

INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

Mark Anthony Brennan

Department of Interdisciplinary Learning and Teaching, University of Texas at San Antonio

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Dr. Patricia Sanchez

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to analyze an interview with Martin, a medically retired veteran and undergraduate student at the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA). Martin utilizes services provided by the Center for Military Affiliated Students (CMAS) and is a former member of UTSA's Student Veterans Association (SVA). Two major themes emerged through open and focused coding of the interview transcript and accompanying field notes: (1) Education as a Tool for Recovery and (2) Challenges and Motivations in Career Transition. Each theme includes a subtheme that highlights how personal motivation, structural support, and internal conflict shape the veteran student experience. This paper examines what Martin's story reveals about the support needs of veteran students (Research Question 1), their sense of belonging (Research Question 2), and the obstacles they face in engaging with services (Research Question 3).

Methodology

The interview was conducted via Zoom and lasted approximately one hour. I transcribed the recording and applied a two-stage coding process. First, open coding allowed broad themes to surface organically. Then, focused coding grouped these ideas under broader categories aligned with the research questions. The updated transcript was then reviewed for clarity, and Martin's responses were tagged with open codes such as *Education Journey*, *Mental / Physical Health*, *Career Planning*, and *Community*. Fieldnotes captured my reflections during and after the interview, offering insight into Martin's tone, comfort level, and the emotional weight behind his words.

Findings: Themes and Subthemes

Theme 1: Education as a Tool for Recovery

One of the strongest themes that emerged in response to the first research question, concerning the primary support needs of veteran students, was the role of education in cognitive and emotional recovery after military service injuries. Martin shared that after being medically retired for injuries sustained in Afghanistan, he initially had no plans to work or study. However, inspired to motivate his son, he enrolled in classes. He found unexpected therapeutic benefits: *"I had pretty bad TBI, where I couldn't remember things if it was in my calendar to give me a reminder. School actually helped, you know, rectify those deficiencies."*

In my fieldnotes, I recorded that Martin's tone became particularly reflective when discussing his memory issues and how school structures, such as deadlines, routines, and learning, supported his recovery.

Subtheme 1.1: Personal Motivation Tied to Family

At first, Martin was motivated by external factors—encouraging his son—but this motivation became deeply internalized over time. As he noted, *"At that point, I had already started. So now I had to finish cause that's just internal. I can't just not finish something."* The shift from external to internal motivation underscores the importance of guiding veteran students in uncovering personal significance within their educational journeys. By fostering a deeper connection to their studies, veteran students can find fulfillment and purpose, transforming their educational experiences into meaningful and self-driven pursuits.

Theme 2: Challenges and Motivations in Career Transition

A second central theme that emerged from the research questions regarding the primary support needs of veteran students and the obstacles they encounter in utilizing available services was Martin's experience in navigating career transitions. After beginning an internship at

RBFCU, Martin recognized that he missed the sense of purpose that comes from meaningful work. He explained:

"I didn't even realize that I would be going back to work. I was just going, because, you know, I get paid to go to school. So why not? So, I did an internship at RBCFU and realized that I was missing out. And in October, I was actually offered a full-time position at USAA. Doing IT, IT Risk, and audit testing."

The opportunity to engage in mission-focused work in cybersecurity reignited his motivation and enabled him to reconnect with the investigative and analytical skills he developed during his military service.

Subtheme 2.1: Obstacles Related to Perceptions of Benefits and Motivation

One significant subtheme that emerged is how financial benefits can unintentionally discourage early engagement with campus support services. Fieldnotes revealed that many veterans, including Martin, initially hesitated to connect with resources such as CMAS, OneStop, Student Success, and other university offices. This hesitation often arises from a sense of temporary financial security provided by benefits like the GI Bill and the Hazelwood Act. As Martin reflected: *"I got 48 months of GI Bill, and then I have Hazelwood after that..."* While education benefits are crucial for helping veterans access higher education, they can also cultivate a mindset that delays students' proactive engagement with career counseling, academic support, and mental health services. The sense of stability these benefits provide may prompt some veterans to postpone making long-term plans until later in their college journey, often when challenges become more difficult to manage.

Martin's experience highlights the vital role of CMAS in addressing immediate logistical needs, such as managing certifications and benefits, while encouraging early career planning and

holistic personal development. However, to reach more students—especially those who do not actively seek out CMAS services—it is crucial to enhance outreach efforts beyond the center itself.

Additional Observations: Sense of Community at CMAS

In relation to the second research question, which examined how the Center for Military Affiliated Students (CMAS) fosters a sense of community and belonging among veteran students, Martin's experiences provided valuable insights. Although he did not participate in many formal community-building events organized by CMAS, he was an active member of the University of Texas at San Antonio's (UTSA) Student Veterans Association (SVA), the only nationally recognized veteran student organization on campus. The SVA is a volunteer-led advocacy group that connects student veterans and their families with resources, networking opportunities, professional development, and peer support, promoting academic and career success.

Martin initially engaged with the organization and received information through its digital platforms. He explained, *"So there was a SVA GroupMe. And that's where a lot of information would go out, and of course, I ended up leaving that because I was just tired of the BS."* This statement reflects some challenges veterans may encounter when navigating peer-led spaces, particularly when interpersonal or organizational dynamics distract from their academic or personal goals.

Martin's experience suggests that while organizations like the SVA can offer valuable channels for connection and information, not all veteran students will find lasting community through these platforms. His continued reliance on CMAS for practical support, such as benefit certification and academic navigation, indicates that for some students, trust in institutional

infrastructure may provide a stronger sense of belonging than peer social groups. As such, CMAS may consider balancing its role in administrative assistance with efforts to strengthen inclusive, low-barrier social engagement opportunities that appeal to a broader range of veteran students.

Conclusion

Martin's interview provided valuable insights into how veteran students utilize higher education not only for academic progress but also as a means of personal and psychological recovery. His experience underscores the importance of access to structured learning environments, supportive family influences, and opportunities for career reintegration. It also highlights the risks associated with delayed engagement, where students rely solely on educational benefits without directed outreach from institutions.

While peer-led organizations like Student Veterans of America (SVA) may not meet the needs of all veterans, Martin's story confirms the crucial role of the Center for Military and Academic Success (CMAS) in fostering trust and helping students navigate the complexities of college life. Future support models for veteran success programs should prioritize early career planning, mental health services, and training for faculty and staff on veteran-related issues. By implementing these strategies, institutions can better connect students like Martin, who may not initially seek assistance, with the resources they need for long-term success.