OPERATION TEAMWORK: FGCU
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Research Methods & Design
Participants
• All participants volunteered for the study. FGCU student Veterans were invited to register while attending orientation.
• Email invitations with a link to a registration site was sent to all FGCU students. Flyers were distributed throughout campus and handed out during student Veteran related events.
• The control group was also recruited flyers posted on campus and snowball sampling; consisted of undergraduate and graduate students enrolled at FGCU.

Design
• Non-randomized pretest posttest design to measure the effects of a service-learning activity on quality of life and well-being of FGCU Veteran and non-Veteran students.
• Intervention consisted of a service-learning activity at Lighthouse of SWFL, where participants engaged in outdoor, physical, post-hurricane cleanup activities.
• Demographic and quantitative data was collected via Pre-Post test assessments.
• Qualitative data was collected during focus groups that took place after the intervention at the Lighthouse.
• Additional interviews were conducted with Veterans who could not attend the intervention.

Data Collection
• The following assessments were administered Pretest and posttest:
  • World Health Organization Quality of Life Assessment (WHOQoL-BREF)
  • Perceived Stress Scale-14 (PSS)
  • Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (PSQI)
  • Brief Mood Introspection Scale (BMIS)
• Focus groups of both cohorts were conducted after the intervention.
• Responses from each cohort were recorded and coded for themes.
• Interviews were conducted with Veterans who were unable to participate in the intervention to explore their experiences reintegrating into higher education.

Results

Quantitative
• Independent sample T-tests were run on all data of Veterans and students.
• Two tests produced statistically significant results.
  • FGU
  • WHOQoL-BREF Domain 3 - Social Participation

Qualitative Data – Emergent Themes
Post-Intervention Focus Groups
Both groups reported an increased sense of community with their respective groups and great sense of purpose in providing needed services to a community agency.
• Veterans welcomed the opportunity to bond with other veterans and having the opportunity to network.
• Veterans stated they would enjoy having a designated meeting time once a month on campus for both social/leisure activities AND service activities.
• Veterans expressed that they can’t be responsible for planning events because they already experience great difficulty balancing life roles (family, school, and work), but all agreed they could spare a few hours a month to complete a project or attend a meeting.

Individual Interviews with Veterans who were unable to Participate
• Veterans reported several limitations for time (work, school, and familial obligations).
• Veterans stated inability to participate in physically demanding interventions.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusions
• FGCU Veterans are very motivated to join the Eagle’s Nest.
• There is a need for more structured Veteran support to allow for better communication and dissemination of Veteran focused resources and events.
• Veterans require earlier and faster access to Veteran-related services.
• A dedicated Veteran Support Officer would bridge the gap between academia and social inclusion allowing Veterans to fully integrate to FGCU.

Recommendations
• Researching funding sources such as Grants for a part time Veteran Service Coordinator for FGCU.
• Developing a job description for a Veteran Service Coordinator for FGCU.

Abstract
This study was designed to explore the needs of Veterans at Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) and to address the challenges they face when integrating into higher education. The assessments and intervention were selected to draw out the differences between Veterans and traditional college students. FGCU students and student Veterans volunteered to participate in a social and physical activity aimed at reducing overall stressors, with a goal of providing social support, structure, and guidance from peers. Veterans who participated in the intervention reported a sense of increased overall well-being and a newfound camaraderie. The process of recruiting Veterans for this study revealed specific barriers to participation in campus activities. Researchers also interviewed Veterans who expressed interest in participating in the intervention but were unable to attend due to time constraints to further explore barriers faced by Veterans. Demographic data revealed complications in analyzing FGCU Veterans are married, with children, and tend to be older than traditional students. Feedback from Veterans revealed that they were interested in on-campus social engagement and welcome the opportunity to network with fellow Veterans and students but lacked the time to organize such events. The results of the study confirmed the belief that FGCU Veterans would benefit from greater FGCU support to enhance opportunities to connect with fellow Veterans and students.

Rationale
Research has shown that Veterans in higher education tend to have difficulty reintegrating into the classroom environment (Lewis, 2008; Lewis & Sokolow, 2008). In addition, they are largely unaware of opportunities available on campus to connect them to other Veterans and support groups (Semer & Harmening, 2015). The Veteran population in higher education is a unique subset of non-traditional students (Lewis, 2008; Semer & Harmening, 2015). Their experiences and maturity levels can vary significantly from their collegiate peers (Lewis & Sokolow, 2008; Semer & Harmening, 2015). Age and maturity can drive a wedge between Veterans their younger classmates (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). The collegiate setting, which fosters autonomy, is a large cultural shift from the military environment, where structure and collaboration prevails. In order to meet the needs of Veterans on campuses we must explore a variety of options to ensure student veterans can participate fully and receive the assistance of veterans using extended group assisted therapies for veterans.

References