

Fieldnotes: Interview with Martin

General Observations:

The participant, Martin, was conversational and relaxed throughout the interview.

He initially apologized for being late due to a meeting, which set a collegial tone. Martin frequently included humor and personal anecdotes, especially about his son, sports, and career transitions. He spoke candidly about the challenges of memory loss stemming from a traumatic brain injury (TBI) sustained during military service. He also discussed his experiences with PTSD.

Martin's responses reflected a sense of pride in overcoming challenges, consistently returning to themes of resilience, education as therapy, and career reinvention.

No major technical issues or distractions were observed during the interview.

Interviewee Responses:

- **Military and Medical History:**

- Martin explained that he enlisted in the military after losing a baseball scholarship in high school due to a knee injury.
- He later suffered additional injuries while deployed in Afghanistan, leading to a medical retirement in 2015.

- **Educational Journey:**

- Initially returning to school to motivate his son, Martin enrolled in school.
- He described how pursuing education helped him rehabilitate his memory and cognitive functions.
- He credits school with restoring structure and memory skills, emphasizing his gratitude for educational benefits and veteran support.

- **Family and Motivation:**

- Martin shared personal stories about his son, who inspired his return to academics.
- He noted generational differences in work ethic and motivation.

- **Career Transition:**

- Martin completed an internship with RBFCU and discovered a passion for IT risk and audit work.
- This led to a full-time position at USAA while still completing his degree.
- He detailed his balance of full-time work and full-time school responsibilities.

- **Plans for the Future:**

- Martin is currently completing his undergraduate degree and anticipates graduating in December. While graduate school was initially part of his plan, he shared that this may change depending on his career trajectory at USAA.
- He wanted to take a break from formal education and assess whether further schooling aligns with his evolving goals.

Reflections and Notes:

- Martin's self-awareness and resilience are strong narrative threads; he frames setbacks (sports injury, combat injury, memory loss) as pivots rather than defeats.
- His comments suggest that higher education played a significant therapeutic role in recovery beyond academic or career goals. He acknowledged that educational routines helped restore his memory and focus.
- Initially motivated by his son, Martin's educational persistence evolved into an internally driven commitment. This shift from external to internal motivation reflects a critical aspect of veteran academic engagement.
- He also noted that the financial cushion of education benefits delayed his proactive career planning until his internship experience. This illustrates the importance of structured experiential learning in shaping long-term goals.
- Martin described his early involvement in the Student Veterans Association (SVA), which he later left due to intergenerational conflict. However, he consistently trusted CMAS as a reliable and supportive resource. This contrast highlights the need for varied community-building approaches—while peer groups may not serve every veteran equally, strong institutional support structures can provide an alternative form of belonging.
- Martin's self-awareness and resilience are strong narrative threads; he frames setbacks (sports injury, combat injury, memory loss) as pivots rather than defeats.
- His family and desire to model perseverance for his children influenced his return to school and workforce reentry.
- There is apparent pride in adapting to civilian life, finding new purpose through academics and a professional career.

Observer Comments:

Martin was easy to schedule for an interview because he was interested in contributing to research focused on veterans. The leadership team at CMAS referred him directly to me. As a medically retired veteran and a previously active member of UTSA's Student Veterans Association, his perspective was especially valuable for this study. He offered firsthand insights into the institutional resources available at CMAS and the emotional challenges veterans face when transitioning into higher education.

The interview was conducted via Zoom in a quiet setting, free from technical disruptions. I felt comfortable and engaged throughout the conversation, and Martin also appeared at ease. He spoke openly, with candor and humor, suggesting a strong level of rapport and trust. Although the conversation occasionally veered off-topic, he consistently returned to the key themes of education, recovery, and reinvention.

He answered all questions genuinely and thoughtfully. We were not rushed for time, and the pacing allowed for elaboration and storytelling. This interview provided valuable insight into the support needs, challenges, and successes of a student veteran navigating higher education after military service.

Key to Codes (Color Codes)	
Color Code	Associated Theme
Blue	Course (VA) Certification
Dark Blue	Military Background
Gold	ROTC
Green	Education Journey (including Education benefits)
LT. Green	Personal Conversation (non-academic or informal topics)
Grey	Appointment
Orange	Hazelwood
Burnt Orange	Family / Personal Motivation
Pink	Mental / Physical Health
Purple	Random Question
Red	Shift Change
Teal	Career Planning / Transition
Yellow	Chapter 33 (GI BILL) / 34
Dark Red	Community