



# The Student Veteran Instructional Communication Training (SVIC): An Analysis of Student Veteran Instructional Needs and Corresponding Instructional Behaviors

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**Abstract:** Student veterans' (SV) transition into academic life is challenging, and faculty/staff are uniquely positioned to support this change. Research calls for academic faculty/staff training to support SVs and aid in their retention and academic success. Framed by Rhetorical and Relational Goal Theory (RRGT; Mottet et al., 2006), qualitative data identified SVs' instructional communication needs and produced a faculty/staff training program. Twenty-three SVs were interviewed about their instructional communication needs, namely, a need for Structure, Integration, and Awareness. These needs were translated into instructor communication behaviors, and a student veteran instructional communication training (SVIC) was created to (a) promote organization, (b) facilitate assimilation, and (c) demonstrate conscientiousness to meet the rhetorical and relational needs of SVs.

## Introduction

SVs often face difficult and challenging experiences as they shift to academic life, and yet they often face university faculty and staff who have little training to understand and support their transition (DiRamio et al., 2008). While academic enrollment of veterans increases, their graduation rates continue to decrease, compared to nonveteran peers (Smith, 2017). Providing meaningful change in the classroom is paramount to prevent the decline of SV academic performance and attendance (Oberweis & Bradford, 2017), as university personnel are pivotal in their successful transition into a civilian role (Sportsman & Thomas, 2015).

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The current study explored the academic communication needs of SVs; findings led to the development of a student veteran instructional communication training program (SVIC) designed to assist and support the SV population in post-secondary arenas. We argue instructors' communication is a point of intervention to meet SVs' needs and aid in retention/graduation. Specifically, Rhetorical and Relational Goal Theory (RRGT) posits teachers and students enter the classroom with specific rhetorical and relational goals (Mottet et al., 2006). Further, students' impressions of their instructors are created through rhetorical and relational instructional behaviors and when student needs are met, learning is heightened (Knoster et al., 2021; Myers et al., 2018). Yet, commonly accepted instructional "best practices" (i.e., allowing students freedom of where to sit in the classroom, moving desks together to foster discussion, etc.) do not always apply to SVs (see Violette & Borton, 2019 for full discussion). It is vital to train faculty in rhetorical and relational instructional communication behaviors that correspond with SV instructional needs.

## Student Veterans in the Classroom

Known as student veterans (SV), this group of often nontraditional (e.g., older, learning oriented, etc.; Houser, 2005) students includes any student who is a current or former member of the active-duty military, the National Guard, or Reserves regardless of deployment status, combat experience, legal veteran status, or government assistance program use (Vacchi, 2012). Like many student groups, SVs are not monolithic; their identities are complex, and their individual differences dictate their educational experience (Howe & Shpeer, 2019). For example, civilians view male and female veterans differently (Hardy et al., 2019), and mental health symptoms post-deployment also vary by gender (Crum-Cianflone & Jacobson, 2014). Variation in learning preferences and past academic experience, compared to nonveteran peers, also reveals the complexity instructors face in determining beneficial and effective methods of instruction. Yet, many SVs report they are viewed through a homogenous lens, though many differences exist within them (Vaccaro, 2015). If scholars could identify these hidden individuals and their strengths, it could benefit instructors and peers in the classroom. For example, SVs often show elevated levels of leadership, maturity, global/cultural awareness, strong sense of purpose, task orientation, and readiness to learn/apply knowledge to solve problems (B. Smith, 2017).

Even with their strengths, extant research shows they still struggle academically. SVs can secure benefits from educational assistance programs (e.g., Post 9/11 GI bill, Montgomery GI Bill, etc.) that subsidize tuition, housing expense, and books, among other benefits (Veterans Affairs, 2023). Yet, the GPA requirement to retain benefits often causes them to pause degree progress, sometimes permanently by dropping out. Dropping or withdrawing from a class may result in needing to pay back the financial assistance (Veterans Affairs, 2023), causing additional financial stress. Nearly a third of SVs do not graduate and only 12.6% sustain a full-time course load (Cate et al., 2017); it is clear how the compounding difficulties of transitioning to a civilian world accumulate quickly. The current study proposes a needs-based training for faculty and staff, informed by SV participants' own experiences, to ensure their academic success.

## Reintegration/Transition Challenges

Indeed, SVs report difficulty reintegrating into academic life (DiRamio et al., 2008). For example, the switch from a culture of military collectivism to academic individualism is challenging (Morreale, 2011). During this transition period, the process of identity (re)formation and (re)negotiation is tempered with role incongruity as they enact a "student" role during deployment and a "military" role during college

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(Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). Importantly, many scholars argue that SVs' success in their dual-identity construction (that of a veteran and a student) is in part determined by instructional communication (May & McDermott, 2021).

Consider that in the military each individual serves to fulfill a clear role with clear boundaries within a hierarchical communication structure. At post-secondary institutions, there is comparatively less direction, guidance, and structure of SVs' daily life, roles, and leader interactions (i.e., instructors, deans, staff, etc.). Further, many feel disconnected from their institution; this causes them to feel lost, disengaged from their degree progress, and in a struggle to redefine themselves (Boettcher et al., 2017). This could be due to the low affiliation many SVs feel in a classroom with nonmilitary peers who are substantially younger, with different life experiences, and a greater perceived in-group/out-group distance (Howe & Shpeer, 2019). The lack of connection is exacerbated when peers and instructors create stereotypical assumptions and generalizations about their previous military role. A stereotype that often plagues SVs is the assumption they suffer from a post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or traumatic brain injury (TBI; Roost, 2015). As a result of assumptions, they are not authentically witnessed or "seen" by instructors, leading to a lack of immediacy with instructors and peers (Witt et al., 2004).

## **Institutional and Instructional Challenges**

According to Sportsman and Thomas (2015), faculty and staff are unprepared to consider the unique needs of veterans who transition from military service. This has led SVs to avoid seeking academic support, self-silencing out of fear of punishment, or engaging in a "cultural clash" with peers and instructors (Howe & Shpeer, 2019). Vaccaro (2015) calls faculty to learn more about SV experiences to avoid sweeping generalizations. When they are stereotyped, they feel the instructor, institution, and academia at large, misunderstand them or view them as nonconforming or unwilling to learn (Gann, 2012). Cleary and Wozniak (2013) posit that instructors who learn more about SVs via one-on-one communication can overcome these challenges. Instructional communication guidance (i.e., the SVIC training proposed in this study) would equip instructors to ameliorate SV frustration and resistance to course content, which could also reduce attrition or academic failure. Therefore, we argue that with the SVIC training, college instructors will learn and practice the behaviors necessary for SV academic success.

## **Improving Student Veterans' Academic Experience**

### **Rhetorical and Relational Goal Theory**

RRGT posits instructors and students enter the classroom with specific goals and needs (Mottet et al., 2006). Specifically, instructors have rhetorical goals centered around how they communicate course content and relational goals that focus on how they engage interpersonally with students. Students also have specific rhetorical needs related to learning course content and relational needs regarding connections with instructors and peers. Mottet et al. theorized that when instructors communicate in ways that align with students' academic and relational needs, learning is maximized. Studies support this assertion, such that relevant instructor disclosures (Kaufmann & Frisby, 2017) and adaption of instructional techniques during the COVID-19 pandemic (McDermott & Ashby-King, 2021) resulted in better aligned rhetorical and relational goals. However, instructor training within institutions of higher education more often cater to traditional students (e.g., 18–24 years old, recent high school graduates) and lack support structures for students outside these demographics (Bahrainwala, 2020).

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As discussed, many SVs attempt to hide their military attributes, which adds to cognitive load and academic stress. Elliott et al. (2011) reported the majority of SVs experience difficulty finding their classroom “fit” and therefore suffer a lack of connection with faculty and peers. Perceived stigma that others hold negative attitudes about them (Petri et al., 2016) means that RRGTT alignment could also suffer. Comments such as “You are a hero!” and “Did you kill anyone?,” are examples of communication that misalign instructor/student relational and rhetorical goals and threaten SV’s identity (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). We argue instructors must attend to rhetorical and relational goals when designing courses and student engagement.

## A Call for Training

The U.S. Department of Education outlined the *8 Keys to Veterans’ Success* (U.S. Department of Education, 2013) for post-secondary institutions. Of note is the seventh *key*: “Provide comprehensive professional development for faculty and staff on issues and challenges unique to veterans.” Some instructors have responded to the *Keys* by instituting student veteran/traditional student peer groups to address their need to belong (Blackwell-Starnes, 2018; Hodges, 2018) and syllabus statements that specifically mention SV services (Wilkes, 2017). These actions have been reported to cultivate motivation and engagement in SVs, exhibiting the instructor’s caring nature and attention to their specific needs. Scholars have concluded faculty and staff require training to meet the needs of SVs (B. Smith, 2017), with a specific focus to engender connection among SVs, faculty, and peers. This study proposes that a classroom instructor’s communication behavior can be uniquely positioned to support SVs.

Indeed, the student/instructor relationship is influential in student success (Frymier & Houser, 2000). Yet, as the few examples of SV training at the post-secondary level found, the focus is placed on deficits rather than on SV’s strengths (Hart & Thompson, 2013), or ignore instructor/student interaction (Griffin & Gilbert, 2012). A training grounded in SV needs and strengths that teaches instructors to adapt their communication in ways that align with students’ rhetorical and relational needs is particularly compelling as it focuses on the instructor/student communication specifically. RRGTT is used as a theoretical framework to support meeting student/instructor goals (Goldman et al., 2017), and can support the translation of instructional behaviors taught in a SVIC training. Therefore, in an effort to identify SV needs which will inform the design of a SV instructional communication (SVIC) training for instructors, we propose the following two research questions:

**RQ1:** According to student veterans, what instructional needs are (a) being met and (b) are *not* being met/violated by instructors?

**RQ2:** Based on these (un)met needs, what instructional communication behaviors best meet/align with student veterans’ rhetorical and relational needs?

## Method

### Participants

Following IRB approval, participants interviews were scheduled in quiet campus spaces at their convenience. Participation criteria included: (a) currently enrolled as post-secondary student and (b) identify as a student veteran (as defined above by Vacchi, 2012). Eight participants were initially

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recruited via email from a list of key informants recommended by the campus' veteran success office, and purposive snowball sampling obtained the remaining participants ( $n = 15$ ). Overall, 23 participants ( $n = 20$  male,  $n = 3$  female) participated: 16 participants in their 20's, two in their 30's, and five not disclosing age. Seventeen participants were currently enrolled, one graduated the previous semester, and five did not disclose their status. All participants had attended the same institution (4-year public university in the Southern U.S.).

## Data Collection

Interviews were conducted face-to-face ( $n = 21$ ) or via video conferencing ( $n = 2$ ). Participants engaged in semi-structured, in-depth interviews with two researchers present. Verbal consent to audio record allowed researchers to take field notes and ask follow-up questions. Interviews were conducted via a set of interview questions and lasted an average of 21 minutes (range = 7 to 53 minutes). One researcher asked the interview questions while the other took handwritten detailed field notes (Eaton et al., 2019), both asked follow-up questions. Field notes were electronically transcribed while listening to the audio recording to add detail, poignant verbal exemplars, and nonverbal vocal cues. Using both audio recordings and field notes, the authors built upon the strengths of these data types by combining them in the analysis (Tessier, 2012), which can be just as effective and reliable as verbatim transcripts (Hill et al., 2022). Interview questions sought SV's overall experience at the institution, experiences with instructors in- and out-of-class, and suggestions/advice for teaching the SV population. In total, 80 single-spaced typed field notes and 486 minutes of audio were collected and analyzed.

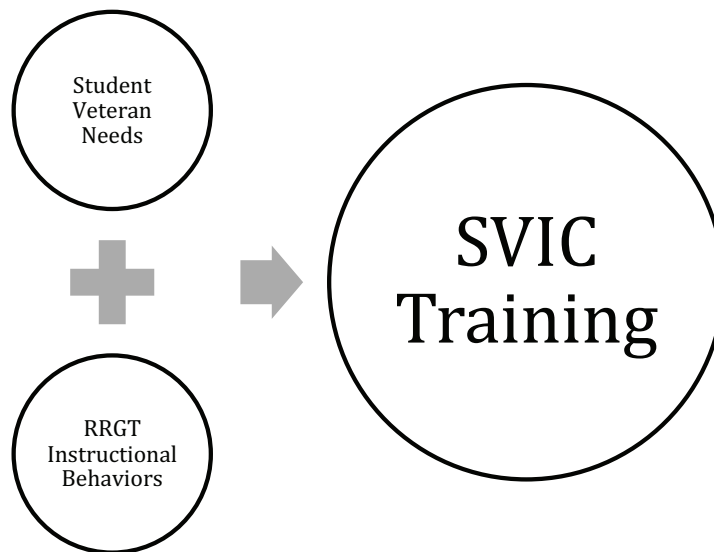
## Data Analysis and Qualitative Rigor

Following the grounded theory tradition, we used purposive sampling of SVs, memoing after every interview, and engaged in concurrent data collection and analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Specifically, by using constant comparison method to understand and organize the data, as well as track theoretical saturation and sensitivity. Our goal to utilize grounded theory for data analysis was to code for the naturally emerging SV academic needs and raise them to a higher conceptual level by translating them into corresponding instructional behaviors to comprise a needs-based training. RRGT was identified through the participants own needs emerging from the data and, following the analysis, supported the training's scholarly underpinning. In the end, researchers were able to identify participants' naturally emerging experiences (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and construct a set of student needs with corresponding instructional behaviors for the training (Suddaby, 2006). See Figure 1 on the following page for a visual depiction of the conceptual design.

Data analysis consisted of five steps: (a) the research team immersed themselves in the SV literature, grounded theory, and data analysis. To gain a holistic view of the data, field notes and audio recordings were read/listened to in entirety. (b) While listening to the audio recordings, field notes were open coded with notes added to the transcript margins to better clarify the data. Memos with initial codes and interpretations were created from the audio files. Special attention was given to both verbal and nonverbal messages, and initial codes reflected participants' own words. (c) Informed by the three data sources (audio, field notes, and memos), initial codes were discussed between the researchers. These discussions served as investigator and data triangulation to strengthen and validate the analysis. This occurred with researchers coding data independently, discussing preliminary findings, and coming to a consensus about theoretical saturation. Theoretical saturation was reached when no new initial codes,

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**FIGURE 1**  
**Conceptual Figure of The Current Study**



categories, or themes emerged from the data, and the research team reached consensus. (d) Intermediate coding occurred where initial codes were then collapsed into larger core categories while also engaging in constant comparison (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). (e) Finally, advanced coding occurred where researchers viewed the categories and combined/organized them into larger themes where theoretical coding could weave the themes together into a cohesive training program. Once results were compiled, researchers engaged in negative case analysis, comparing the final themes and training program back to the field notes, memos, and audio files. Pseudonyms were created as exemplars were selected to demonstrate connections between the data and researchers' interpretations (Suter, 2009).

## Results

To answer the first research question regarding the met and unmet instructional needs (i.e., the rhetorical and relational goals) of SVs, three overarching themes emerged: (a) need for *structure*, (b) need for *integration*, and (c) need for *awareness*.

### Need for Structure

Across interviews, SVs expressed the need for structure from both the interpersonal communication with the instructor and the written communication in the course. These both aligned with a rhetorical goal need, specifically to: (a) exhibit organization/preparation and (b) present clear syllabi and lesson planning.

SVs expressed the desire for instructors to be organized and communication during class relevant to course topics. For example, John stated his instructors, “ramble about stories that are important to him [the instructor].” In addition, participants expressed a need for clarity concerning instructor

expectations. For example, Danny stated, “We need to know what to expect and when to turn stuff in,” and Jordan similarly explained, “I want to know what I’m getting into. I don’t want to have to wonder.” These exemplars illustrate SVs’ rhetorical goals: to be organized and prepared. In their view, instructors’ verbal communication was either irrelevant to their education or missing entirely. When they perceive the instructor is straying from course content or vague with instructions or expectations, they experience frustration with the instructor and course. They believe their time and financial resources are being wasted on distracting, trivial topics. As the exemplars showcase, the instructor’s credibility is clearly impacted by the negative expectancy violation the students experience, which could result in a loss of student motivation to learn.

A second rhetorical goal emerged as a need for a clear syllabus and course assignments. For example, Jeff explained, “I know all the due dates . . . I know everything ahead of time so I can work when I want to work.” George agreed, “I know what to expect and I can work at my own pace.” In particular, Aaron identified an academic structure/military link, “When I was in the Marine Corps, I had to make lesson plans to teach . . . it’s a ubiquitously used structure—everyone uses this format; you get very used to it. So that could perhaps be entirely reliant on it [my military experience].” These exemplars explain why SVs desire clearly written course documents and how it impacts their academic outcomes. A structured course syllabus gives SV perceptions of control and flexibility and helps instructors set clear expectations in writing.

## **Need for Integration**

SVs expressed a *need for integration* into academic/student and civilian life, which align with relational goals, and expressed in terms of (a) academic and (b) relationship outcomes.

Participants identified a desire for integration into academic student life, which impacted them academically. Kyle expressed, “I didn’t know what to study, or what route to study . . . there wasn’t any insight.” This statement describes the perceived lack of academic support from instructors and other departmental staff (e.g., academic advisors). The military provides very clear instructions on pathways to success and who to contact for help, as a result when academia is not as clear, frustration and academic failure occurs. Felix echoed this frustration and failure:

For example, there’s two pre-requisites I have to take here before they allow you to even apply for the program, and I didn’t know that. I could have taken them both in one semester, but because that part wasn’t explained to me, I took one in one semester, and in my second semester I took another one, when I could have just done it in one [semester]. I felt like I always had to play catch-up because of that.

These exemplars illustrate the need to integrate SVs into civilian/academic life, and the role faculty and staff can play in this process. As the participants suggested, advising points of contact and understood pathways is highly desired, especially given their military background.

Many interviewees identified an explicit goal to cultivate relationships with instructors and peers but struggled to do so for a variety of reasons. Ron expressed, “It [Involvement] is one of the most important parts of the university experience. But not everyone experiences it.” Additionally, Frank explained, “I’ve struggled because I’m not necessarily out to be the most popular kid on the block, but I do value a small

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group of friends. . . . looking for those individuals has been a challenge.” These comments express a desire to belong, yet also acknowledge the difficulty to building community and connection with their peers. They would benefit from academic institutions that establish an inclusive sense of community that is welcoming and integrates SVs into the campus and the classroom. In addition, given the need for integration, belongingness for SVs meets both their rhetorical and relational goals.

## Need for Awareness

A third theme emerged as SVs expressed a need for identity *awareness*, which called to meet relational goals by respecting intersectionality and individual difference.

SVs identified the multifaceted, intersectional, nature of their own identities, that were often overlooked or generalized. For example, Jordan explained, “The word veteran doesn’t have to be so black and white, ‘hero’ or ‘baby killer.’ I have many other qualities—veteran is just part of my story.” Many participants deemphasized their military identity. Danny stated, “Being a Marine was something I did in the past and that’s pretty much it.” Participants wanted to be viewed as complex and unique as any other student. This finding emphasizes that faculty and staff should avoid assuming sameness of SVs; they should recognize the intersections of their identity, which along with their veteran’s status includes many other social identities.

Additionally, SVs conveyed instructors’ cultural insensitivity regarding their military experience and social identity. This need was expressed as a desire for instructors to avoid stereotypes or assumptions about their military experience. Jordan described “She [the instructor] assumed I was a violent, angry person.” Further, misunderstandings about SVs also impacted their ability to connect with instructors. Felix described feeling singled out when an instructor asked him about his views on the U.S. Constitution’s Second Amendment. Felix explained, “They [the instructor] will ask me, ‘well what do you think of the second amendment?’ and don’t ask anyone else that. And I am sitting there wondering—why are they asking *me* that?” While Tyler described an instructor who questioned his veteran status, “One teacher did not understand that student veterans could live on campus whenever they are in the military. We don’t have to live on base.” These comments illustrate the damage that assumptions and generalizations can have on the instructor’s credibility and their perceived ability to meet the students’ relational goals. These exemplars show how inappropriate instructional communication can be perceived as lacking awareness, specifically related to intersectionality and individual difference.

## Discussion

The needs of structure, integration, and awareness suggest there are specific rhetorical and relational goals (Mottet et al., 2006) of SVs. Namely, structure needs can be met with RRGTT behaviors directed at aligning rhetorical goals, and integration and awareness needs align with relational goals. When these needs are satisfied, they engender positive community, retention, and graduation outcomes reported in extant SV literature (Cleary & Wozniak, 2013; Oberweis & Bradford, 2017). When needs are not satisfied, negative SV outcomes such as isolation, withdrawal, and dropping-out might result (Oberweis & Bradford, 2017). In total, facilitating structure, integration, and awareness through a needs-based instructional communication training, such as SVIC, can have significant implications for instructor rhetorical and relational communication in and outside of the classroom.

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## The SVIC Training: Connecting Student Veteran Needs to RRGT Instructional Behaviors

Research question two asked what instructional communication behaviors best meet/align with SVs' rhetorical and relational needs. We propose the Student Veteran Instructional Communication (SVIC) training, for faculty to develop productive instructional communication behaviors that benefit SVs and the classroom. To our knowledge, no post-secondary institution currently trains faculty in instructional behaviors centered in SV needs. So, unique to this study, the SVIC training is grounded in SV instructional needs and supported/framed by RRGT behaviors. Given the findings of RQ1 viewed through the lens of RRGT (Mottet et al., 2006), instructional behaviors that align with SV needs call for instructors to engage in communication behaviors that (1) *promote organization*—in course design and delivery, (2) *facilitate assimilation*—to cultivate academic and relationship outcomes, and (3) *demonstrate conscientiousness*—by recognizing and acknowledging SV diversity (see Table 1 and Appendix A).

First, structure needs through an RRGT (Mottet et al., 2006) lens translate to *promoting organization* via clarity, competence, and assertiveness behaviors. Results of this study identified SVs need written and oral communication from instructors who express clear expectations and organization. Clarity, an instructor's ability to communicate the intended meaning of course content (Chesebro & McCroskey, 2001), and competence (credibility), the perception of expertise knowledge (McCroskey & Teven, 1999), predict students' understanding of course material and create learner empowerment (Finn & Schrodt,

| <b>TABLE 1</b>   |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <b>Learning Objectives for Student Veterans Training</b>   |   |  |
| <b>Student Veteran Need</b>  | <b>RRGT Instructional Behavior<sup>1</sup></b>                              | <b>Training Learning Objective<sup>2</sup></b>   |
| <b>Structure</b>   | Clarity<br>Credibility<br>(Competence)<br>Relevance<br>Assertiveness        | Trainees will <i>promote organization</i> by:<br>(a) constructing a structured course information document<br>(b) communicating expectations in oral & written communication<br>(c) recognize the negative effects of off-topic discussions  |
| <b>Integration</b>   | Credibility<br>(Trust)<br>(Caring)<br>Immediacy<br>Self-Disclosure<br>Humor | Trainees will <i>facilitate assimilation</i> by:<br>(a) identifying advisor/mentorship strategies that support student veteran military to civilian/student transition<br>(b) guiding student veterans in building and maintaining positive relationships with instructors and peers<br>(c) promoting involvement in university activities |
| <b>Awareness</b>   | Credibility<br>(Caring)<br>Responsiveness<br>Immediacy                      | Trainees will <i>demonstrate conscientiousness</i> by:<br>(a) recognizing and appreciating the multifaceted nature of student veteran identities<br>(b) Acknowledge and communicate respect for aspects of military culture and student veterans' diverse experiences  |
| <p>Note: <sup>1</sup>RRGT instructional behaviors were selected from Goldman et al.'s (2017) 10 rhetorical and relational instructional behaviors and characteristics and aligned with student veteran needs that emerged from the interviews. <sup>2</sup>Learning objectives reveal the intended outcomes from the training, grounded in the student veteran needs which were translated into instructional behaviors.</p> |   |  |

2012). Given that SVs, a subset of nontraditional students, have a tendency to be learning motivated, rather than grade motivated (Houser, 2005), clarity is necessary. As RRGTT predicts, higher motivated students achieve better academic outcomes—and emphasizing clarity and competence as an instructor can meet rhetorical needs (Mottet et al., 2006).

One practical way clarity and competence can be achieved is through a well-planned syllabus that instructors follow strictly and that can be met through the assertiveness behavior of RRGTT (Wanzer & McCroskey, 1998). SVs are familiar with standard operating procedures (SOP) or systematic approaches via training manuals, procedural lists, or military training handbooks. SOPs provide guidelines for what is expected, and many are taught not to question orders that challenge authority or go beyond the SOP (Roost, 2015; Roost & Roost, 2014). When instructors communicate in a confident and self-assured nature, the assertive style is reminiscent of the communicative script set when interacting with those in a position of authority. As the behavioral norms of college campuses greatly differ from that of the military (Callahan & Jarrat, 2014), as our data suggests, glimpses of military structure and behavior can benefit SVs. The proposed SVIC training suggests methods of creating course information documents, such as syllabi and instruction sheets that communicate competence and a balance of clarity and assertiveness. Future research should investigate how rhetorical goals are met via the course syllabus to better convey what these students consider clear and organized communication.

Second, RRGTT (Mottet et al., 2006) behaviors such as trustworthiness, caring, self-disclosure, humor, and immediacy can meet SV integration needs by *facilitating assimilation* with their civilian peers/faculty. Central to SVs' integration need is a desire to be connected with and socialized into the academic community, in other words to assimilate into their new communities. Trustworthiness reflects how much they trust their instructor, and caring is concerned with how much they perceive the instructor is concerned with their academic and personal well-being (McCroskey & Teven, 1999); both are part of perceived instructor credibility. Instructor/student communication is a point of intervention to engender assimilation; confirming messages from instructors increases student connections, which is also predictive of student involvement (Sidelinger & Booth-Butterfield, 2010). In addition, RRGTT behaviors such as humor and self-disclosure can serve integration needs, as both instructor behaviors predict student engagement, motivation, and satisfaction with learning (Imlawi et al., 2015). Immediacy (Andersen, 1979) also increases feelings of connectedness among the instructor and SV.

To *facilitate assimilation* and, ultimately, connect SVs to their peers, instructors, and support systems within their institution, instructors might include a military-related assignment in the course, or create a class discussion related to military topics. For example, Whitfield and Conis (2006) developed a service-learning project for their interpersonal course that asked students to interview veterans for their memoirs, and projects such as this significantly reduce the civilian-veteran knowledge gap (Smith, 2018). Of course, the instructor should also be wary of singling out SVs, or other military affiliated learners (e.g., spouses, children, etc.). As our data suggests, it could be perceived as a violation of their academic need to be viewed as a whole person, not only as a veteran. Nevertheless, attempts to reduce the SV's self-perceived barrier of peer communication should be prioritized as classrooms can function as a space for breaking barriers and building bridges among student sub-populations (Hosek et al., 2017). Future research should expand on the need to socialize and assimilate SVs within the larger student population by exploring concrete steps institutions can take to invite integration.

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Finally, training instructors to engage in RRGT (Mottet et al., 2006) caring, responsiveness, and immediacy behaviors will *demonstrate conscientiousness* and meet SVs' relational goals. Confirmation messages increase caring (credibility) perceptions, and immediacy is related to communication satisfaction and higher learning outcomes (Myers et al., 2014). In fact, immediate behaviors can increase one's credibility and in turn increase student's intent to persist in their academic career (Wheless et al., 2011). Additionally, instructors who facilitate a responsive sociocommunicative style will arguably be the most effective at *demonstrating conscientiousness*, as they respond in appropriate and sensitive ways and are reactive communication to student needs (McCroskey & Richmond, 1996). Taken together this leads to increased affective learning (Allen et al., 2008) and communication satisfaction (Frymier, 2005).

Extant research describes how social identity (i.e., SVs as a group) influences student participation in the classroom (Hosek et al., 2017). Specifically, teachers should communicate respect and an appreciation for veteran identity, intersectionality, and difference within their daily interactions and course documents. Indeed, when SVs' dual identities are highly integrated and reflected back to them by instructors, they report increased commitment to completing their degrees and an openness to faculty and peer assimilation (Meiners, 2019). The SVIC training suggests one method for meeting their need for awareness is to place trainees in the shoes of SVs to cultivate empathy, compassion, and mindfulness.

## Limitations and Conclusion

We would have preferred a more equally representative sample in terms of SV gender. When compared to SV census data, however, SVs in the United States are 78.9% male and 21.1% female (Cate et al., 2017). Thus, our sample does represent the population to some extent. Further, we were unable to collect fully descriptive demographic features for our sample, as some were hesitant and asked for confidentiality. However, because our focus was on instructor behaviors and (un)met SV needs, we argue the absence of fully descriptive demographic information does not skew results. Second, the behaviors in SVIC training are considered *good* teaching practices; they are not novel. However, the SVIC training is novel and will improve teaching effectiveness for SVs specifically as the learning objectives are grounded in the results. It would be an added benefit to all students that instructors receive instructional communication training. In any sense, the study serves as a reminder that instructional communication does influence students, and training of these behaviors is essential.

This study documented the instructional needs of SVs and translated them into rhetorical and relational instructional communication behaviors, which can be taught to instructors' campus wide through professional development. Framed by Rhetorical and Relational Goal Theory (Mottet et al., 2006), qualitative interviews with SVs revealed three primary needs: *structure, integration, and awareness*. Capitalizing on the grounded and needs-based nature of this study, we translated these specific needs to instructor communication behaviors viewed through the lens of RRGT. Specifically, these results advance the training learning objectives: to *promote organization, facilitate assimilation, and demonstrate conscientiousness* which prepare instructors to meet SVs' rhetorical and relational goals, often in concert (e.g., components of credibility were translated from all three SV needs, see Table 1). We call institutions and department administrators across the country to action to implement this empirically-based training. We especially encourage this training in community colleges, college-readiness programs, or vocational institutions where veterans are more likely to be enrolled (Cate et al., 2017). As the emerging demographic of SVs on college and university campuses continues to grow, empowering instructors to support SVs becomes increasingly vital.

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## Appendix A

### SVIC Training Plan

Please contact the authors for permission to use this training at your institution.

#### Learning Objectives

1. Trainees will *promote organization* by:
  - (a) constructing a structured course information document
  - (b) communicating expectations in oral & written communication
  - (c) recognize the negative effects of off-topic discussions
2. Trainees will *facilitate assimilation* by:
  - (a) identifying advisor/mentorship strategies that support student veteran military to civilian/student transition
  - (b) guiding student veterans in building and maintaining positive relationships with instructors and peers
  - (c) promoting involvement in university activities
3. Trainees will *demonstrate conscientiousness* by:
  - (a) recognizing and appreciating the multifaceted nature of student veteran identities
  - (b) acknowledging and communicating respect for aspects of military culture and student veterans' diverse experiences

#### Preparation

##### Materials

Pre-Test Assessment

Lecture/Knowledge Check

1. PowerPoint Presentation (available by contacting authors)
2. Printed Slides Handout
3. Needs/Behavior Connections Handout

Structure Activity

1. Examples of Good/Bad Syllabus Statements
2. Paper & Pencils

Integration Activity

1. Paper & Pencils

Awareness Activity

1. Sharpies & Colored Paper
2. Positionality Worksheet

Lecture/Knowledge Check

Post-Test Assessment

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**Procedures (Total Time: 3 hours)**

Open with Administrative Details (10 minutes)

Lecture/Knowledge Check (30 minutes)

- a) Report of Veteran Needs Study
  - 1) Literature Review & Method
    - i) What do we know about Student Veterans?
    - ii) How did we explore their needs in the classroom?
  - 2) Results: Student Veteran Needs & Learning Objective
    - i) Need: Structure & Learning Objective: Organization
    - ii) Need: Integration & Learning Objective: Assimilation
    - iii) Need: Awareness & Learning Objective: Conscientiousness

**Activity: Structure—Promoting Organization & Preparation**

1. Create Your Own Syllabus Statement for Student Veterans (30 minutes)
  - a) Identify “good” and “bad” syllabus statements for targeted student populations
  - b) Practice writing own syllabus statement for student veterans in their courses
  - c) Share original syllabus statements with class
  - d) Discuss strengths and weaknesses of syllabus statements
2. Off-Topic Lecture Case Study (30 minutes)
  - a) Identify characteristics of unfocused lecture from video examples
  - b) Think-Pair-Share discussion of areas of improvement

Unpack

Description

How did you complete the syllabus statement? What were some common themes you recognized in the statements written? Similarities/differences between groups?

Inference

How does this relate to the needs identified by veterans? Do the syllabus statements you created “fit” the student veteran population?

Transfer

How can you take what we did in this training and implement it into your teaching? What take-home messages do you have?

**Activity: Integration: Facilitating Assimilation**

1. Create an assignment that incorporates a military-related topic to reduce military–civilian knowledge gap. (30 minutes)
    - a) Work in small groups to conceptualize veteran-centered assignment
    - b) Set related learning objectives for assignment
    - c) Create a plan for combining civilian and military identities
    - d) Present assignment to audience
-

## Unpack

### Description

What did you all come up with? (View presentations)

### Inference

Where can we improve this lesson plan or assignment idea? How can it include and relate to the identified student veteran needs?

### Transfer

How can you see these assignment ideas worked into your future course design and syllabus?

## Activity: Awareness—Demonstrating Conscientiousness

### 1. Identity Placard Activity (50 minutes)

- a) Identify own positionality in the world
- b) Create positionality statement
- c) Brainstorm hurtful comments regarding one's own multifaceted identity
- d) Identify the role of generalizations, stereotypes, etc. in hurtful comment
- e) Create placard refuting/reinforcing comment/identity

## Unpack

### Description

What just happened? How did the activity unfold? What were some common themes you recognized? Similarities/differences between individuals' identities?

### Inference

How does this relate to the needs identified by veterans? What are the possible identities that veterans may have?

### Transfer

How can you take what we did in this training and implement it into your teaching? What take-home messages do you have? How should student veterans' multiple identities influence your instruction?

## Assessment (15 minutes)

On face value, each instructional behavior and associated activity have take-home, tangible resources for participants to take back to their departments and offices. It is our hope that these take-home activities inspire and remind participants to incorporate the knowledge and skills they have received into their course syllabi and daily interactions with students. The following instructional behaviors will be taught, and their take-home resources listed:

1. Promoting Organization
    - a) Syllabus Statement & Sample Case Study
  2. Facilitating Assimilation
    - a) Military/Civilian Knowledge Gap Assignment Ideas
  3. Demonstrate Conscientiousness
    - a) Intersectionality/Difference Identity Placards
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Overall, the training can be assessed by ensuring participants can recall specific student-veteran needs and their associated instructional communication behaviors. This can be done through a summative assessment in the form of an “exit slip” or brief questionnaire, for example, asking the following questions:

1. What are 3 different student veteran needs in the classroom?
2. What are 3 things you can do as an instructor to meet these needs?
3. What is something you learned today that you did not know before?
4. Where do you see the importance of today’s topic?
5. What can you do to meet the needs of student veterans in your classroom?

Lastly, a pre-test/post-test assessment should be administered to participants to track potential learning. The pre-test can show pre-existing military and student veteran knowledge, as well as give a baseline starting point to understand participants’ progression throughout the training. The post-test will show any evolution of knowledge regarding student veterans’ needs and allow trainers to evaluate the training.

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