themes would be sustained during the data collection's entirety via the process of "categorical aggregation" (Cresswell, "Qualitative Approaches"). Grounded theorists formulate their research methodology throughout the study, coding all the while and being responsive to the data and participants (Cresswell, "Educational" 431-32). However, at a later date, I also looked back at my documents to confirm my codes and reevaluate the big picture.

To discover common ideas regarding my study, I applied a thematic analysis to the data by utilizing these steps: reading and annotating the documents, identifying themes, developing a coding scheme, which entails listing the themes and codes to be applied; and coding the data (Bricki and Green). To code the data, I wrote the codes in my documents' margins. On the computer, I made distinct files for each code by cutting and pasting information. Nevertheless, I also put information

for a participant or class in its own file to maintain distinct pictures or narratives of people and events (Bricki and Green). The codes I utilized were linked to my research questions, allowing me to identify preliminary themes and study outcomes.[xvi]

Utilizing existing literature on my topic, and the themes arising during the study, I composed an analytical framework to assemble the data and formulate a storyline (Yin) subsequently. An analytical framework suggests that data from all participants, with their varying viewpoints, may be important (Strand et al.). Finally, I analyzed the data[xvii] relating to the study's setting, participants, and chronology to present a description of the case's details (Cresswell, "Qualitative Approaches") as generated by my research question regarding whether veterans would prefer and benefit from FYC cohort courses.[xviii]

To offer credibility to the study's premises and assertions, I involved myself in prolonged field engagement (Cresswell, "Educational") by considering the course sequence over a long period, utilized member checking by communicating with Kyle to render an accurate portrayal of his opinions, and created thick descriptions to lend the course sequence a sense of reality for readers (Cresswell and Miller). I also utilized the process of data triangulation by implementing "multiple sources of data" and "multiple methods to confirm the emerging findings" of my study (Merriam, "Case Study" 204). Furthermore, I engaged in peer consultation by offering a draft of my work to colleagues to establish its validity before composing the final manuscript (Merriam, "Case Study"). As a limitation of my study, however, I did not implement a second coder. Having included another coder would have provided me with additional feedback about the class's patterns as way to generate further credibility for my findings.

Overall Class Member Enrollment and Study Participants, Including Instructor

Students

First, I will describe the overall student veteran and cadet population in the FYC, military-cohort sections. To advertise Composition I, Writing Studies, housing it, created posters, contacted advisors, and spoke with VS. Still, before word spread, many veterans had registered for other sections, and others lamented later they had not known about the courses. The class enrolled fourteen men and two women affiliated with the Air Force, Army, and Marines, with more than two-thirds representing veterans and the others representing cadets. Simultaneously, some veterans also participated in the "Foundations" course with a veteran/nontraditional cohort. In spring, the department offered two Composition II sections for veterans and cadets, adding some nonveteran, nontraditional students to provide veterans with the opportunity to interact with others sharing similar backgrounds as adult learners. This design element was meant to scaffold the former's college transition. Participation in the courses was voluntary and self-selected, and students were not offered any additional activities or requirements that might inculcate them in academic culture beyond the class settings. Thirty-four students, with over half representing veterans and cadets, enrolled in the Composition II sections, with eight returning from Composition I. Arguably, the returning students felt comfortable enough with their peers and the instructor to select the same setting, while others might have postponed taking Composition II or not returned to the university for reasons including transferring elsewhere, as represented the case with one veteran.

By demographic, the pilot's student veterans and cadets can be compared anecdotally with a general, national student population showing interest in LCs (Zhao and Kuh) (see table 1). A variety of student veterans were drawn to the pilot's cohort. Across the FYC sequence, the veterans and cadets ranged in age from eighteen to at least thirty-eight, with the cadets comprising about a third of military-affiliated students. More men than women participated by far, replicating the military's demographics for gender. Additionally, Caucasian students with a military background represented

the majority, with African-Americans ranking second. By race, the pilot veterans' demographic patterns matched those of the university's. About a third of FY students value LCs nationally (Zhao and Kuh). Similarly, I chose FYC as a course sequence in which to offer a military-based cohort, as have other universities, since it represents a natural entry point for many student veterans. Finally, some student veterans were married with children and had full-time employment, with these factors being comparable to those for NCSL and ACE. In the pilot, student veterans from many disciplines participated, including business, aviation, forestry, and psychology.

Table 1

National student interest rate for LC participation versus rate in FYC military cohort

	National Rate	Pilot Institution Courses
Women	27 %	10 %
Men	24 %	90 %
African-Americans	35 %	20 %
Caucasians	24 %	80 %
Students aged nineteen or younger	30 %	25 %
Students aged twenty to twenty-three	24 %	25 %
Students aged twenty-four to twenty-nine	22 %	40 %
Students aged thirty to thirty-nine	21 %	10 %
Freshmen	30 %	80 %
Full-time students	27 %	95 %
Part-time students	18 %	5 %
Pre-professional students	29 %	25 %
Humanities, math and sciences, and social science majors	23 %	80 %

Now, I will discuss the study's student veteran and cadet participants specifically. In Composition I, four students participated, and in Composition II, two did. Of these groupings, one student, taking both FYC courses, participated both semesters. Since I received a great deal of feedback from this student, a cadet, I refer to her as "Erica." A student veteran, taking only Composition II, I call "Stephen."

Instructor

Kyle, a nonveteran, doctoral student with some family military history, taught the courses. He had participated in the FYC Stretch Program expanding Composition I over two semesters, based on the Arizona State model (see Glau). Thus, he explained that he preferred working with students, some of whom, like the student veterans, represented adult learners, over an extended time period. Posed as a cohort sequence, the pilot courses offered students taking both Composition I and II together the opportunity to form long-lasting bonds with the instructor and one another. Moreover, students could expect the teacher to present consistent policies across both classes as well as maintain a continuous pedagogical style to which they could accustom themselves. Having a nonveteran instructor for Composition I, as opposed to a veteran, also widened the veterans' sense of audience expectations for their assignments and class discussions, and facilitated the later inclusion of the nontraditional civilian students into Composition II. Schell, discussing national, veteran-based, writing groups, outlines the remunerations deriving from veterans leading them, even when members'

branches of service, rank, race, gender, and placements diverge, as being "camaraderie, share[d] vocabulary, and [an investigation of] common military experiences" (n.p.). However, unlike in an outside, community-based environment, a university setting may offer a limited instructor pool invested in a given special-interest group (SIG), and so civilian teachers can also undertake the important work of instructing veteran writers (Schell and Kleinbart). To provide Kyle with the support to teach a military-affiliated population, I linked him to two departmental, veteran instructors, and VS staff, a group with whom Kyle engaged in valuable collaborations over the pilot's course, he remarked. Table 2 (below) portrays the study participants and their characteristics.

Table 2

Study participants and their characteristics

	Role	Gender	Age	Race	Status	Data Collected
Composition I student veterans (3)	Full-time student, employee, spouse (2), business major (2), forestry major (1), freshmen (3)	Male	23-26	Caucasian	Army combat veterans (2). Air Force combat veteran (1).	Survey, course papers
Composition II student veteran (1)	Full-time student, employee, spouse, psychology major, sophomore	Male, "Stephen"	38	Caucasian	Army veteran, non-combat	Survey, course papers, interview
Composition I and II cadet (student taking both pilot courses) (1)	Full-time student, aviation major, freshman	Female, "Erica"	19	Caucasian	Air Force cadet	Composition I and II surveys and course papers
FYC pilot instructor (1)	Pilot instructor and Ph.D. student	Male, "Kyle"	Late 20's to early 30s	Caucasian	Civilian	Survey, interview, class materials

Creating a Military LC for Composition I

The Instructor's Goals in Teaching the Military LC

Of importance, Kyle recognized that he was teaching a LC and thus was prepared to welcome students possessing a common military interest from the start. Composition instructors often foreground writing involving "intimate matters" and value the group work in which it can be shared (Valentino, "CCCC" 6). Moreover, the personal essay constitutes a major genre in seventy-one percent of FYC classes (Hart and Thompson, "Ethical" 9), as it does at my locale, taking the forms of a literacy narrative and reflective pieces concerning a student's FY writing experiences. Thus, teachers must be prepared to react competently and humanely to any "traumatic events" veterans describe (Valentino, "CCCC" 6). Without meaning to, instructors unmindful of a veteran's presence may facilitate an "uncomfortable or hostile environment" through their centralized position (6). However, in his introduction of course objectives and the syllabus, Kyle explained that he encouraged students' potential desire to share their military identity, whether as veterans or cadets, by his discussing their voluntary decision to forge a military-affiliated LC in the class. Kyle also foregrounded his course as being veteran-friendly in nature and highlighted the departmental policy

of allowing military-affiliated students making progress to either take incompletes at any time in the semester or complete remaining classwork through online assignments if dispatched for military duty.

In an interview, Kyle indicated that, in teaching the pilot, he attempted to create a "safe space" for military-affiliated students where they could be open about their experiences, a LC requirement. He also advised students that they would have opportunities to speak and write about their military identity if they chose. Furthermore, Kyle explained that some readings tailored to student veterans' supposed interests might broach sensitive topics, and those wanting alternatives could ask for them. Additionally, he assured students that the FYC military-oriented sections would utilize the same type of assignments and structure as standard sections, so pilot students would encounter a similar experience. Aligning with a LC-course's agenda, Kyle's goals in teaching the FYC sequence included "helping students transition" to the university and "find a place in which they felt welcome." Of course, he also wanted to help them become "better writers." In engaging with Kyle, I found that his interests in teaching the courses, like mine in offering them, were tied to the study's larger concerns involving 1) providing cohort courses that student veterans might perceive as attractive and beneficial as they transitioned from the military to academia and to the FYW classroom.

The Value of Camaraderie in Fashioning the LC

As a finding for the study question concerning the LC's preferred makeup, the student veterans demonstrated that they did wish to interact based upon their common identity as a function of the courses. In the LC's confines, participants "gain a feeling of belonging from the personal relationships they are able to develop with teachers, administrators, and their cohort of students" (Jones 1). Aligned with this LC-oriented class objective, according to Kyle and the student participants, the veterans and cadets ranked being with compatriots as their primary reason for enrolling in the pilot and finding it valuable. Veteran and composition and rhetoric scholar, Derek Handley, who attended a historically Black institution as an undergraduate, believes that one benefit of a veteran FYC cohort may represent the potential for students to feel as if they can add to the group's shared identity. Indeed, contributing to the group's dynamic represents a necessary factor in negotiating one's successful entry into and membership in a LC.

In the pilot, according to feedback from the students and instructor, military-affiliated students from diverse backgrounds worked together as a cohort to construct meaning stemming from their shared military experiences within a compassionate environment. Mirroring the university's cadet and veteran population demographics, the pilot students were assorted in gender, race, age, home state, major, and branch of service, but what they liked best about Composition I represented its "communal" environment, which many felt exemplified the military's sense of "family," according to students' survey comments.

Concerning the course's sense of student solidarity, all students surveyed[xix] strongly agreed that they "enjoyed" being with others possessing a military identity similarly. Moreover, all believed that they "felt a stronger bond with classmates" in Composition I than in their other fall classes, a sentiment mirroring research noting students' greater identification with LC peers. The pilot students surveyed also concurred that due to having "common experiences as part of their military background," they engendered "a positive and supportive learning environment," another LC goal.

On a related note, veteran and composition and rhetoric scholar, Angie Mallory, has offered a cohort for composition students at Iowa State University. She herself enjoyed the "dark humor" her students introduced in the classroom and mentioned the comfort they found in utilizing military "banter" in conversation. Utilization of a common language or discourse represents another aspect of formulating a shared LC identity contributing to a sense of camaraderie, such as the pilot's student veterans desired in their writing class.

The Divisions Occurring Among LC Student Types

As a related finding to the question regarding whether student veterans would wish to interact with cadets in the LC, most veterans preferred relating to one another but were also willing to include the latter. According to Kyle, some divisions, replicating the military's sense of hierarchy, appeared between the veterans and cadets. In his judgment, the veterans preferred associating with themselves and were defensive about their community. Still, in their surveys, they referred to the class's sense of "solidarity." Moreover, Kyle believed that the veterans' interaction with the cadets helped the former to engage with the university's large percentage of traditionally-aged students outside the classroom in positive ways and to consider the varied military backgrounds and paths of their pilot peers as valuable. In turn, as both Kyle and Erica identified, the cadets, planning to enter a service-member community, benefited from learning about the veterans' experiences and locating role models through the LC's mentoring aspect.

The Composition I cohort course allowed military-affiliated students to formulate a LC, and within members' dialogues, the veterans sometimes explained conduct compatible with military life to the cadets, Kyle reported, even if this behavior did not match course goals in a few instances. The veterans, accustomed to a rigid military lifestyle, indicated that they preferred classes to be "efficient," orderly, and well-planned. They wanted a "detailed schedule," outline of objectives and aligning modules, and "transparency," he described. Furthermore, he noted, a few, disdainful of classroom distractions, "complained" about and monitored the cadets' disruptive behavior as if replicating a teachers' pet-peeves list: texting, arriving late, coming unprepared, talking over the teacher, and asking "mindless" questions.

David DiRamio and others discuss some student veterans' "irritation and impatience with their less mature civilian peers" in the classroom (87). Of course, while the pilot veterans may have been expressing their preference for a military-like setting, the divide also likely involved a generational one, given the groups' differing relative ages and accompanying life experiences. Despite the laissez-faire behaviors that a few veterans attributed to the cadets, the latter expressed strong convictions about their college careers and held high vocational expectations, as suggested by their survey responses and papers. Still, looking to the veterans for cues, the cadets fell into line under the veteran majority and adopted the prevailing, more rigid classroom etiquette, Kyle recounted, with students following a LC class's tendency to coalesce quickly. As a cadet, Erica explained that she looked to the veterans for guidance, believing that their ideas held as much importance as did her ROTC faculty members' views.

Still, on two occasions, Kyle explained, some veterans thought it appropriate to use the classroom as a vehicle for demonstrating to cadets what future military involvement could entail more overtly, as if the classroom constituted a community of practice or situated-learning environment with experts and apprentices performing in an actual field setting (Wenger). Once, Kyle mentioned, a veteran asked him for a few minutes after class to yell at the cadets for not shaving (which he was not given). Indeed, in a cohort, large personalities can have a great impact upon classroom dynamics (Sapon-Shevin and Chandler-Olcott). In instances such as the aforementioned one, some older combat veterans, who had served longer military terms and led large units, seemed to draw upon military-influenced forms of leadership and direct communication styles. Such veterans, with their strict attention to Composition I's policies and objectives, seemed not to realize that the enactment of a boot-camp-like atmosphere in which new recruits might be molded by "superiors" would be inappropriate and disruptive to the university's purpose of fostering equality, free expression, and diversity. Nonetheless, the student veterans in question utilized their directive qualities in positive ways. Indeed, the management styles that they had developed in the service should be cast as viable leadership models and not stereotypical deficits (see Hart and Thompson, "Serving"). For instance,

as both Kyle and Stephen noted, in functioning within the university sphere, the veterans led as well as received guidance from the cadets. All participated fruitfully in peer-review workshops and collaborated in group-work activities, with interaction being key to functional LCs.

Overall, according to Kyle and his students, even the course's big personalities looked to him for direction as they acted. They spoke well of and seemed to want to support him. Despite the emergence of class leaders, in discussions and peer-review sessions, most students participated and "did not seem afraid of making their opinions known," Kyle reported. Indeed, the veteran class leaders seemed interested in what the cadets thought and especially in their rationale for wanting to join the military, Kyle mentioned. Some veterans were worried also about presenting a pessimistic view of their enlistments for those who had yet to serve, he said. In class talks, Kyle explained, he asked both the veterans and cadets, if willing, to explain their basis for entering the military and discuss any military stereotypes, conversations that he felt dispelled some of the suspicion on the veterans' part concerning the differences in training and association between those who enlisted and the cadets. In response, Erica reported, she felt that being in a course with veterans was even more important than the cadets being with one another. Engaging in discussions, students shared by raising their hands and waiting to be called upon in a "formal" manner, Kyle explained, and the veteran class leaders made sure everyone spoke, even in disagreement. As for classroom relations, Kyle said that he never presented any rules for behavior, since the students, including the cadets, were mature in nature. In LCs, students themselves often set the tone for the course early on.

While the veterans and cadets worked out any differences, a third group emerged consisting of two supposed cadets who either withdrew from ROTC within the first months, Kyle guessed, or who did not wish to discuss their so-called military identity in any capacity. These students' presence gave the class another layer of diversity but, as an impediment to the LC's purpose of fostering participants' shared identity, it also divided the veterans and cadets, Kyle believed, from those possessing either no continued wish to pursue a military career or no desire to share such aspirations. While these students' silence on military-related topics represents a viable choice in self-presentation, their reticence about disclosing any personal information in class as linked to their supposed military ambitions separated them from their classmates, especially the veterans, who regarded them suspiciously, Kyle observed. Students in this third group may have continued with the class not necessarily because they wanted to participate in the pilot but because they could not transfer (easily) to another section. In the end, one did stop attending Composition I, and the other stayed. In balancing LC benefits and drawbacks, administrators and teachers must consider that many FY students' interests shift as they undergo life changes and learn about themselves, and numerous factors must be investigated regarding persistence (see Tinto). Nonetheless, in addressing the question as to whether student veterans would like interacting with cadets in the LC, I had not anticipated the presence of this third group and their effect on the class's composition.

Students' Attention to LC-specific Course Policies

Kyle found the course's flexible attendance policies and seamless communication with university veteran services to be valuable to the student veterans. Moreover, regarding this study concern, the student veterans identified such course elements and others related to the cohort's function to be attractive and beneficial in the FYC classroom similarly. While the LC created an environment for students to learn together with peers sharing a common association, the course also provided a friendly, open environment in which service-members could discuss the need for accommodations for drill, National Guard or reserves duty, or deployment. Although such conversations may seem matter-of-fact, and although at my university, student policies apply course-wide, this is not the case at some locales, where faculty may adopt syllabus statements

accommodating service-members nonetheless. A National Survey of Student Engagement reveals that first-year veterans report a greater disconnect with teachers than their peers, while combat veterans believe they receive "less campus support" than others (18).

Despite the outside commitments that the pilot veterans held as adult learners, they took fewer absences, excused and unexcused, than those in standard sections that fall and in falls past, and they seemed more committed than many students in other general FYC sections, Kyle thought, signs also suggestive of the pilot students' positive contribution to the LC. The veterans' sense of vigor seemed to reinforce the cadets' participation patterns likewise. Most veterans took the class seriously, corresponding with Kyle and submitting work online when absent. Some attended every class, and one came while his wife was in labor, with Kyle making this discovery because the veteran had brought his phone. Nevertheless, a few considered course policies "negotiable" and eased into academia's requirements via the FYC pilot, Kyle found. One student with multiple tours presented various unacceptable excuses, such as hunting deer and attending a party. While he failed to submit work on time, he took care to maintain a passing grade. Regardless of their strategies for approaching the class, on many counts, the pilot veterans, like student veterans nationwide, managed jobs, full-time enrollment, and spouses and kids while attempting to complete college degrees in a timely manner due to funding-year limits.

In a national survey, fifty-six percent of students over age twenty-four identify themselves as employees first and students second (National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)), with only eighteen percent who did not work (Berker and Horn 5). The pilot student veterans' attitudes toward both their careers and school mirrored this picture to some degree, as demonstrated in their writings. Nonetheless, the students also took care to foreground their sense of dedication to school, a theme evident in the collected materials. Nationally, students who view themselves as career-oriented are more likely to be married (NCES), as were some pilot veterans. Such students thus possessed three simultaneous identities, which made the nature of their participation in the LC that much broader, while perhaps also indicating their need for a cohort as a place to belong.

Since many veterans' attendance was regular, Kyle and the veterans became concerned when one was missing for longer than a day without notice, he remarked. In such cases, Kyle continued, the veterans would ask him if he had heard from the student, and although Kyle could not reply for privacy reasons, he would email the student, and the veterans might go to the person's house. If the veteran returned to class before being located, however, the others would ask, "Where the fuck were you?" as he walked in. Regarding this context, I have seen no other LC with such cohesion and a sense of concern for members. The well-functioning LC's ability to generate unity and coalescence among members could have allowed many the opportunity to share their personal concerns at some level within the course. At any rate, with access to a university study group linked to the VS and a veterans lounge, the pilot veterans looked out for one another before the class started and after it ended, and Kyle viewed them as a "close-knit" group because of their strong interaction. Tinto finds that FY students involved in LCs participate in course activities and undertakings with peers beyond the classroom more often than do FY students unassociated with a LC. Moreover, cohort students possess a more affirmative view of various components of their university experience, including the campus atmosphere, peers, and teachers than do others (Tinto). Arguably, the pilot students' positive evaluations of the course may have influenced their views of their greater campus experience.

Students' Interactions with the Instructor and LC Leader

The student veterans and cadets enjoyed being together in the LC, but Kyle's contribution to the group dynamic as a continuing instructor over both semesters and an interested LC member also proved vital to its functioning. He contributed to the military-affiliated students' willingness to share

their military experiences and backgrounds as they deemed relevant, and he taught in a way that addressed the veterans' needs and reflected their learning styles. Kyle, describing himself as a "forceful figure inadvertently causing silence when entering the room," believed that his upfront teaching style accommodated the LC. He argued that the veterans desired that he take a "commanding" figure's role, as opposed to acting as a "group member" or other decentered presence, in helping them transition from the military's rigid dynamic to a less-structured college setting. In turn, he reported, the veterans did not question his instructor authority, even though he felt that attaining their "respect" represented the most "important" aspect of his being able to teach the course. The students watched Kyle, especially the first day, he found, and evaluated his formal apparel choices and overall bearing, and he believed they "were waiting to be told exactly what they needed to do" and would detect any "hesitation" in his voice if he "failed to have a plan" and stick to it. Nevertheless, the veterans represented a strong presence themselves. They wanted "reasons" for every curricular choice, from the technology utilized to the readings selected, Kyle relayed.

Kyle believed that he taught the course "like any other," yet since it represented a LC, he felt that he knew students "better" than those in some Composition I sections, who were slower to "open up" or shared "personal" information only during the first unit, the first-person literacy narrative. The pilot's veterans were "opinionated," Kyle remarked, even about topics in which they purportedly did not have an "interest," such as the course's opening water-conservation sequence. Because students participated in a LC, they also reported their forming of a "close bond" with the instructor, who they felt "recognized their military status," as one student commented in the survey.

After Composition II ended, Stephen mentioned having continued contact with Kyle and the "importance" this relationship held for him. Indeed, "[t]he best learning communities are classrooms where students are connected through meaningful conversations in cooperative groups with each other and their teachers" (Hesse and Mason 30). LC instructors take a Constructivist approach to identifying knowledge in which class participants do not "discover" knowledge but prefigure and assimilate it socially as group members (Cross) through reciprocity, so that students engage learning on a more profound, individually relevant, and personal level (Bruffee; Schon). Furthermore, instructors become fellow learners, instead of the ones possessing answers (Kellogg). In the classes, Kyle remarked that he grew academically by applying his interest in literature to some reading materials he selected for students concerning the World Wars. Although I had surmised that generating a unified group presence would be important to the student veterans, as a study finding, I had not foreseen the very high degree of relevance they would place on forging a bond with their teacher as part of the LC's function, too.

Expanding the Military Cohort in Composition II

Reforming the LC with the Addition of a Nontraditional-Student Population

Although the student veterans engaged with the cadets to a degree in Composition I, as a related study question, I had contemplated also whether the veterans would further welcome collaborations with the subsequent group of nonveteran, nontraditional students via an expanded LC in Composition II. For the veterans beginning their second semester, Composition II facilitated a continuing transition period with the introduction of the general nontraditional-student population, with whom the veterans shared a larger common background. Still, this evolutionary point in the LC's membership was not seamless for all veterans involved.

A number of Composition I students continued with the pilot, with the first Composition II section enrolling the larger portion of prior students, who, liking their LC peers, coordinated their schedules to take the class together. The second section enrolled continuing military-affiliated students as one-third of the class. Additionally, some new veterans enrolled in Composition II who

had not taken the Composition I pilot, and this group also contributed to the new classroom dynamic. Kyle believed that a few veterans enrolling in both FYC courses struggled with the altered mix in Composition II. He relayed that these veterans reported feeling "less comfortable" sharing their military experiences with a civilian population present and disliked the class-etiquette renegotiations that ensued, since some nonveteran, nontraditional students, who were the same age as traditional students, engaged in the disruptive habits that the veterans had desired to avoid.[xx] Commenting on a LC's construction in the course, Stephen, a noncombat veteran whose military occupation placed him in "incoming fire," argued that establishing a "supportive veteran community outside one's unit" upon return is "impossible," as one can never replicate "such ties." Still, he mentioned contacting veterans (as opposed to the other nontraditional students) from his class to "continue relationships" after it ended, so he may have found interactions with his military-affiliated peers valuable in some way likewise.

In the course, Kyle explained, some veterans set themselves apart through their belief that they could identify their civilian class counterparts due to bearing, apparel, and grooming practices, even though it lay with each student to disclose an identity. Here, Stephen mentioned that he could not understand why the civilian students showed up at class "not having considered what they were wearing," including "torn" clothing and "inappropriate footwear," and failing to bring class "supplies." Laughing good-naturedly about what he called "the kids'" choices, Stephen said, "If I didn't have the right gear on the field, I could be hurt or killed. None of us has to worry about that here, I guess." Other veterans engaged quickly with their nontraditional peers as incoming LC members, and Stephen, representing a new group member himself, was "encouraged" in his own academic and career pursuits by the civilian students' "drive to succeed in school" and "belief in future possibilities." For the cadets, the transition seemed effortless, Kyle mentioned, perhaps since they, like many of the nontraditional students, were also younger. In the end, Kyle expressed, the military and civilian factions blended, especially as students conducted group work and peer review. Enrolled in the second section, Stephen reported that its "class cohesion" was "strong." A closed cohort into which no new members are introduced can prompt the group to coalesce in a deep fashion (Pothoff et al.). However, in Composition II, the introduction of other nontraditional students allowed the veterans to mix with a more diverse population through participating in broadened classroom conversations, collaborating with an expanded group, and becoming acclimated, as necessary, to the university's culture.

Linking the Curricular Context to Students' Military Experiences and Backgrounds

Like Composition I, Composition II also provided student veterans with opportunities to draw upon their military experiences and backgrounds as meaningful to college writing contexts, and students appreciated this dynamic, with its having been a study concern. In Composition II, the military population and freshly-introduced nontraditional students began where Composition I terminated by reading some additional texts foregrounding military history, life, and matters. Kyle tailored readings to the Composition I students' interests to offer thematic continuity while providing background information for the new group of military-associated and other nontraditional students. He discovered that those with military and civilian backgrounds related well to Maxine Hong Kingston's *Veterans of War, Veterans of Peace* (2006), containing accounts of soldiers, spouses and children, medics, and conscientious objectors. Likewise, the course readings' nature continued to be important for military-affiliated students. Despite the Composition I students' appreciation of the class's expression of companionship, some would not have taken the second course had it not dealt with military-related texts, Kyle reported. With the nontraditional students' presence in Composition II, conversations about military texts were "far-reaching" in a way that was "applicable to all

students," Stephen expressed. However, as Kyle had noted, a few veterans, seeming unsure of their reception, were less willing to communicate about their military identities within the expanded peer group than before. The others acclimated to the broader classroom dynamic, and the cadets showed no hesitation in taking part in dialogues.

Still, not every veteran joined Composition II for its camaraderie or military-related curricular theme. In class, Stephen chose not to speak about his military past due to his "ambivalent feelings" about it, and while he did like to read military history, he possessed a "wide reading taste," he explained. Instead, Stephen desired to connect his military experiences and background to academic writing scenarios in practical ways. He took the course based on its appeal to him as an almost forty-year-old student with life experience. Stephen explained that he was seeking a place to explore and reconcile the differences between discourses for military and academic communities. Describing himself as a "good writer," Stephen found the course "valuable" in helping him shift his composition approaches from being military-related to "academic" in nature. While he was practiced in creating "brief, direct, and formulaic" military documents (see Hinton), he expanded his "repertoire of skills" to implement "personal style" and "individualistic" purpose in his writings. Indeed, Kyle believed that the veterans appreciated his emphasis on helping them to utilize prior military-writing experiences as an orientation to FYC.

In Composition II, students wrote about their proposed careers, an assignment allowing all to pursue a relevant subject, Kyle believed. The college-related theme propelled some military-affiliated students to draw upon their backgrounds to compose about military-based controversies. They focused on matters including workplace issues; changes in the military, such as the then recent inclusion of women in the infantry; and rationales for recent conflicts. Others took different avenues related to their majors with their papers. Again, military-affiliated students had the choice to compose about their experiences, as some veterans may not wish to write about war (Leonhardy). As Stephen explained, he thought of himself first as a student, not a veteran, and thus did not necessarily desire to share his military past. Because of the breadth of subject areas on which students could concentrate, student veterans discussed their careers and personal experiences in terms of or apart from the military in writing to an audience including civilian peers. According to a LC model, students had the chance to interrogate their individual identities as part of the writing classroom's bigger conversations, Kyle, Erica, and Stephen felt. Such is an opportunity that adult learners embrace (Merriam and Caffarelle).

Course Results

According to instructor and student feedback, military-affiliated students found the FYC courses valuable in providing a safe, welcoming place to discuss their military-related experiences; helping them acclimate to university expectations, lifestyles, and dynamics; and building a foundational writing skillset. (See appendices 1 and 2 for related questions students engaged in surveys, as well as the surveys' results). In the study, the military-focused LC connected student veterans with one another, with cadets, and with other nontraditional students. Related to the military-based LC's expressed viability for the student veterans, research suggests that nontraditional students need social support in making a smooth college transition (Hays and Oxley). Likewise, students more engaged "in the social and academic life of an institution" possess a higher chance of "learn[ing] and persist[ing]" (Tinto 2). In my study, the military-affiliated students appreciated the option to engage with one another and utilize their military experiences and writing backgrounds in the FYC classroom similarly. Because of research suggesting that LCs raise student retention numbers, many institutions have implemented them (Taylor et al.; Price), including mine. Indeed, Tinto finds that LC participants complete their coursework at a higher rate than their counterparts,

as did I in regards to students' pass rates in the piloted FYC sections alone. Furthermore, LC courses lasting even one semester can produce a positive, long-term impact on students and raise graduation rates, according to study of a Kingsborough, England, program (MDRC).

Offering Suggestions to WPAs and Writing Instructors

The offering of LCs succeeds best at larger universities that can support a variety of cohort designations, so that participants possess different options (Kerka). However, because of staffing, cost, and time requirements, not all institutions can implement LCs for given populations, including those with a military affiliation. In such cases, administrators and faculty might consider the scenarios that I offer here (without advocating any particular one), based upon Deepa Rao's vision for engendering a LC-based-classroom: (1) offering a standalone, first-semester composition course for veterans; (2) pairing courses, including a writing class, so veterans can locate their experiences within an interdisciplinary context; (3) urging veterans to enroll in other classes offering a veteran LC; (4) drawing up a list of interested veterans and asking them to enroll in the same course to support one another informally; (5) creating a list of interested nontraditional students, of which veterans represent members, and asking them to enroll in the same course; and 6) inviting a college veteran resource center, student veteran organization, or other university office or association to speak to students or requesting outside speakers to discuss military-related topics.

Besides these possibilities for LC-based course scenarios for military-affiliated students, Kyle and/or I identified some helpful practices for teachers of cohort courses designed like ours. Instructors can 1) explain their relationship to the course, whether as veteran or civilian, and reason for teaching it in order to create an identifiable ethos and put students at ease; 2) continue to define why the class is required, what students will learn, and why these concepts are important, since some military-affiliated students are mission- and goal-oriented (see Hinton); 3) ask students to write down objectives for themselves at the course's beginning, so they can reflect on them during the semester. The more responsibility an instructor can offer students to promote their own self-learning, a LC goal, the better many nontraditional students may respond; and 4) foreground group work activities, as, likely, veterans are accustomed to working collectively, and a LC lends itself to collaboration. As Stephen explains, instead of "working alone," in the military, personnel "rely" on the "relationships they form" in order to "function." Teachers can also foreground the concept that the LC-based class constructs knowledge collectively, and instructors do not necessarily have the answers to the questions presented.

Conclusion

Following my research questions, I conducted a study concerning the impact of providing FYC I and II courses for a service-member, veteran, and ROTC cohort, with the latter course adding a nontraditional-student, nonveteran segment. As an outcome, military-affiliated students enjoyed the opportunity to enroll in linked courses within a traditional classroom space and interact under a continuing instructor. Students also liked engaging military-based readings and composing writing assignments giving them the possibility of discussing their military-associated identities. Thus, the pilot classes supported student veterans' engagement with FYC and facilitated their university transition as related to my overarching research questions. Offering the FYC pilot promoted students' active and collaborative learning processes, interaction between military-affiliated and civilian students, and students' personal and academic development. In the classroom, veterans from different backgrounds contributed to a military-affiliated LC to help themselves acclimate to college and navigate new paths together stemming from their mutual but broadly-defined identities.

At my school, offering FYC, military-cohort courses has encouraged many student veterans to embody both military and student identities, as well as a host of others. Since being offered, the courses drew increased interest. In fall 2014, a female instructor with a family military connection taught the Composition I section, and an instructor serving as a pilot course substitute expressed a wish to teach it also. In facilitating the pilot, I also saw the requisite for fashioning online FYC courses to accommodate the needs of service-members living some distance away and possessing adult-learners' responsibilities.[xxi] Meanwhile, the university itself has expanded offerings to military-related students. The college provided a chaplain's services, the first program of its kind nationwide, and veterans began local writing and reading groups.

Future Directions

I have reported my case study by implementing a chronological structure, as well as a theory-building structure (Yin) premised upon LC tenets. I analyzed my case study within the case's context or setting (Merriam, "Case Study"), and the case presents "both description and thematic development" (Cresswell, "Educational" 486) to render "naturalistic generalizations" that readers can learn about or apply to other cases (154). In the literature, Hart and Thompson define veteran-focused courses, while Shivers-McNair describes the case of a veteran-focused, extended Composition I class sequence. My subsequent study covers both Composition I and II, discusses a military student cohort containing veterans and cadets, and explores the introduction of a nonveteran, nontraditional student population in Composition II. Future studies might investigate cohorts involving student veterans and cadets, with other nontraditional students being added subsequently to a FYC course sequence, over a longer time period, in other institutional contexts, and in other geographical locations. Additional readings and assignments that would engage student veterans and cadets as well as nonveteran, nontraditional students might also be suggested. Furthermore, subsequent studies might highlight other university stakeholders' perspectives on military cohort courses beyond those of the WPA, departmental colleagues, and the course instructor. Finally, forthcoming work might identify the extent to which student veterans and cadets interact with a FYC class's LC members beyond the course itself to gauge the LC's overall impact.

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[1] The Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) represents a collection of officer training programs offered by universities for producing commissioned officers (Committee on Armed Services of the House of Representatives). ROTC students can obtain scholarships for college tuition in exchange for serving in the military post-graduation. During the school year, cadets take part in drills, and they train in the summer. ROTC officers participate in all divisions of the armed forces. Of newly commissioned officers, ROTC graduates constitute almost thirty-nine percent of Army officers, almost two percent of Marine Corps officers, almost seventeen percent of Navy officers, and more than thirty-eight percent of Air Force officers, a total of thirty percent of all active duty officers (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense, Personnel and Readiness).

[2] I will not be discussing national academic programs, such as the Warrior Scholar Program, in delineating such models.

[3] Descriptive case studies, presenting the factors of a situation in its particular setting, are utilized for constructing theories (Baskarada). Likewise, illustrative case studies, which are also descriptive, provide realism and rich examples about a program (General Accounting Office). To promote credibility regarding his case study, Keast engages in prolonged engagement in the field (Cresswell,

"Educational") and creates thick descriptions of his class to lend it a sense of reality (Cresswell and Miller).

[4] For John Cresswell, a case study involves "an in-depth exploration of a bounded system," such as a course-design sequence, "based on extensive data collection" ("Educational" 485).

[5] As a participant observer, the researcher participates in events at the location under study (Cresswell, "Educational").

[6] Utilizing a single instrumental case study, one presents information about a particular programmatic approach about which the findings might be generalizable (Stake, "Qualitative").

[7] A case study provides an illuminating, comprehensive view of a given group of people or situation (Patton) in a particular context (Merriam, "Qualitative").

[8] In reporting a case study, researchers should offer the meaning gleaned or the lesson learned (Lincoln and Guba).

[9] A semi-structured interview allows participants to provide detailed answers with their own individual context to open-ended questions surrounding the topic of exploration (Rubin and Rubin).

[10] See Cook and Kim for veteran-college-enrollment divisions.

[11] This course introduced students to college; taught study, notetaking, and reading skills; and offered success and wellness strategies. In the fall 2013 through spring 2014 academic year, when the veteran/nontraditional cohort was introduced, approximately three percent of military-affiliated students participated.

[12] One can integrate quantitative survey data into a case study to create a broad comprehension of the topic (Baxter and Jack).

[13] Both my study's veterans and the other nontraditional students represent adult learners. In Malcolm Knowles' educational framework known as "andragogy," adult learners prefer their learning to be self-directed, draw from a range of past experiences that instructors must acknowledge, learn concepts based on their wish to know about or do something, are task- and problem-centered instead of subject-driven, and show great internal motivation (Knowles). According to the literature, students involved in a successful LC may also demonstrate the adult learner's set of traits.

[14] Later, I transcribed the digitally recorded interviews and provided notes for interpreting them after each one (Cicourel).

[15] Merriam argues that one should test and confirm data as one collects it in order to create a funnel in which the process becomes easier as the study proceeds ("Case Study").

[16] In coding, one should pursue the propositions on which the case study was based. These propositions help the analyst focus on the most significant data, organize the case study, and create alternative explanations (Yin).

[17] To maximize reliability, I analyzed the whole data set (Bricki and Green).

[18] Merriam recommends an analytical framework for presenting participants' roles, a network analysis of formal and informal exchanges among groups, themes, and critical incidents that challenge

or reinforce beliefs, practices, and values. The framework allows researchers to search for patterns in the data offering relevance to the study ("Qualitative").

[19] This number represents four Composition I students.

[20] Indeed, a nontraditional student may present any of these characteristics: (1) waiting some time after high-school graduation to enroll in college; (2) attending part-time; 3) working full-time (35 hours or more); (4) being financially independent; (5) being a parent; and (6) having a GED instead of a diploma (National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES)). Overall, seventy-five percent of undergraduates represent nontraditional students (NCES).

[21] Studies show nontraditional students, including veterans, often choose online and mixed format courses to accommodate a lifestyle involving work and family (ACE).

Appendix 1
Selected survey questions and results for Composition I students

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I enjoyed being part of a class comprised of students with backgrounds similar to mine.					
Because of our shared experiences, we as a class were able to establish a positive and supportive learning environment.					
I felt a stronger bond with my classmates in this class than I did in my other classes this semester.					
This class helped me to better acclimate to the expectations and lifestyle of the university.					
This class provided a safe place to discuss the experiences of my classmates and myself.					
The atmosphere in class was welcoming and appreciative of the service time and experiences had by my classmates and myself, if relevant.					
The community in this class helped me to form a stronger sense of self-identity outside of the military.					
The readings in this course were relevant to my interests and experiences.					

The amount of military-focused reading material was appropriate in meeting and achieving course objectives.					
The types of assignments in this course were appropriate in meeting and achieving course objectives.					
This class helped me to build up a solid set of foundational skills necessary for success in composition.					

Appendix 2

Selected survey questions and results for Composition II student veterans and cadets (multiple choice)

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I enjoyed being part of a class comprised of students with backgrounds similar to mine.					
Because of our shared experiences, we as a class were able to establish a positive and supportive learning environment.					
I felt a stronger bond with my classmates in this class than I did in my other classes this semester.					
This class helped me to better acclimate to the expectations and lifestyle of the university.					
This class provided a safe place to discuss the experiences of my classmates and myself.					
The atmosphere in class was welcoming and appreciative of the service time and experiences had by my classmates and myself, if relevant.					
The readings in this course were relevant to my interests and experiences.					
The amount of military-focused reading material was appropriate in meeting and achieving course objectives.					

The types of assignments in this course were appropriate in meeting and achieving course objectives.					
This class helped me to build up a solid set of foundational skills necessary for success in composition.					

Appendix 3
Selected survey questions and results for Composition II
student veterans and cadets
(open-ended)

1. Why did you decide to become a college student, and what do you want from college? Explain. Please write at least 1 paragraph.

2. Do you prefer online courses or in person courses? Why? Are any of your reasons related to your military identity, such as a need to attend drill? Please write at least one paragraph.

3. Why did you decide to take a section of Composition II directed toward veterans and cadets? Explain. Please write at least 1 paragraph.

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