College Choice Process and Perspectives of Students Who Chose to Attend a Military Junior College: Voice from Students and Parents

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Abstract of Dissertation

College Choice Process and Perspectives of Students Who
Chose to Attend a Military Junior College: Voice from Students and Parents

This qualitative study explored reasons that students choose to attend military junior colleges and factors influential in their decision-making process. Defined by college choice theory, the study addressed six research questions: why do students choose to attend a military junior college; who are the persons or factors that influence the student's choice of a military junior college; which students choose to attend a military junior college; what is the search process that students go through; what are the significant experiences that influence the student's personal decision-making process; and what sources of information were most influential in the student's decision-making process.

Data was obtained through 18 in-person interviews of students enrolled in military junior colleges. Parents of the students were interviewed by telephone for the purpose of supplying supplemental data to that obtained from the student interviews. Analysis of the data revealed that students who attend military junior colleges do go through a search process. Like their peers who attend civilian colleges, these students consider factors such as the school's size, location, and reputation. Furthermore, the college's means of communication is influential as these students go through their selection process.

Several themes emerged through data analysis. These students have supportive parents, influential peers who also attend college, strong personal aspirations, and concerns about paying for their college education. Their parents shared their concern

about how they would finance their child's education. A sub-theme that emerged from discussions with the students regarding their concern about paying for college is that of self-reliance. The students expressed their desire to help pay their way through college, either because their parents could not pay or because they did not want to put additional financial burden on their family.

In addition to conclusions, this study provides recommendations for further research. A study involving students who applied but did not matriculate would provide college administrators with information regarding changes that might need to be made, if that information was relevant to factors under their purview. Likewise, further research could involve military junior college alumni. Contacting the alumni to ask them why they chose to attend a military junior college and how their initial expectations compared with their experience would also be valuable information for the military junior college administrators.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Students who enrolled in a college in the United States in 2008 were able to choose their school from a list of over 7,000 postsecondary institutions (Comparison Individual Institutions, n.d). The college decision is understandably overwhelming for many students because there is such diversity in the types of institutions. Among the nation's assorted selections are the national service academies, such as the Air Force Academy, Coast Guard Academy, Merchant Marine Academy, Naval Academy, and United States Military Academy at West Point. There are also other well-known military colleges such as The Citadel and Virginia Military Institute. In addition to the nation's more familiar four-year military institutions are a select group of five military junior colleges that provide a two-year, liberal arts education in a military-type environment. This category of junior colleges includes Georgia Military Institute, Marion Military Institute, New Mexico Military Institute, Valley Forge Military Academy and College, and Wentworth Military Academy & Junior College.

The purpose of this study was to understand the reasons that students choose to attend a military junior college and the factors that influence the decision-making process. Though these colleges provide avenues for their students, known as cadets, to become commissioned officers at the end of their two-year programs, not all of the students in these colleges participate in the early-commissioning programs. Of particular interest, therefore, were the reasons that these students choose a military college, and the factors that influence their decision to attend.

This chapter contains the statement of the research problem and its accompanying

background, a statement of the purpose, a listing of the research questions, and sections on the problems in the literature and problems in practice. Chapter 1 also contains a description of the theoretical framework and methodology, sections describing the delimitations, limitations, and assumptions, and finally, a description of the list of terms and definitions essential to and appropriate for this study.

Statement of the Research Problem

Though much research has been conducted and documented on student college choice, no study has been conducted and published that addresses why students choose to attend a military junior college and the process through which that choice is made. Most people would assume that the only reason students would enroll in this type of institution is to obtain an education that would further their careers in the military. Yet there are students who enroll at military colleges who have no plans for a career in the military. In fact, many of the cadets at colleges like the Citadel or Virginia Military Institute no longer go into the military after graduating.

Information received from The Citadel web page indicates that, "…about 40 percent of the graduating seniors earn military commissions. The remaining graduates attend graduate school or enter the job market" (*The Citadel*, n.d.). The same is true for Virginia Military Institute. The web site for this military college notes that, "About 18 percent of VMI graduates make the military a career. Other graduates have distinguished themselves in all walks of life, including finance, medicine, law, and education" (*Virginia Military Institute*, n.d.).

Unlike civilian colleges and universities, student life at a military college is rather stark. Students, known as cadets, wear uniforms and exist in a structured environment

with limited access to television and video games. Weeknights are usually spent in structured study halls. Generally, as observed at Marion Military Institute, the cadets' small amount of free time is spent creasing uniforms or polishing shoes and boots. The question presents itself, then, as to what attracts students who have no desire to continue in the military environment beyond their educational years.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand the reasons that students choose to attend a military junior college and to explore those factors that influence the student's decision-making process. Though the military is currently meeting recruitment and reenlistment numbers, it is doing so while offering substantial bonuses and incentives, not only to recruits and those who reenlist, but also to some civilian employees of the military who refer viable candidates that join the military (Enlistment Incentives, 2006; Referral Bonus, 2007). Additionally, during a time of high unemployment, the military could be seen by many as an option for employment (Freedberg, 2010). Obviously, however, maintaining numbers for the military during a time of war is more difficult and requires additional creative strategies than during times when the nation is not at war.

One might deduce, therefore, that, during a time of war, applications would decline for any school where the educational experience generally leads to a military career. This may be especially true for the military junior colleges. Not only do their two-year degrees provide the opportunity for students to be commissioned after completing their second year of college, but their degree programs are mainly liberal arts, necessitating the completion of at least two more years of college work.

As admissions personnel may experience some difficulty in recruiting young men and women to military programs at a time when the nation is at war, they must determine what attributes, other than the military opportunities, attract students to their institutions. Additionally, admissions personnel must ascertain what or who influences the student to choose one particular college over another.

Richard Hesel (2004), a higher education marketing consultant, indicates that a crucial strategy for admissions personnel is focusing on the product. Those marketing the institution must know what makes their institution, or their product, attractive to students considering their options (Hesel, 2004). This study will provide information on the characteristics that make a military junior college a viable choice.

Research Questions

1. Why do students choose to attend a military junior college?
2. Who are the persons, or what are the factors, that influence the student's choice to attend the military junior college?
3. Which students choose to attend a military junior college?
    a. What are the demographics (gender, state of residence) of the students?
    b. What is the educational background (diploma/GED, cumulative high school grade point average, college entrance examination scores) of the students?
    c. What is the educational background of the students' parent(s) (highest grade achieved)?
    d. What is the occupation of the parent(s)?
    e. What is the income level of the parent(s)?

4. What is the process that students go through as they decide that a military junior college is their college of choice?
5. What are the significant personal experiences that influence the student's decision-making process?
6. What sources of information were most influential in the student's decision to attend a military junior college?

Problem in the Literature

There are numerous studies that have been conducted regarding the process of students choosing a college or university (Brunnage, 2004; Greenough, 2004; Palmer, 2004; Smith 2007; Teeples, 2006). Few studies, however, have dealt with college choice as it relates to military schools. Two studies that dealt with college choice and military schools both relate to the choice of attending senior military institutions. Fielitz (2001) researched college choice as it related to student athletes who attended the United States Military Academy at West Point. Jacob (2006) conducted a qualitative study related to the first female cadets to enroll at senior military institutions. There are no published studies that deal with college choice and military junior colleges. This research study helped fill that gap in the literature.

Problems in Practice

This study is significant for several reasons. As evidenced by the literature gap cited in this study, studies examining college choice have not considered why students choose to attend military junior colleges. This study addressed the college choice process as it pertains to students who attend a military junior college.

The results of this study have relevance for administrators and staff at military junior colleges. Deciphering the complex process that students go through when determining which college or university to attend assists these personnel in knowing how to better market their institution and grow their enrollments. The study is also relevant to military personnel who consider how best to continue to meet military recruitment goals.

Additionally, this study adds to the overall body of knowledge relative to higher education institutions. Though the military junior colleges may not be as well known as senior military colleges, they have all been in existence since the late 1800s and have played a substantive role in the education of many men and women throughout their history. Information relative to these junior colleges and the students that choose to attend them is now a part of the scholastic record.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

The theoretical framework employed as the basis of this study is college choice theory. A qualitative study was conducted using interviews as the method of obtaining data. Six students who have enrolled at each of the three military junior colleges participating in the study were interviewed in order to obtain information that facilitated the understanding of the reasons that they chose to attend a military junior college and those factors that influenced their decision-making process. Additionally, the researcher attempted to contact the parents of those students who consented to the researcher contacting their parents and interviewed those that could be reached to acquire information, which was supplemental to the information provided through the student interviews.

Delimitations and Limitations

This study included information obtained from cadets at the U.S. military junior colleges. The first delimitation was that the study focused on three military junior colleges rather than including senior military colleges or the service academies. The study included interviews with students who attend a military junior college and their parents. A second delimitation, therefore, was that other persons who may have influenced the student's decision and process, such as counselors or peers, were not interviewed. The study included only those students who accepted the offer of admission and matriculated at one of the military junior colleges. A third delimitation, then, was that students who considered applying or who did not accept the offer of admission were not a part of this research.

Limitations of the study included the researcher's position as a senior administrator at Marion Military Institute, which is one of the five military junior colleges. Additionally, this was a qualitative study where only six students, and the parents of those students who consented to parental contact, at each of three institutions were asked to participate in the study.

Assumptions

This study has three assumptions. First, it was assumed that this researcher would be able to obtain the list of first-year, degree-seeking cadets enrolled at each of the participating military junior colleges so that the students to be interviewed may be randomly selected by this researcher. Second, it was assumed that the cadets would be cooperative and truthful. Finally, a component of the study was parental interviews, so it

was assumed that at least a portion of the students would indicate that their parents could be contacted and interviewed.

Definitions

The following terms, definitions and abbreviations were relevant to this study.

Cultural Capital – This term, originated by Pierre Bourdieu, is representative of resources that are related to a person's social class, attitudes, and values. These resources can be advantageous in social institutions.

Early Commissioning Program (ECP) – This is an Army program offered at the military junior colleges where cadets, upon graduation with an associate's degree, commission as a Second Lieutenant in the U.S. Army.

Military Junior College – This is a two-year, liberal arts college associated with a branch of the United States military that grants an associate's degree, usually along with an officer's commission, upon graduation.

Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) – ROTC is a military training program that is offered in colleges and universities.

Summary

How students make decisions regarding whether to go to college and what college to attend has been studied since the 1970s. Though a few studies have been conducted relative to why students choose to attend a senior military college, there are no published studies that examine the reasons why students choose to attend military junior colleges and the factors that influence the process. This qualitative study involving interviews of cadets who are enrolled at military junior colleges, and the parents of those cadets, helped fill that gap in the literature.

Chapter 1 has outlined the study by providing the purpose of the study, a listing of the research questions, a description of the problems in the literature and in practice, the delimitations and limitations, the assumptions, and a list of definitions pertinent to the study. This chapter provided the foundation for determining the reasons that students choose to attend a military junior college. Chapter 2 will review the importance of military colleges and universities and will specifically describe the uniqueness of military junior colleges. College choice models and research will be examined as well as literature that describes those factors that are influential during a student's college choice process. Chapter 3 will describe the methodology for the study, Chapter 4 will report the results and analysis for the study, and Chapter 5 will provide the study's discussion and analysis.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This study on why students choose to attend a military junior college required a literature review composed of three main sections. First, this review provides information on U.S. senior military service academies and colleges and military junior colleges. Second, this literature review presents a section on college choice and related process models, and finally, a section describing persons and factors that influence the decision-making process and related theory. Together, these three sections provided an appropriate literature background study for this research project.

Higher Education and U.S. Military Colleges

Military education at the collegiate level has a long history in the United States. Military colleges have long been popular choices for males, and in the last few years, have admitted eager females as well. These colleges have been recognized for their preparation of military leaders, superior academic programs, as well as strenuous physical fitness programs.

Military Senior Colleges

The nation's oldest military academy, the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York, was formed in 1802, though it traces its origin back to 1778 when the area served as a strategic military post (DelVecchio, 1990). The establishment of other service academies followed as the United State Naval Academy was founded in Annapolis, Maryland, in 1845; the United States Coast Guard Academy in New London, Connecticut, in 1877; the United States Merchant Marine Academy in Kings Point, New

York, in 1943; and finally, the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado, in 1947.

Interspersed among the founding of the service academies were other military colleges, such as Norwich University, located in Northfield, Vermont, which is the oldest private military college in the United States. Virginia Military Institute, located in Lexington, Virginia, and The Citadel, located in Charleston, South Carolina, followed in the mid-1800s. The Morrill Act of 1862 actually specified that instruction in military tactics should be included in the instruction of land-grant schools (Andrew, 2001). Texas A&M, located in College Station, Texas, is a land-grant university that has the largest college military program, outside of the federal service academies (DelVecchio, 1997).

The academies all have strong academic programs, which is always attractive to students. Perhaps most important, the education provided at the academies is completely free of financial cost to those who are privileged to be selected to attend. In lieu of actual payment of financial tuition and fees, the graduates of the academies are required to serve a minimum number of years in the respective branches of the military.

Other senior military colleges, such as The Citadel and Virginia Military Institute, also enjoy widespread favor among students who desire a strong academic program and structured campus environment. Unlike the service academies that require a period of military service after graduation, these colleges offer those attending the option of military service. Both colleges promote their strong academic programs along with robust leadership development curricula. Referring to The Citadel's recent ranking as the No. 1 best value among Southern colleges in the U.S. News & World Report rankings,

Citadel President Lieutenant General John Rosa stated, “This No. 1 ranking recognizes our commitment to keep the cost of a Citadel education as low as possible for our parents, while also providing an excellent academic and leadership development program for our students” (“The Citadel Public,” n.d.).

Military Junior Colleges

Military junior colleges are a unique group of five institutions. These colleges offer the traditional academic program of other junior colleges, but the students attending these colleges have the opportunity to participate in a military-preparatory environment. In some of the colleges, the military environment is the only option for the cadets while some of the military junior colleges offer civilian programs in addition to the program in the military setting. The military environment means that the students, or cadets, wear uniforms, carry military rank, march and drill in formation, and live a Spartan-like lifestyle with little time for television or video games.

Additionally, these military junior colleges all have an Army program known as the Early Commissioning Program (ECP). Those cadets who qualify for this program take advanced Reserve Officer Training Courses (ROTC) for two years in addition to their academic program and graduate at the end of two years with an associate’s degree and a commission as a Second Lieutenant. The cadets then move to a senior institution to obtain their bachelor’s degree.

These five military junior colleges have all been in existence for many years and though each one is similar to the others, they all have a unique history. Prior to 2002, there were six military junior colleges. Kemper Military School and College was a private educational institution that had been in existence since 1844 (DelVecchio, 1997).

Kemper declared bankruptcy in 2000 (McEowen, n.d.), but the administration managed to keep the school open

until 2002 when it finally succumbed to financial difficulties (Sullivan, 2005).

The five military junior colleges currently in existence are Georgia Military College (GMC) in Milledgeville, Georgia; Marion Military Institute (MMI) in Marion, Alabama; New Mexico Military Institute (NMMI) in Roswell, New Mexico; Valley Forge Military Academy and College (VFMAC) in Wayne, Pennsylvania; and Wentworth Military Academy (WMA) in Lexington, Missouri. During the 2007-08 academic year, the military junior colleges had a combined enrollment of 3,079. ("Georgia Military College," n.d.; "Marion Military Institute," n.d.; "New Mexico Military Institute," n.d.; "Valley Forge Military Academy and College," n.d.; and "Wentworth Military Academy," n.d.). The enrollment number for Georgia Military College reflects the enrollment of the Milledgeville campus, which is the home of its military junior college program. Each of the colleges is coeducational, with the last to accept women, Valley Forge Military College, opening its doors to females in 2006.

Georgia Military College. Georgia Military College is a public two-year, co-educational institution that has a junior college and a separate preparatory school. The mission of Georgia Military College is to "produce educated citizens by providing junior college students with a liberal arts based two-year undergraduate curriculum, by providing selected college students with ROTC training, and by providing preparatory school students an inclusive college preparatory curriculum that includes a military training component…" ("Mission," n.d.). Georgia Military College is one of only two military junior colleges that offers a junior college program without a military

orientation, in addition to its military program. For the fall, 2008, semester, Georgia Military College reported a full-time enrollment of 1,095 students on its Milledgeville campus, which is where the GMC military program is located ("Georgia Military College," n.d.).

Georgia Military College is one of the oldest military junior colleges, having been founded in 1879 by an act of the Georgia General Assembly. It was, initially, a part of the Georgia University System and was established on land surrounding the Old Capitol Building, now the main college facility. The college was first known as the Middle Georgia Military and Agricultural College. In 1900, the name was changed to Georgia Military College, though the college section of the academic program was not added until 1930. By that time, legislative acts in 1920 and 1922 had separated the military institution from the University of Georgia system ("History", n.d.).

Marion Military Institute. Marion Military Institute traces its origin back to 1842, when the Alabama Baptists established Howard College. Howard College struggled during the Civil War and the Reconstruction Era. Despite some progress, however, the Alabama Baptist Convention voted to move the College to Birmingham, Alabama. Howard College, after being moved to Birmingham, Alabama, became Samford University. An educational facility to replace Howard College was soon developed in Marion, and this facility was named Marion Military Institute (Mansell, 1990).

Two of the original buildings still stand on campus. The first building, Lovelace Hall, was built in 1845 (The Book Committee and Friends of the Perry County Historical and Preservation Society, n.d.). The second building, the Marion Military Institute Chapel, was built in 1857. Both of these earliest buildings served as Breckenridge

Military Hospital from 1863 to 1865. Though college studies had been suspended in 1863 due to the service of the two buildings as a hospital, the college classes were reinstated in 1864 and have continued uninterrupted since that time (*Marion Military Institute,* n.d.).

Marion Military Institute first admitted women in 1971 (*Marion Military Institute*, n.d.). The school, unlike Georgia Military College, offers strictly a military environment. All students wear military uniforms and complete two levels of military science courses, in addition to the traditional academic program. The school had remained a private institution until it became a part of the Alabama two-year college system in June 2006. Full-time enrollment for the fall, 2008, semester at Marion Military Institute was 446 ("Marion Military Institute," n.d.) .

New Mexico Military Institute. New Mexico Military Institute was established in 1891 in Roswell, New Mexico, where it is still located today. The school, originally known as Goss Military School, was open only a short time before it closed due to financial difficulty. Just before closing, the school was renamed New Mexico Military Institute. Due to a generous donation from a local philanthropist, New Mexico Military Institute reopened in 1898 (*NMMI – a Historical,* 2006). New Mexico Military Institute was the first military school to be state-supported rather than supported by private funds. It is a land grant school with permanent land income dedicated to its support (DelVecchio, 1997).

New Mexico Military Institute occupies 40 acres in Roswell on a site known as North Hill. Yellow brick buildings dominate the campus and form a quadrangle near the center of the campus (DelVecchio, 1997.) Like Marion Military Institute, New Mexico

Military Institute offers only a military program. New Mexico's full-time enrollment for the fall, 2008, semester was 446 students ("New Mexico Military Institute," n.d.).

Valley Forge Military College. Valley Forge Military College is a private military institute located on 120 acres in Wayne, Pennsylvania, which is located near Philadelphia. Beginning as Valley Forge Military Academy, the school was established in 1928. The founder of the Academy, Lieutenant General Milton G. Baker, created the school to "fill what he perceived as a 'crying need' for the education of young Americans" (*Valley Forge College*, 2006-07). The school was so successful that it was expanded to become the Valley Forge Military Academy and Junior College in 1935. The junior college was renamed again in 1992 as it became Valley Forge Military College to reflect its provision of a collegiate experience. Women were first admitted to the school in 2006 (*Valley Forge College*, 2006-07).

Like Marion Military Institute and New Mexico Military Institute, Valley Forge offers only a military program where all students are members of the Cadet Corps. Fall, 2008, full-time enrollment at Valley Forge was 211 ("Valley Forge Military College," n.d.).

Wentworth Military Academy and Junior College. Wentworth Military Academy and Junior College, located in Lexington, Missouri, was founded in 1880 as Hobson's Select School for Boys. The students began to use broomsticks to march and drill as an extracurricular activity, and thus, the military school was formed. Wentworth's Junior College was established in 1923 as an outgrowth of the Academy ("About Wentworth," n.d.). The full-time college enrollment for the fall, 2008, semester was 927 ("Wentworth Military Academy," n.d.)

Wentworth joins Georgia Military College as a college that provides, in addition to the traditional military junior college program, an academic program with no military requirements (Ahrens, n.d.). The military college program for Wentworth is located at its main campus, while a traditional junior college program is provided in three other locations (*Wentworth Junior College*, n.d.).

The early establishment of military colleges made popular the combination of strong academic preparation combined with leadership development that prepares young men and women for a civilian career, or a military one if they choose to join a military branch of service. The military junior colleges, though perhaps not as well known as the senior military colleges, also have a long history of providing a rigorous academic program for young students along with leadership training that can lead to an officer's commission along with the associate's degree. For purposes of geographical diversity and the exclusion of the researcher's own institution of employment, this study will focus on New Mexico Military Institute, Valley Forge Military College, and Wentworth Military Academy and Junior College.

College Choice and Related Process Models

How and why students choose to go to college and the college they choose has been a topic of research since the 1970s. The earliest research focused mainly on students' choice of going to college or choosing another path such as going directly into work. Manski and Wise, in their 1983 book, *College Choice in America,* described a comprehensive study conducted from 1972-76 using data from the National Longitudinal Study. This research provided a "unique source of information on the transition from high school to work or further schooling" (p.2).

Likewise, Gregory Jackson (1986) conducted a study between 1972 and 1980 that looked at trends in the college choice decisions of new high school graduates. Jackson pointed out, however, that his definition of college choice was "choosing among college and other options, not the choice among colleges" (Jackson, 1986, p.3). Studies conducted in later years, however, have focused more on how students choose among colleges. This research is of great interest to college personnel who seek to have a better understanding of those students that consider their particular institution and enroll as opposed to those who either do not consider the institution or consider, but do not enroll.

Whether colleges are concerned about attracting additional or more highly-qualified students or improving their academic image, administrators at those colleges and universities must do research to determine how to begin their improvement process. Because of the limited budget at most higher education institutions, persons charged with leading these initiatives can no longer blindly dispense resources and hope that the results are productive. A plan backed by research must be put in place before the campaign is started. Part of the research must consist of examining college choice models. By reviewing these models, admissions practitioners have already started the necessary advance work for their strategic plan.

Hossler and Gallagher Model

Don Hossler and Karen Symms Gallagher developed a three-stage college choice model in the 1980s. Their work revolved around the stages of predisposition, search, and choice (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999). The first stage, predisposition, is a description of the plans that students make for either continuing their education or working after graduating from high school. The development in this predisposition stage is influenced

by the student's family background, including strong influence by their parents, peers, and by their own academic performance. Hossler and Gallagher (1987) indicate that one of the most predominant and compounding background characteristics of the predisposition stage is that of socioeconomic status. Additionally, attending a high-quality secondary school, participating in school activities, and holding a positive attitude about education also influences the student during this stage (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987).

The second stage in the Hossler and Gallagher model is the search stage. This stage is the time when students are actually researching and assessing various postsecondary institutions. During this stage, students search for attributes and values that characterize postsecondary educational alternatives as well as becoming familiar with and identifying the appropriate choices to consider (Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989). Students receive marketing and recruiting materials from various postsecondary institutions and from the military. The students gather data, both objectively and subjectively, which they will use in the third and final stage. This stage is not a static one, nor do all students move through it in the same manner.

Hossler and Gallagher's third stage is that of choice. It is in this phase when students, generally in their senior year, decide the colleges to which they will apply, and then, finally, decide the college in which they will enroll. In a nine-year study of high school students conducted by Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper (1999), the authors paid special attention to the consistency of students' anticipated choices with their final choice. According to the research results, only 12 percent of the first choices in the sophomore year were still the first choices in the senior year. The first choice reported in the sophomore year, however, did remain as an option for 59 percent of the students.

Kotler and Fox Model

The model described by Kotler and Fox in their 1995 text, *Strategic Marketing for Educational Institutions*, is the only model described here that deals with economics, or inputs and outputs. The Kotler and Fox model is a college choice model that was developed to assist campus personnel in understanding how best to market their institutions to prospective students. It is a four-stage model that has the following components: first, the student makes the initial decision to investigate colleges; second, the student gathers information; third, the student evaluates and eliminates colleges and narrows the list; and fourth, the student chooses from among the options.

Once the initial decision to investigate colleges has been made, students begin the process of gathering information. This process will vary from a heightened awareness of any information related to colleges to an intense information search, depending on the needs and wants of the individual. Along with gathering information, the student will also begin the process of establishing selection criteria and corresponding weights for the criteria. These evaluation factors are shaped by the student's needs.

Kotler and Fox (1995) refer to Maslow's hierarchy of needs when describing the student's evaluation of need. The needs of students will run the gamut from basic physiological needs, i.e., the college food service and dormitory space, to safety and security concerns, i.e., bar-coded entry into buildings and surveillance cameras, and to social needs, i.e., sororities and fraternities. Some students will consider esteem needs, such as the prestige of the institution, and some may even consider self actualization needs, such as opportunities for community involvement or leadership positions.

The students will use their self-developed selection criteria to evaluate their alternatives and narrow their list from which the final choice will be made. Kotler and Fox (1995) relate that there are six basic concepts in the evaluation process. The first is the concept of the choice set, which is all of the colleges from which the student is planning to choose. Second is the concept of school attributes, which may include factors such as cost, academic program, social life, or location. Next, the student will have a set of perceptions regarding how each school measures on each attribute. Students will also have a utility function for each attribute. The utility function is an indication of the student's varying level of satisfaction with varying levels of an attribute.

The fifth basic concept that the student will employ is importance weights, as some school attributes will have more relevance than others. The sixth and final concept is the evaluation procedure, which Kotler and Fox indicate may vary from a "jump-the-hurdles" model where the student sets minimum characteristics and drops from the list all of those that do not meet the minimum criteria to a "standout" model where the student would ignore attributes that, while they may be important, are virtually the same for all of the colleges. The student would focus on attributes that are important and highly variable (Kotler and Fox, 1995).

In this section, significant theories related to the college choice process were reviewed. Theorists, including Hossler and Gallagher and Kotler and Fox, view the college choice process as a multi-step operation that begins with an awareness of colleges, proceeds to the gathering of information, and then moves to the evaluation of the alternatives. The pace at which the student moves through the process is different for most students, but the culmination of the process occurs sometime during the senior year

of high school, with the final step of the process occurring when the student enrolls in college.

Contributing Factors and Persons and Related Theory

Intricately interwoven in the college choice process are factors and persons that influence the series of events. Different persons and factors vary in degree of influence and points in time as to when they are most influential. Patricia McDonough and David Chapman have conducted research that directly relates to contributing persons and factors.

McDonough Research

Patricia M. McDonough, in her research study published in her text, *Choosing Colleges: How Social Class and Schools Structure Opportunity* (1997), documented those entities that exert influence on students as they move through the college-choice process. McDonough compares the influences on students during this perplexing time to a mobile. She states, "For each individual student who is choosing a college, every influence has a different weight and the mobile hangs in a unique way" (p. 111). Most authorities agree, however, that parents and peers are two of the most significant parties, with guidance counselors and college and university personnel also playing a significant role for some students.

Patricia McDonough writes of the importance of cultural capital as termed by Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist. Bourdieu defined cultural capital as an internalized code that equips one with "competence in deciphering cultural relations…" (Bourdieau, 1993, p. 7). Cultural capital is accumulated through an extended process of acquisition that includes the education of one by family members, peers and others in

society, and social institutions (Bourdieau, 1993). McDonough writes that cultural capital is related to a person's social class, values, and attitudes and provides one with resources which, if used effectively, can provide needed advantages in social institutions (McDonough, 1997). Many parents with high cultural capital influence their children to choose a prestigious college because "they know it will pay off in later job success and social status" (McDonough, 1994).

McDonough relates that parents provide cultural capital to their students in a variety of ways. For example, parents who have attended college will relate the value of a college education to their children. Regarding a college education, they inform their children of the "potential for conversion in the occupational attainment contest" (McDonough, 1998, p. 183). Those parents will also be able to assist their children with understanding the importance of the college entrance examinations or assisting them with writing the essays that go along with their admissions applications. Many parents are now hiring professional counselors to assist their children in getting into the "right" college or getting into their first choice of colleges. Still other parents influence their children's choices by insisting that they attend a college that is located close to the student's home or one that has certain characteristics that are important to the parent, such as a college that is supported by a particular religion.

Bourdieu also relates the importance of what he terms "habitus," which he defines as a second sense that results from a long process of inculcation. "The dispositions represented by … habitus are 'durable' in that they last throughout (a) … lifetime. They are 'transposable' in that they may generate practices in multiple and diverse fields of activity…." (1993, p. 5). Habitus is certainly related to parental influence during the

college selection process. If students have grown up in families where a college education is emphasized and valued, then the student's habitus will direct him or her toward obtaining a college education.

McDonough also relates the concept of bounded rationality and its relationship to college choice. She defines bounded rationality as "behavior that is rational but limited by the cognitive constraints on decision making" (1997, p. 10). She notes that students making choices about where to attend college will select from choices that are already narrowed by the location of the colleges, the student's social network, and their anticipated goals for college (1997, p. 10). Bounded rationality infers that, though there are thousands of postsecondary educational institutions in the United States, the student's choice list will reflect only those that remain after those that did not meet the bounded rationality parameters have been removed.

Chapman Model

David Chapman examined the issue of student college choice in the early 1980s. He believes that many colleges simply think modifying their college descriptions or attempting to reach a new target market will increase the effectiveness of their marketing. Chapman, however, advocates the development and use of a "systematic model of the influences on student college choice" (Chapman, 1981, p. 490). Chapman's model exemplifies the idea that a student's college choice is influenced by certain student characteristics combined with particular external influences.

Chapman states that the major student characteristics influencing college choice are socioeconomic status, educational aptitude as usually measured by the college entrance examinations, level of educational aspiration, and high school performance.

Chapman reports that, generally, students who are in the higher socioeconomic brackets are more likely to choose four-year colleges and universities than students with middle to low socioeconomic status. A student's performance on college entrance examinations may provide an avenue for self-selection out of application to colleges that post average entrance examination scores which are higher than those scored by the prospective applicant.

A student's educational aspirations are very influential in determining whether the student will attend college at all, as noted in Hossler's research (1999). Chapman indicates, however, that research has demonstrated that educational aspirations are related also to college choice. High school performance has also long been an indicator of college choice, either through the student's self-selection or through admissions requirements as required by particular colleges and universities. High school performance may subjectively influence a student's college choice as students who perform well in secondary school usually have friends who are high performers and who may influence the student's college choice. Equally as important, college guidance counselors may spend more time with those who are high performing, also influencing the student's college choice.

These ideas are supported by Chapman's work on the external influences of college student choice. He groups external influences into the three categories of significant persons, fixed college characteristics, and college communication efforts to prospects. Significant persons, according to Chapman, include the student's parents, friends, and guidance counselors.

Fixed college characteristics are one of the two influences that are, for the most part, under the control of the college and university. They include location, cost, availability of programs, and campus environment. Location is mostly out of the college's control unless the college administration determines that it can open another campus. Chapman makes the point that that though these influences are controlled by the college or university, they are relatively stable in the short-term. New programs must go through a review and adoption process; costs are usually fixed for at least a year and almost never decline when a change is made; and campus environment usually does not change overnight.

Chapman's final category of student influences is college communication efforts. Again, this is a category that is within the span of control of the particular college or university. In an earlier work, Tillery and Kildegaard (1973) noted information gathering on the part of high school seniors is positively related to their educational aspirations. That is, students who expect to go on to college are more apt to actively seek out college information. Chapman's results matched that of Tillery and Kildegaard. Yet, little research is available that describes how effective college communication efforts are in convincing a student to attend a particular college. In an earlier piece of research, Chapman, along with Johnson, found that students did not select a college based on its written materials. The students reported reading printed materials to confirm the decision they had made during a previous step in their search process.

Significant Factors and Persons

As described in various college choice models, students are influenced by various factors, both external and internal, as they prepare to make a decision on which college to

attend. Specific external factors influencing the process include parents, siblings, peers, counselors and other significant high school personnel, and college and university communication. Internal factors, or characteristics of the students themselves, that sway the decision-making process are the student's socioeconomic status, level of educational aspiration, and academic achievement.

Parents. There is a definite relationship between parental encouragement and college attendance. Most basic to the description of parental influence, according to Conklin and Dailey (1981), is the long-standing assumption that the child will go to college. In other words, it is not a question of if the student will go, but where the student will go to college. In many homes, this question is discussed even before the child is born. Their research reflects that "the longer postsecondary education has been taken for granted in the home, the more likely students are to enter college" (Conklin and Dailey, 1981, p. 261).

According to Cabrera and La Nasa (2000), there are two domains to parental encouragement. The first domain is that of motivational encouragement, whereby the parents regularly indicate to the students the importance of going to college. A second domain involves the parents in being proactive regarding their child attending college. In this domain, the parentsare involved in school activities, discuss actual college plans with their child, and also, save money that will help pay their child's college tuition (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999).

Hossler's research (1999) indicates that nearly 64 percent of students receiving strong encouragement attended a four-year institution, and almost 75 percent receiving the same level of encouragement enrolled in some form of postsecondary education.

Though Hossler's research indicates that parental influence is strong in motivating students to enroll in postsecondary education, the research does not directly address parental influence in the final choice of the particular college. Research conducted by Pagano and Terkla (1991) concerning students enrolling in Tufts University indicated, however, that parents, particularly mothers, have the strongest influence on a student's college selection.

Factors that are important in the latter stages are the level of parental education and their income. According to Hossler (1999), "Half of the students whose parents had at least a high school diploma attended college, and almost 75 percent whose parents had a college degree attended" (p. 105). In other words, the higher the parental educational attainment, the more likely the students are to enroll in higher education.

Likewise, parental income is also influential in the latter stages of the college choice process. Approximately 19 percent of the students whose parental income was below $15,000 attended a four-year school, while more than 58 percent of the student whose parents' annual income was more than $45,000 attended a four-year college or university (Hossler, 1999).

Peers. Though students generally have one set of parents, they usually have many friends. They may have friends who are planning to go to college, and they may have friends who do not have plans for college or who have not yet finalized their post-graduation plans. McDonough indicates that students who are in a high socioeconomic class have a "seamless quality to their world: friends, family and school personnel all expect that everyone goes to college" (1997, p. 137).

Some students, however, have a stratified set of friends. Students who find that they have some friends who are planning to go to college and some who are not planning to go may behave differently when interacting with the two groups. Not wanting to make those who are not planning to go to college feel inferior, the student may avoid talking about applying to college with that group. Conversely, the student may freely discuss going to college with like-minded friends, but may avoid talking about applying to particular schools, either because the student would be embarrassed if not accepted or would feel badly if the school was out of the academic or financial reach of his or her other friends (McDonough, 1997).

McDonough (1997) further relates that college-bound students who have relatively the same academic achievement and social-class backgrounds make similar college choices. These choices are unlike those made by students with similar academic abilities but from different social-class backgrounds. In McDonough's study, the patterns of students' aspirations were shaped more by the framework of their communities, families, and schools as opposed to being molded by individual analysis.

A student's peer group and the support and encouragement provided by that group is extremely important in the early predisposition stage. Jackson's 1986 study, as related by Hossler and Stage (1992), showed that the presence of peers who planned to attend college produced one of the most important determinants of postsecondary enrollment.

Counselors. Though the amount of influence may be dependent on the type of high school and the year of the student in the high school, guidance counselors still play a major role in the college choice process. McDonough and Calderone (2006) indicate that college counselors represent one of the single most important sources of college and

financial aid information for lower income students. Hossler's research (1999) indicates that talking to counselors was the third most important resource, from a list of ten, for students in researching postsecondary educational options. Even with limited resources, some public schools are able to begin the college selection process as early as the ninth grade, but guidance counselors in private preparatory high schools are still the leaders in providing thorough college choice counseling services.

Through the years, extra tasks have been given to the school's guidance staff, particularly in the public schools. Additionally, the number of students enrolled in public schools has increased without a comparable increase in the number of guidance counselors. According to McDonough's research study that involved four California schools, the ratio of school guidance counselors to students was somewhat disappointing in the public schools that were a part of the study. In the two private schools, there were ratios of 1 guidance counselor to 56 seniors and 1 counselor to 117 seniors. The public schools featured in the study had ratios of 1 guidance counselor to 365 seniors and 1 guidance counselor to 400 seniors. As to the amount of their day dedicated to performing guidance functions, each of the private school counselors were able to devote 100 percent of their day, while one public school counselor was able to spend 90 percent of her time on counseling duties and the other was able to spend only 50 percent of her time on counseling activities (McDonough, 1997).

The extra work and insufficient staff have caused reductions in the amount of time that some guidance counselors are able to spend assisting students in developing their college plans and completing college applications and essays. Many parents with financial resources, therefore, have turned to hiring professional college counselors to

assist their children with the challenging college selection process. Though the parents and students may continue to use the services of the high school guidance counselor, many of them see the private counselor as an extra resource to help the student get into a preferred college choice.

These counselors, many of whom prefer to be called consultants, provide assistance with preparation for the ACT and/or SAT, completion of college applications, review of essays that go along with the applications, and assistance managing the stress that goes along with the college application process. McDonough (1977) states, "Parents want to invest their sizable college tuition dollars wisely, while seniors want a safe space to be able to talk through their fears and anxieties about making their first important decision in an environment of intense competition and pressure" (p. 120). Some parents, realizing that admissions processes have changed dramatically since they enrolled in college many years before, are not confident in their ability to advise their children through the process and feel it best to turn the guidance over to a professional. McDonough (1994) relates, "Private consultants provide a structured, disciplined college application process, search for the widest possible range of college options for the student, counsel the family, and relieve some of the pressure generated by stiff competition" (p. 434).

College and University Communication. It is well documented that colleges and universities spend huge amounts of money in marketing to attract those students who are in the middle of the college choice process. A 2007 survey conducted by the Lipman Hearne marketing firm confirmed that colleges and universities are spending 50 percent more than reported in the firm's 2000 survey. Additionally, the report indicates that the

expenditures are producing desired results as those institutions that invest heavily in marketing are more likely to attract desired applicants and increase enrollment (A Report on Marketing, 2007).

Hodges and Barbuto (2002) conducted research on effective college communication for rural and urban student populations. The results of their study indicated that rural students rated the college's web site, campus tour, and contact with faculty somewhat higher than did urban students. Other sections of their research pointed out that the desired contact with faculty may not have been to establish relationships but simply to expedite the receiving of information. Interestingly, all three of the communication tools cited as more popular with rural students could be combined and provided through the college's web site. Hodges and Barbuto (2002) suggested providing a virtual tour through the website and providing links to faculty member's email addresses.

Tucciarone's 2009 study indicated that students rely heavily on the information presented on a college's website and may base a decision as to whether to keep a college on the "possible" list or eliminate the college from consideration solely on perceptions of the website. One attractive feature of all college websites, as indicated in Tucciarone's study, is that students can have a virtual visit anytime that they choose to do so, without regard to "open for business" hours.

Tufts University regularly surveys those accepted students who matriculate and those who do not matriculate to determine the institutional contacts that exert the most influence in the college choice process. Tufts personnel believe that all institutional contacts "reflect and communicate the personality of the institution" (Pagano & Terkla,

1991, p. 33). Their list of institutional contacts include, but are not limited to, campus visits, alumni interviews, university literature, formal contacts with university personnel, and contacts with current students. The Tufts survey indicated that personal institutional contacts were more likely to have a positive effect on the student's impression of the University, rather than the larger, more impersonal events.

The Tufts research additionally indicated that college and university communication was also important to, and evaluated by, the parents of the college students. Parents may actually read more of the institutional publications mailed to the student's homes. Additionally, parents may have more contact with the institution, especially with the financial aid personnel. Pagano and Terkla (1991) indicated that "Parents pay the bills and thus seem to be geared toward a consumer relationship with the college or university. Consumer relationships demand courtesy, service, and a quality educational experience – factors that parents evaluate with respect to institutional contacts" (p. 39).

Socioeconomic Status. Grodsky and Jones (2007) indicate that patterns of postsecondary enrollment are heavily influenced by socioeconomic status. As socioeconomic status varies, so does the amount and accuracy of information available to students and their families. According to Grodsky and Jones (2007), "Parents and students who are economically disadvantaged may have beliefs about the costs of college that are, on average, higher than the true costs, leading them to end their educational careers earlier than otherwise similar more advantaged students" (p. 16).

Social science researchers have shown that the flow of college tuition information to disadvantaged parents is segregated along the lines of race and ethnicity, education,

and income (Grodsky & Jones, 2007 and McPherson et al, 2001). According to McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook (2001), the social class of origin usually determines neighborhood residence, and education locates people in school settings. Their occupations affect both workplace and voluntary association activity. Grodsky and Jones (2007) note that "to the extent that information about college preparation, including the costs of college attendance, flows through these networks, those in advantaged networks will have more points of generally higher-quality information" (p. 17).

Trusty and Harris (1999) conducted a study whereby they examined college degree expectations of students from the eighth grade through two years after high school. The students involved in their study were those who demonstrated early educational achievement and who had early expectations of a college degree. They found that students who have a lower socioeconomic status were more likely to suffer lost talent, or lowered expectations, than their counterparts in a higher socioeconomic status. Trusty and Harris also noted that students from a lower socioeconomic background are more likely to lower their expectations to their parents' level of educational attainment. Conversely, students who come from a family in a higher socioeconomic level usually understand that they are to reach or exceed their parents' educational attainment level.

Plank and Jordan (2001) relate that, in the absence of abundant and exact information relative to costs and available financial assistance, many low socioeconomic families may decide that a postsecondary education is out of reach for their children. If presented with reliable and current information, however, some of these families would find that a college education was within the reach of their children.

Offer of Scholarship Monies. Though it is assumed that students of a lower

socioeconomic status would be attracted to colleges that offered substantial scholarships, research shows that the availability of financial aid and scholarships is important to students in other socioeconomic categories. Perceptions of the availability of institutional, state, and federal aid not only influence students' thoughts of enrolling in college, but are also influential in the choice of one particular college over another (Cabrera and La Nasa, 2000; Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper, 1999).

Researchers have documented that students planning to attend private institutions, as well as those planning to attend public colleges and universities, all are sensitive to the cost of a college education (Cabrera and La Nasa, 2000; Leslie and Brinkman, 1988). McDonough, in her qualitative study of 12 females and their college choice processes which was published in 1994, found that financial aid was discussed by families in both high and low socioeconomic categories.

Manski and Wise (1983) remarked that financial aid offers play a substantial role in the college choice process. They indicated that, whereas federal financial aid was focused on accessibility of all students to college attendance, institutional aid was focused on attracting more highly academically qualified students to a particular college or university.

Level of Educational Aspirations. Research conducted as early as 1972 indicated that students who planned to go to college usually did follow through with their plans. Fetters, Dunteman, and Peng (1977) in a longitudinal study based on national data found that 82 percent of those who graduated in 1972 and planned to go to college actually did enroll in college following their graduation.

Many school systems currently force students to think about postsecondary plans as early as the completion of the eighth grade. As high schools now offer a college preparatory track, the school personnel ask students to make decisions as to whether they will pursue the curriculum that prepares them for study at a college or university or one that prepares them for the workforce. It is at this point that students may begin to consider their postsecondary plans, if they have not already done so because of parental influence or observation of siblings. Schmit (1992) found that high school students in the college preparatory track who had been considering their postsecondary plans were thought to have a stronger commitment toward fulfilling their plans.

Somers, Cofer, and VanderPutten (2002) conducted a study using data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study to determine how eighth- and tenth-grade student and parent aspirations affected enrollment in postsecondary education. They reported their results in three categories: attendance at any postsecondary institution; attendance at a two-year school; and attendance at a four-year college or university. The researchers found that eighth grade students who planned to enroll at any postsecondary institution were 15.68 percentage points more likely to have enrolled than students with no plans to enroll. Students who enrolled at a two-year institution were 6.42 percentage points more likely to have had postsecondary aspirations in the eighth grade, and students who enrolled at a four-year institution were 20.55 percentage points more likely to have had postsecondary plans in the eighth grade. Their research indicated that postsecondary aspirations had more effect on eventual enrollment in some type of post-high school education than did parental influence, which was also examined in the study (Somers, Cofer, and VanderPutten, 2002).

Academic Achievement. The term "academic achievement" combines both the high school academic performance as indicated by the grade point average and the college entrance examination scores. Student ability and achievement have a significant impact upon the predisposition of students to aspire to postsecondary education. As these two factors rise, so does the likelihood that students will seek to enroll in postsecondary education and follow through with their intentions (Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1985). Manski and Wise (1983) found "a substantial relationship between measures of academic ability and performance on the one hand and college attendance and completion on the other" (p. 14). They also noted that, "the likelihood that a person will apply to a four-year college or university increases with high school class rank (and) SAT scores…." (Manski & Wise, 1983, p. 4).

Hossler and Stage (1992) reported the results of their study that involved ninth-graders attending high school in the state of Indiana. Both students and their parents were surveyed and queried as to demographics, family background, high school experiences and parental expectations. High school experience factors, which included academic performance and activities, were significantly related to students' aspirations. The students' grade point averages were directly related to their predisposition regarding postsecondary enrollment (Hossler & Stage, 1992).

In summary, the college choice process may, at first glance, appear to be a solitary one, although, in actuality, it is influenced by other individuals and factors. Parents almost always play a role in the selection, as do peers. Counselors may also influence students. There are personal factors unique to each student that also effect the college choice process. A student's academic achievements, level of aspiration, and

socioeconomic status have roles to play as the student gathers information and evaluates their options. College communication to the student, either through direct communication such as a phone call or a piece of mail or through an indirect means such as the college's website, can play a major role as the student moves through the college selection process.

Previous Research and Gaps in the Literature

Multiple studies relative to college choice have been published. Teeples published a study that examined the college choice decisions of student athletes (2006). His results indicated that students chose to attend a major university because of the chance to win championships. Palmer (2004) examined the college choice process of low-income students and found that these students lacked the information, guidance, and support to successfully transition to college and that their choices were formed by the contexts in which they interacted. Smith (2007) examined the college choice process for females attending four-year public institutions in Arkansas. She found that those students looked at major program of study, reputation of the college, and cost of attendance when determining the college in which they would enroll.

Few studies are published, however, that deal with students who choose to attend military colleges. Fielitz published a study in 2001 that examined the college choice process of athletes who chose to attend the United States Military Academy at West Point. He found that excellent instructors were a major factor in the athletes' decision to attend West Point as well as the opportunity to play at the Division I level and the academic and athletic tradition and reputation of the college. Jacob (2006) conducted a study wherein she interviewed some of the first female students to enroll at senior

military institutions. Her qualitative study examined the college choice process of the women as well as their experiences while at the military colleges.

No studies have been published that explore the college choice process for students who choose to attend a military junior college. This qualitative study involving interviews with students who have enrolled at a military junior college, as well as interviews with their parents, filled this gap in the college choice literature.

Summary

High school students are facing increasing pressure from college admissions personnel. In order to maintain their enrollment numbers and, in many cases, increase those numbers each year, college and university admissions personnel are expending large budgets to get the attention of the upcoming high school graduates. Once a particular college has the attention of the young prospect, the admissions personnel then spend additional marketing dollars to secure that student as an applicant and then, finally, as a matriculated student.

The key to this entire process is discovering the institutional characteristics that attract a student to a particular college or university in the first place and ascertaining the persons or factors that influence a student's college-choice decision. The examination of these issues is particularly important at this time in the history of military colleges. With military recruitment being somewhat more difficult during a time when the nation is at war, military colleges must research what other attributes attract students to their schools. Though, at first glance, it would seem obvious that students are attracted to a particular theme school because of that school's particular environment, students choose colleges for different reasons. It is important that these reasons be discerned.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research study was conducted in order to understand the reasons that students choose to attend a military junior college and to explore those factors that influenced their decision to attend this particular type of higher education institution. A qualitative research methodology was chosen because of its proclivity toward allowing the researcher to obtain "intricate details about phenomena such as feelings, thought processes, and emotions that are difficult to extract or learn about through more conventional research methods" (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 11). Conducting personal interviews provided this researcher with the opportunity to ask why or to follow up on answers that needed further explanation. Additionally, a qualitative study provided a method whereby objects or issues were "not reduced to single variables, but represented in their entirety in their everyday context" (Flick, 2006, p. 15).

The purpose of this chapter is to detail the methodology that was employed in this study. Specifically, this chapter contains these sections: Statement of the Research Questions, Strategy of Inquiry and Research Paradigm, Theoretical Constructs, and Analytical Procedures.

Statement of the Research Questions

1. Why do students choose to attend a military junior college?
2. Who are the persons, or what are the factors, that influence the student's choice to attend a military junior college?
3. Which students choose to attend a military junior college?
    a. What are the demographics (gender, state of residence) of the students?

b. What is the educational background (diploma/GED, high school grade point average, college entrance examination scores) of the students?

c. What is the educational background of the parent(s) (highest grade achieved)?

d. What is the occupation of the parent(s)?

e. What is the income level of the parent(s)?

4. What is the process that students go through as they make a military junior college their college of choice?

5. What are the significant experiences that influence the student's decision-making process?

6. Which sources of information were most influential in the student's decision to attend a military junior college?

Theoretical Constructs

The theoretical basis for this study was student college choice theory. Early studies that formed the basic tenets of college choice theory focused on whether students would attend some type of postsecondary training. Research soon began to evolve that looked beyond whether a student would attend a college or university to consideration of the process that students go through as they determine the college or university where they will enroll. Other important factors considered under the umbrella of college choice theory are the background characteristics and educational aspirations and achievements of the students and how these influence the student's selection of a college or university.

The specific constructs of student college choice theory strongly supported the purpose of this study, which was to understand why students choose to attend a military junior college and to explore the factors that influence their decision-making process. Hossler, Braxton, and Coopersmith (1985) specifically defined student college choice as a "complex, multistage process during which an individual develops aspirations to continue formal education beyond high school, followed later by a decision to attend a specific college, university or institution of advanced vocational training" (p. 234).

Research Strategy

The interview method was chosen because it afforded the researcher an opportunity to gather first-hand information, observe the respondent's expressions, and follow up on questions that might need further clarification. A semi-structured interview strategy was chosen because of the opportunity that it presented to veer somewhat from the list of stated questions, if the response of the person being interviewed indicated that additional follow-up was needed before moving to the next question. Though the research questions established for this study were designed to be straightforward, some additional questions were asked throughout the interviews for purposes of clarification and obtaining additional information.

Silverman (2000) and Converse & Schuman (1974) indicated that the interviewer must ensure that neutrality is maintained during the interview process. A "balanced rapport" must be established as the interviewer must be friendly and approachable while, at the same time, being direct and professional. Perhaps most importantly, the interviewer must develop a style of "interested listening" that rewards the respondent's participation but does not evaluate the responses (Converse & Schuman, 1974).

Research Design

The research design of this project was an interpretive and descriptive qualitative study. A qualitative study was chosen because of the rich and expressive results that are produced by this type of research. Moreover, a qualitative study was selected because many of the studies that have been conducted on college choice have been conducted using quantitative data. McDonough noted that, "One feature of college choice research is that it has nearly exclusively been the domain of quantitative analysts" (1997, p. 4). For example, studies conducted by Jackson (1978), Manski and Wise (1983), and Hossler and Stage (1992) were all quantitative studies.

Bentz and Shapiro (1998) indicated that a researcher should also consider whether the chosen method will provide an avenue to discover what one wants to know. The qualitative method offered this researcher an opportunity to probe more deeply into the processes through which these students arrived at their decision and the factors that influenced them along the way.

Merriam (2002) indicated that interpretations of reality are in flux and change over time, and qualitative researchers are interested in understanding what those interpretations are at a particular time and context. She stated, "Learning how individuals experience and interact with their social world, the meaning it has for them, is considered an interpretive qualitative approach" (Merriam, 2002, p. 4). This study of why students choose to attend a military junior college sought to discover the experiences and interactions that influence the students' decisions. Additionally, Merriam (2002) noted that when conducting a basic qualitative study, the researcher seeks to discover and understand the processes and perspectives of the participants in the study. The research

questions in this piece of research were structured so that the processes and perspectives of the participants might be ascertained as the research questions were answered.

Qualitative methodologies provided the opportunity for the researcher to be the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. As the responses to inquiries about the student college choice process are generally complex, the researcher had the opportunity to mentally assess the data at the exact moment that the participant responded and immediately ask for clarification or request a further explanation if the response was one that was not anticipated.

The purpose of this study was to understand the reasons that students choose to attend a military junior college and the factors that influence the decision-making process. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) stated that, though both qualitative and quantitative researchers are concerned with an individual's point of view, the qualitative researcher feels that he or she can obtain a clearer understanding of the individual's true thoughts and opinions through detailed interviewing and observation.

A qualitative research design was also chosen because of the final product provided by such a study. Merriam (2002) notes, "The product of a qualitative inquiry is richly descriptive. Words and pictures rather than numbers are used to convey what the researcher has learned…" (p. 5). Basically, this type of research project gave the researcher an opportunity to produce detailed first-person accounts of why certain students chose to attend a military junior college.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

In qualitative research, the usual criteria of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity are generally replaced by "credibility, transferability,

dependability, and confirmability" (Denzil & Lincoln, 2000, p. 21). Validity, as noted by Creswell (2003), does have a place in qualitative research, but it is used as a method of determining whether the findings are accurate from the viewpoint of the researcher, participant, or the readers. He indicated that, in qualitative research, the term "validity" is sometimes replaced by "trustworthiness" or "authenticity." Creswell noted that there are several techniques that may be employed in qualitative research in order to verify the trustworthiness of the findings. These techniques include triangulation of different data sources, member-checking so that those participating in the study have an opportunity to review specific themes generated in the study, and providing "rich, thick" descriptions to convey the findings and clarifying the bias that the researcher brings to the study.

In order to provide trustworthiness to this study, the researcher contacted two linked groups: the students who chose to attend a military junior college and the parents of those students who consented to having their parents contacted. The students and parents were interviewed, and the students were asked to complete a data form that provided demographic information. The researcher recorded the findings of the study in the form of a detailed description to further provide verification of the trustworthiness of the data.

Additionally, the researcher asked for contact information, specifically email addresses, from the students who were interviewed so that information received through the interview could be returned to them for comment. The interview content was returned to the students, through email, for their verification of their responses.

To further enhance triangulation, the researcher reviewed the websites for the three military junior colleges that participated in the study to check the validation of the

students' responses relative to the characteristics of the websites. The researcher compared the student's responses on the data form, relative to the websites, to the actual web sites.

Finally, as noted in Chapter 1 as a limitation, the researcher disclosed her bias, which is her employment as a senior administrator in a military junior college. In order to protect against this bias, the researcher was very conscientious as she conducted the interviews to be mindful of her status as a researcher at that time, and not an employee of a military junior college. Additionally, as she analyzed the data, the researcher was careful to ensure that the results were representative of the study's data, and not an opinion based on the researcher's work experience.

Data Collection and Analytical Procedures

Participant Selection

Creswell (2003) wrote of the importance of purposefully selecting individuals and sites that will enable the researcher to best understand the problem. The individuals, who were students at a military junior college, and the sites, which were the campuses of military junior colleges, were appropriate subjects and locations from which to collect the data.

The five military junior colleges, Georgia Military College (Milledgeville Campus), Marion Military Institute, New Mexico Military Institute, Valley Forge Military Academy and College, and Wentworth Military Academy and Junior College, had a combined full-time college enrollment, as reported in fall, 2008, IPEDS data, of just over 3,000. Four of the junior colleges, Marion, New Mexico, Valley Forge, and Wentworth, each have enrollments of less than 1,000 students. Georgia Military College,

with six campuses, has an enrollment of over 3,700 on all of its campuses, though its main military college campus in Milledgeville, Georgia, has an enrollment of just over 1,000 students, and the Milledgeville campus enrollment has been used in computing the total enrollment for the military junior colleges ("Georgia Military Institute," n.d.; "Marion Military Institute," n.d.; "New Mexico Military Institute,,"n.d.; "Valley Forge Military Academy and College," n.d.; and "Wentworth Military Academy," n.d.).

Three of the military junior colleges, New Mexico Military Institute, Valley Forge Military College, and Wentworth Military Academy and Junior College were chosen to participate in the study. Marion Military Institute was excluded from the study because of the researcher's position as a senior administrator at Marion. Georgia Military College was excluded as it is the college with the largest civilian population. Though Wentworth also has a civilian population, its civilian population is much smaller. Additionally, the selection of New Mexico, Valley Forge, and Wentworth did provide some geographic diversity. All three received a letter of invitation to participate in the study (see Appendix A).

Six students from each of these colleges were randomly selected to be interviewed, for a total of 18 students. The researcher asked the Chief Academic Officer at each of the three military junior colleges to randomly select six first-year students. The students were selected from the first-year, degree-seeking students at each of the military junior colleges, so that those who participated in the interviews had recently gone through the decision-making process. As Wentworth Military Academy and Junior College also has a civilian, community college program in addition to their military program, the Chief Academic Officer at Wentworth was asked to limit the possible Wentworth

participants to first-year, degree-seeking students who were enrolled in the military program. Limiting the selection list from Wentworth to those in the military program enabled the population to be more homogeneous.

A Response Form (see Appendix B) was developed on which the students indicated their willingness to participate in the study. Additionally, the students were provided with a Research Consent Form (see Appendix C), which described, in detail, what their exact involvement would be in the study. These forms were completed prior to the interview. Before the start of each interview, each student was again given the option of not participating in the interview. All students agreed to participate.

During the interview, each student was presented with a second form (see Appendix D) that asked if their parents could be contacted for a telephone interview relative to their understanding of the reasons why their child chose to attend a military junior college and the factors that were most influential in their student's decision-making process. The parents of those who consented were contacted through a telephone call. Numerous phone call attempts to reach the parents were made, and the calls were made at different times during the day. The number of parents who could be reached for interview was 12, but only 11 agreed to be interviewed.

Data Collection

The student data was collected by conducting semi-structured, open-ended interviews. The first step in the interview itself was the introduction of the research. Next, each student was asked to complete a Student Data Form (see Appendix F) that provided some demographic and objective data, such as the student's method of high school completion, high school grade point average, college entrance examination score,

career goal, and method of contact with the military junior college prior to enrollment. Once the form was completed, the student was asked if they had any questions before the interview began in an effort to help the student feel comfortable with the interview process.

The 18 student interviews had a range in time from three to nine minutes. The research questions had been designed to be straightforward, but the researcher did ask some additional questions for purposes of clarification and follow-up to the original questions. The interview responses were transcribed verbatim, and the responses are found in Attachment J.

The parent data was collected through a telephone interview with the parents of the students who consented to parent contact. An Initial Contact Letter that was sent to the parents prior to a phone call is found in Appendix H. Along with the letter, a copy of the Parent Information Sheet (Appendix E) that explained the parent's participation in the study was mailed to the parents. At the beginning of the telephone call, the researcher asked the parent for permission to tape record the telephone call. One parent did not grant permission for the phone call to be recorded, so the interview was conducted with the researcher making notes on the parent responses. The amount of time for the parent phone interviews ranged from two minutes to eight minutes. The tape recordings were transcribed verbatim, and the responses are found in Attachment K.

The research questions were addressed through one or more of the questions that were asked of the students and the parents. Appendix F contains the Student Data Form that the students completed prior to the interview, Appendix G contains the Student Interview Questions, and Appendix I contains the Parent Interview Questions. Table 1

shows the relationship of the study's research questions to the relevant theory or model and provides information relative to the connection between the research questions and the student and parent questions.

Table 1: Relationship of Research Questions to Theory and Data Sources

Research Questions	Theory/Model	Data Source
Why do students choose to attend a military junior college?	• Hossler & Gallagher Three Stage College Choice Model	• Student Data Form Question 8 • Student Interview Questions 7, 8 • Parent Interview Questions 4, 10
Who are the persons, or what are the factors, that influence the student's choice to attend a military junior college?	• David Chapman's College Choice Theory • Patricia McDonough's Research	• Student Data Form Questions 8, 9, 11 • Student Interview Questions 5, 6, 7, 8, • Parent Interview Questions 2, 3, 4, 6
Which students choose to attend a military junior college?	• Hossler & Gallagher Three Stage College Choice Model • Patricia McDonough's Research	• Student Data Form Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 • Student Interview Questions 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8 • Parent Interview Questions 1, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11
What is the process that students go through as they make a military junior college their college of choice?	• Hossler & Gallagher Three Stage College Choice Model • David Chapman's College Choice Theory	• Student Data Form Question 10, 11 • Student Interview Questions 1, 3, 4 • Parent Interview Questions 1, 6
What are the significant personal experiences that influence the student's decision-making process?	• David Chapman's College Choice Theory • Hossler & Gallagher Three Stage College Choice Model • Patricia McDonough's Research	• Student Interview Question 9 • Parent Interview Question 5
What sources of information were most influential in the student's decision to attend a military junior college?	• David Chapman's College Choice Theory • Hossler & Gallagher Three Stage College Choice Model • Kotler & Fox College Choice Model	• Student Data Form Questions 10, 11 • Parent Interview Question 6

Data Analysis

Each of the student interviews was audio-taped, so that all of the verbal interactions were captured. The visits to the junior colleges and the accompanying interviews were set so that there was time between each visit to transcribe the audio tapes. The verbatim transcription of the tapes between the interviews provided an opportunity to make adjustments in the process, as necessary, before the next set of interviews.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) stressed the importance of microanalysis of qualitative data. They defined microanalysis as a thorough examination and interpretation of the data. Of course, the data are the main focus of microanalysis, but also important in the process is the interplay that takes place between the data and researcher during the collection and examination of the data. When gathering qualitative data, and in this instance, conducting personal interviews, the researcher is constantly reacting to and working with the data. Though a researcher will always attempt to be completely objective, Strauss and Corbin indicated that total objectivity will not be achieved. They noted that, instead, the researcher should obviously bring disciplinary and research experience into the analysis, but do so in a manner that will enhance the analysis. Strauss and Corbin (1998) stated, "Experience and knowledge are what sensitizes the researcher to significant problems and issues in the data and allows him or her to see alternative explanations and to recognize properties and dimensions of emergent concepts" (p. 59).

Creswell (2003) suggested that there are three critical steps in preparing the data for analysis. First, the data must be organized and prepared for analysis. Inherent in this step is the transcription of all of the audio tapes. The second step is to read through all of

the data to get a general sense of all of the information and to reflect on the overall meaning of the information before it is broken into sections during the coding process. The final step in preparing the data for analysis is the actual coding process.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) defined coding as an analytic process through which data are "fractured, conceptualized, and integrated to form theory" (p. 3). These authors related five coding procedures that provide a relevant description of how coding relates to the analysis of the data that will be gathered through this study. First, coding builds theory rather than tests theory. Second, coding provides researchers with analytic tools for processing mass amounts of raw data. Third, coding provides an avenue through which the researcher may consider other meanings of phenomena. Fourth, coding provides a manner in which the analyst can be both systematic and creative. Finally, coding helps establish a manageable process through which the researcher can identify, develop, and relate the concepts that are the basic elements of theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The researcher used the NVivo software program for computer-assisted analysis of the data generated through this study, along with manual coding of the data. Silverman (2000) wrote that computer-assisted analysis of qualitative data helps demonstrate that the conclusions drawn from the data are based on rigorous analysis. The initial coding of the data obtained from this study was completed using the software. The researcher then employed manual coding for additional analysis of the data.

The first step was open coding where the data were taken apart and each response was given a name that represents the concept underlying the observation (Merriam and Associates, 2002). These concepts are units of data. Merriam related that units of data

are the basis for the coding process. She defined a unit of data as any significant, or potentially significant, piece of data. Once the data had been conceptually divided, then the researcher employed axial coding where the data was put back together by making connections between the concepts and forming categories (Merriam and Associates, 2002).

Once categories had been established, the developing of theory began through selective coding. Strauss and Corbin (1998) related that selective coding is a process through which categories are assimilated and refined. This is the most lengthy of all processes as it begins with the first piece of data and ends when the final product is produced. It is a process of recognizing relationships which have developed between all of the units of data that have been collected and categorized (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

Summary

A qualitative research study was designed and conducted to ascertain why and how students chose to attend a military junior college and those persons or factors that influenced the student's decision. New Mexico Military Institute, Valley Forge Military College, and Wentworth Military Academy and Junior College participated in the study. Semi-structured, open-ended interviews were conducted with six, first-year, degree-seeking college students at each campus. Parents of those students who consented to having their parents contacted through a telephone call were asked questions relative to their opinions as to why their children chose to attend a military junior college and the factors that were influential in the decision. The data received from the student and parent interviews were transcribed verbatim and, along with the data received from the

Student Data Form, were coded and analyzed in order to answer the research questions posed in the study.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Chapter Four presents the results and the data analysis for the study. The research questions that were the basis of this study will be used to organize this section of the study. These are the research questions that were established for this study.

1. Why do students choose to attend a military junior college?
2. Who are the persons, or what are the factors, that influence the student's choice to attend the military junior college?
3. Which students choose to attend a military junior college?
    a. What are the demographics (gender, state of residence) of the students?
    b. What is the educational background (diploma/GED, college entrance examination scores, cumulative high school grade point averages) of the students?
    c. What is the educational background of the students' parent(s) (highest grade achieved)?
    d. What is the occupation of the parent(s)?
    e. What is the income level of the parent(s)?
4. What is the process that students go through as they decide that a military junior college is their college of choice?
5. What are the significant personal experiences that influence the student's decision-making process?

6. What sources of information were most influential in the student's decision to attend a military junior college?

The results presented in this chapter come from in-person student interviews conducted at three military junior colleges, data forms completed by each of the students who were interviewed, and telephonic parent interviews. Pseudonyms have been assigned to the three military junior colleges and to all student participants. The pseudonyms will be used in all references presented in reporting results and data.

The researcher visited American Military Junior College on February 19, 2009; Federal Military Junior College on December 4, 2008; and National Military Junior College on March 30, 2009. Six first-year students were interviewed at each college. Prior to the interviews, the researcher asked each student to complete a data form (Appendix F), which was in addition to the information provided by the students during the interview process. Furthermore, each student was asked if his or her parent could be contacted for a telephone interview. All students, with the exception of one, agreed that their parents could be contacted. The one student who did not consent to a parent interview is from a foreign country, and the parents are not fluent in English. One student asked that an older sister be contacted in lieu of the parents. All students who agreed that their parents could be contacted were asked to complete a Consent to Parent Contact form (Appendix D). Twelve parents were reached by phone, and one of the twelve, when reached, declined to participate. The phone interviews with the parents were intended to supplement the information obtained through the student interviews. The average parent phone interview was only two to three minutes, while the in-person student interviews were longer in duration.

Results and data analysis are presented in this chapter. The information is organized into the following components: student demographics and educational background; sections corresponding to each of the six research questions; and sections discussing the emergent themes, including family influence, peer influence, personal aspirations, finances, and other influences. Included in the finance section is a discussion of the sub-theme of self-reliance.

Student Demographics and Educational Background

Of the 18 students who were interviewed for the study, twelve were males and six were females. The students ranged in age from 18 to 21, and they were from 12 different states, one American territory, and one foreign country. Of the 18 students interviewed, six were residents of the state in which the military junior college was located.

All of the students reported that they graduated from high school, as opposed to receiving a General Equivalency Diploma (GED). The students were asked to self-report their high school cumulative grade point average and college entrance examination scores. All of the students reported a grade point average of at least a 2.0 on a 4.0 scale, which is the equivalent of a "C" average. The arithmetic mean of the grades reported was 3.2, while the most frequently-reported grade point average was that of 3.0. The range reported varied from a low of 2.5 to a high of 4.0. Some of the students reported ACT scores while others reported SAT scores. For purposes of consistency and comparison, SAT scores were converted to a comparable ACT score (ACT-SAT Concordance, n.d.). One student did not report a college entrance examination score. Of the 17 who reported, all but one scored at least a 17 composite on the ACT, or the

equivalent on the SAT. Twelve of the ACT scores were 21 or over, or the equivalent on the SAT, and the arithmetic mean of the reported scores was 22.

All of the students were asked to indicate an annual household income, choosing between the categories of: Below $25,000; $25,000 to $50,000; $50,001 to $75,000; or above $75,000. Three students indicated that the total household income was below $25,000; four stated $25,000 to $50,000, five indicated $50,001 to $75,000; and four noted above $75,000. Two of the students did not answer the question on family income. The students were not asked about the number in their families, but, using federal guidelines, the data can be interpreted to indicate that all of those with an income of below $25,000 and probably those with an annual family income of $25,000 to $50,000 would be considered economically disadvantaged (Federal Register, March 27, 2009). When comparing their stated family incomes with the median household income of their home states, not counting two who did not report and one whose home is in a foreign country, 73 percent are under or right at their state's median income level (*Two Year Average Median, n.d.).*

Fourteen of the 18 students, or 77 percent, plan a military career, with the remaining four indicating plans for a civilian career. This statistic is not surprising, as the students were all attending a military junior college.

In summary, the students who were interviewed for the study were 66 percent male. This statistic is representative of the enrollment demographics at all five military junior colleges, including the two that were not selected to participate in this study. Enrollment percentages, by gender, for the residential population of the five military junior colleges, vary from 50 percent male to 78 percent male (College Navigator –

Georgia Military College – Milledgeville Campus (n.d.); College Navigator – Marion Military Institute (n.d.); College Navigator – New Mexico Military Institute (n.d.); T. Casey, personal communication, September 7, 2010). The students who participated in this study were traditional-age college students, as all were 21 years of age or younger. This statistic is representative of the average age of those enrolled at all five military junior colleges. According to 2007 IPEDS data, the average age ranged from a low of 18.9 at Marion Military Institute to a high of 24 at Wentworth Military College. As many of the programs offered at the military junior colleges are attractive to traditional-age college students, i.e., athletics and military, it can be expected that traditional-age students are those that choose to attend military junior colleges.

All of the students reported at least a C average, or a 2.00 on a 4.00 scale, when reporting their cumulative high school grade point average. Two of the five military junior colleges have a required minimum grade point average for admission of a 2.0, so it is reasonable to expect that all who were interviewed have at least a high school cumulative grade point average of 2.0. With the exception of one student, all reported college entrance examination scores that were at least the equivalent of a 17 on the ACT, and the mean ACT score was 22. As 77 percent of those interviewed for the study were planning a military career and the ACT requirement to participate in the two-year ROTC program is a 17, it is not surprising that most would score at least a 17 on the ACT or the equivalent on the SAT. Table 2 provides a summary of the students' demographics.

Table 2: Student Demographics

Student	Gender	Age	High School GPA	College Entrance Exam Score	Family Income
Aaron	Male	19	3	21	$50,000 - 75,000
Alice	Female	18	2.5	19	Not Reported
Allen	Male	18	2.9	24	Over $75,000
Ellen	Female	18	2.5	20	Less than $25,000
Eric	Male	19	4	Not Reported	$50,000 - 75,000
Gianna	Female	19	3	19	$50,000 - 75,000
Harold	Male	19	3	28	Over $75,000
Harry	Male	18	2.5	21	Less than $25,000
Ingram	Male	18	3.9	21	Less than $25,000
Ingrid	Female	19	3	21	Not Reported
Landon	Male	18	3	22	$25,001 - 50,000
Lee	Male	18	3.8	29	Over $75,000
Nate	Male	19	4	21	$25,001 - 50,000
Omar	Male	21	2.9	14	$25,001 - 50,000
Orrin	Male	18	2.7	17	$25,001 - 50,000
Robert	Male	19	3.66	21	$50,001 - 75,000
Russell	Male	18	3.66	24	Over $75,000
Ursula	Female	19	3.5	28	$50,001 - 75,000

Reasons Students Choose to Attend a Military Junior College

The first research question in this study was, "Why do students choose to attend a military junior college?" This section presents data on students pursuing a military career, receiving scholarships, and searching for a structured environment.

Military Career

As indicated in the demographics section, fourteen of the eighteen students who participated in the study plan a military career. It is expected that the pursuit of a military career would be one reason why students attend a military junior college. Russell, a student at American Military Junior College, remarked, "Upon my graduation from high school, I immediately enlisted in the United States Army, and that's when I learned about the commissioning program here. And that was my main reason for coming here." There are, however, other reasons that students choose to attend this type of college, as indicated by responses to other questions, including scholarship money offered by the college and the structured environment inherent in a military junior college.

Scholarships

Fourteen of the students stated that they did consider their family's financial situation when deciding where to go to college. Of those fourteen, ten mentioned "scholarship" or "paying for school" sometime during the interview, with one student, Aaron, indicating that he narrowed his college choices down to three, and then enrolled where he was offered the most scholarship money. He stated, "I took whoever gave me the most money because my family, I have a large family, and asking them to pay for college is a little much."

IPEDS data (2009) showed that the 2009-10 tuition and fees for the three military junior colleges included in this study were $23,560 and $19,000 for the private military junior colleges and $3,016 (in-state) and $6,566 (out-of-state) for the public school. It is understandable that the offer of scholarships would be significant, especially for those students whose family income is at or below their state's median family income and for those attending the private military junior colleges. Of the students attending the public military junior college, however, four of the six still stressed the importance of scholarships during the interview process.

Structured Environment

Unique to a military college is the structure provided in the military environment. Students remarked that they realized a need for focus or discipline, not because of past bad behavior, but to improve their study habits, and, consequently, their grades. From some students who simply remarked that "(I was) pretty sure I needed some discipline" and "…I wanted to go to a military academy where it was structured," to Alice at Federal who, when asked if there was a significant experience that influenced her decision to attend a military junior college, stated:

> Yes, it was the little things, like I would always go out and I didn't really have, like, my own restriction on myself. I really didn't know how to sit down and say, 'I've got to do do this.' Have a mindset to do what I have to do. ….I can't go on leave all the time, and if I have to be here, I am going to study.

Influential Persons and Factors

The second research question posed in this study asked, "Who are the persons, or what are the factors, that influence the student's choice to attend a military junior

college?" This section presents data relative to the influence of parents, peers, scholarship monies, and significant experiences.

Parents

All of the students who participated in the interviews indicated that they knew that their parents valued a college education. When asked if her parents valued a college education, and if so, how she knew, Ellen responded:

> Yes, they do because they're one of the reasons that I'm actually going to college. They're paying for it. They're funding it. They thought it was a good idea to go to college. They're definitely a major part of my college choice.

These parental educational values were, as noted in Ellen's response, influential in the student's decision to attend college. Some of the students, however, indicated additional influence by their parents in the decision to not only attend college, but to attend a military junior college. Of the ten students who indicated that someone had influenced their decision to attend a military junior college, five stated that their father had been an influence, one indicated that his mother had influenced him, and one student indicated family, in general.

It is noteworthy that of the eleven parents who were interviewed and asked questions regarding both parents, six of the fathers had served or were serving in the military. None of the mothers had served in the military. Other responses to the interview question regarding persons who influenced the decision to attend a military junior college included JROTC instructors, a coach who recruited the student to play a sport at the military junior college, and a neighbor who was a retired military recruiter.

The parents who were interviewed were asked if they had influenced their child's decision to attend a military junior college. Only four stated that they had influenced their child's decision. The parents were also asked if someone else had influenced their child's college decision. Seven parents answered yes, but their answers did not always match their child's answer.

In total, only four parents, out of the eleven parents interviewed, provided answers that matched that of the child's answers regarding persons who influenced the child's decision. Though parental influence, in this study, has been measured by several factors including the parents' value of a college education, when the students were directly asked who influenced their decision, and the parents were asked if they influenced their child's decision, only two matched. The important element obtained from this section of inquiry, however, is that ten students indicated that someone had influenced their decision, with seven of the ten being family members, and five of the seven indicating their father.

Peers

Most of the students stated that a large percentage of their peers enrolled in college. Allen, a student enrolled at National Military Junior College, responded in this manner when asked about the percentage of his high school peers who enrolled in college, "I went to a private school, and so probably like, actually, out of my graduating class, I can only think of one person that didn't go somewhere. So, 99 percent."

Additionally, the students indicated they had discussed their college plans with their peers, with some seeking approval from their friends concerning where they planned to attend college. Harold remarked, "I had already decided to come here (Federal), but I

kinda wanted to see what their opinion was. They didn't want me to leave, but … they thought it was good for me. Because I really wanted to come here." Other students, like Ingrid, discussed the benefits of attending a military junior college. She stated, "I had a lot of different interests than my friends. I wanted to go to a military academy where it was structured." Ellen, a student at Federal Military Junior College, remarked:

> We all decided that we wanted to go to college. …It was definitely a goal, definitely in our future plans. Everything from the looks of it to the dorm to the people that might go to the school. We considered all the factors. We talked about a lot of it.

The student's peer group, then, was an influential group, as well as their family members. Not only did a large percentage of the students' peers enroll in college, but prior to high school graduation, the students discussed their college plans with their peers.

Scholarships

The results of the interview data indicate that scholarship money provided by and through the military junior colleges is a factor that influenced the student's decision to attend the military college. As noted in the section discussing the reasons that students attend a military junior college, ten of the students mentioned "scholarship" or "paying for school" during their interviews, and fourteen of the eighteen students did indicate that they considered their family's financial situation when determining where to go to college. Additionally, seven of the eleven parents stated that the family's financial situation was a consideration in their child's college choice process. Harold, a student at Federal Military College, described the importance of receiving a scholarship in this way,

"…I got a scholarship to go here and that really helped out a lot. So, this place was great for that, too. They gave me a pretty good scholarship."

Tuition and fee costs, as noted in a previous section, were quite high for the private military junior colleges ($23,560 and $19,000), though the students attending the public military junior college also noted the importance of receiving scholarship money. In regard to household income, nine of the parents reported a household income of over $50,000 with five of those reporting an income of over $75,000. Two parents reported a household income of under $50,000. It is somewhat difficult to discern the socioeconomic status of the parents who reported a household income of over $75,000 as the researcher did not inquire as to the number in the family. It can be surmised, however, that those who reported an income of $50,001 to $75,000 would be, at least, in a middle socioeconomic status and those reporting less than $50,000 would be in a lower socioeconomic status. For all of these students, scholarships were an important factor as they chose to attend their particular military junior college.

Though most of the students stated that they did consider their grade point average and college entrance examination scores, those factors did not prove to be a deciding factor during their decision-making process. A student who stated that he earned a high grade point average and ACT score stated, "I didn't believe that any school was out of my league because I did my best in high school to make sure that I could go to any school that I wanted to when I got out." Many of the students stated that their scores were high enough to get into the colleges that they were considering.

Relevant Experiences

Just as they were asked if some person had influenced their decision to attend a military junior college, the students were also asked if there was a significant experience that had influenced their decision to attend this type of college. Some of the answers to this question overlap other responses, such as the repetition of the offer of a scholarship and the influence of students' fathers. Still others responded "just the desire to join the military," and another indicated the influence of a JROTC event whereby the student came to the military junior college

for a drill competition.

Two of the students indicated that a recruiting letter from the military junior college was a significant experience that influenced their decision. Ingrid's response supported the importance of a positive campus visit. She stated,

> When I came for my campus visit, I stayed in the female barracks, and I saw, like, how the high school females are … really less disciplined and I like leadership so I wanted to come here and be their commander and help straighten them out some day. And so, since I've attended (National), I met that goal.

Though several of the students indicated "no" or wanted to downplay the event that they described, they did relate significant events or happenings that had some influence as they chose the college where they would eventually matriculate.

Characteristics of Students

This study's third research question, "Which students choose to attend a military junior college?" accounted for the demographics of the students and their parents. The demographics and educational background of the students who were interviewed for this

study have already been discussed. To summarize, 66 percent of the students were male, and all entered their respective colleges with a high school diploma. The average grade point average was 3.2, while the average ACT score was 22. The students were from twelve different states, one American territory, and one foreign country. Of the 18 students who participated in the study, six were residents of the state in which their particular military junior college was located.

Most of the students came from homes where one or both parents have at least attended college, if not graduated from college, as indicated in Table 3. It has already been noted that all of the students indicated that they knew that their parents valued a college education. That value of a college education can, at least in some part, be attributed to the fact that the majority of the parents have obtained at least some college credit. Out of the eleven sets of parents, or a total of twenty-two persons, who responded to the question of educational background, seventeen of them had at least attended college. Table 3 portrays the educational level of the students' parents.

Table 3: Highest Educational Levels Obtained by Parents

Student	Mother's Highest Level of Education	Father's Highest Level of Education
Aaron	Bachelor's Degree	Bachelor's Degree
Alice	High School Diploma	Some College
Allen	Bachelor's Degree	Doctoral Degree
Ellen	Some High School	Some High School
Gianna	Some College	High School Diploma
Ingrid	Bachelor's Degree	High School Diploma
Landon	Bachelor's Degree	Bachelor's Degree
Lee	Some College	Associate's Degree
Nate	Associate's Degree	Bachelor's Degree
Omar	Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree
Russell	Bachelor's Degree	Bachelor's Degree

Likewise, most of the parents were employed. Their jobs included those of a minister, teacher, accountant, military officer, teacher, postal service employee, transportation officer, and self-employment. Though most of the parents did indicate employment in positions which would be considered white-collar positions, no executive-level positions were indicated. The parents, like the students, were asked to report total family income. Nine of the parents reported an annual income of $50,000 and over, while two parents reported annual incomes of under $50,000.

The questions posed in this study did not inquire about the number of family members in the household, so it is not possible to firmly declare the socioeconomic status of each family, but, based on the employment of the parents and the income levels indicated by the parents, it could be proffered that those whose incomes are over $50,000 are middle-income families. Research indicates that students who are from middle-class families are equipped with skills necessary to seek out information about colleges, which is the basis of the college search process.

College Choice Process

The fourth research question for this study asked, "What is the process that students go through as they decide that a military junior college is their college of choice?" Fourteen of the eighteen students stated that they did go through a search process when deciding where to go to college. Of the four that indicated that they did not go through a search process, two had enlisted in the military upon graduation from high school. The true beginning of any college search process could be considered to be the student's first thoughts of going to college. As previously indicated in this discussion, most of the students first began to think about going to college during high school,

though some indicated that they began to think about going to college much earlier. Aaron responded this way when he was asked to relate the first time that he began to think about going to college, "As soon as I can remember starting school. It wasn't a question in my household. It was, 'you're going to college.' It was planned, and it was planned for me whether I like it or not…."

Once the actual search process began, the course of action involved a review of college options. Most of the fourteen students considered several other colleges, in addition to the military junior college where they eventually enrolled. As the students considered their college options, they considered standard factors such as academic programs, athletic program, location, size, and reputation. Some of the students, however, considered characteristics relative only to military colleges, such as the structure provided by a military college and the opportunity to participate in military programs offered by the military junior college.

Some of the students indicated that they consulted others, either during the search process or during the final stages when they narrowed their options and made a final decision. Only one student indicated that she "talked with her high school advisors," though another student did speak of the importance of JROTC instructors when asked if anyone had influenced the decision to attend a military junior college. Nate at National remarked, "I have always admired my instructors back in high school. They were in the military. I actually don't have any family in the military, so it was mostly outside people." Five of the students indicated that they discussed their options with their father. Two students also indicated, when asked, that their father influenced their decision to

attend a military junior college. One noted that he talked with his brother, who is enrolled in college, but not in a military junior college.

The students' search processes were similar in nature and matched that of the process described in David Chapman's work (1981), including the factors that were significant to them as they considered colleges where they might matriculate. Of particular interest to this study, however, was that some students did search for schools that had programs or characteristics that would only be found in military colleges.

Significant Personal Experiences

The researcher surmised that there was at least one significant experience that influenced a student's decision to attend a military junior college and that was the basis for the research question that asked, "What are the significant personal experiences that influence a student's decision-making process?" The students who were interviewed for this study were asked if there was a significant experience that influenced the student's decision to attend a military junior college. A majority of the students answered "yes" and then described an experience that was meaningful to them in their decision-making process. Even those students who answered "no" or "not really," though, did relate a corresponding experience. Harold remarked, "Nothing specific. Well, you know, talking to … some people in the military…."

As previously noted, the offer of financial aid was significant, as were discussions that the students had with other family members. A campus-related experience was significant to several, and those experiences included campus visits and letters received from the college. Not surprising, though, was that, for some, the military experience was what brought them to the military junior college, either because they want to be a military

officer or because they had a relevant JROTC experience in high school. Table 4 provides a summary of the students' search processes and those persons and factor that were influential in their decision-making process.

Table 4: Students' Search Processes and Influencers

Student	Search Process	Influential Persons	Influential Factors
Aaron	Was not accepted to West Point; Applied to schools for athletics	Coach	Scholarship
Alice	Based search on music & athletics; Grades were a factor; MJC offered scholarship	None indicated	High school grades; Letter from school; Scholarship; Structured environment
Allen	Searched ROTC programs	Neighbor (Retired Military Recruiter)	Grades; Scholarship
Ellen	Based search on academic majors	None indicated	Size; Location; Structured environment
Eric	Assisted by Educ Opportunity Center; Center helped determine best fit	Father	Concern about paying for college
Gianna	No search process; Went to military training after graduation	Family	Structured environment; Appearance of cadets
Harold	First went to community college; Thought military college would be good choice	Father	Structured environment
Harry	Looked at in-state colleges; Academic programs	None indicated	Location; In-state tuition; Appearance of campus

Student	Search Process	Influential Persons	Influential Factors
Ingram	Looked at military colleges	Father; JROTC instructors	JROTC experience
Ingrid	Looked at military colleges	JROTC instructors	Structured environment; Positive contact with the college
Landon	Looked at civilian colleges; Considered size and reputation; Pressured to try ROTC program by mother	Mother	Social reputation of the college
Lee	Considered a community college; Attracted by the ROTC	Father	ROTC program; Scholarship
Nate	Applied to military schools	JROTC instructors	Military program
Omar	First attended community college; Chose military junior college "to do better"	Father	Structured environment
Orrin	Looked at reputation of college	None indicated	Athletics
Robert	Based search on athletics	None indicated	Scholarship; Location
Russell	No search process; Went to military training after graduation	None indicated	Military program
Ursula	Discussed plans with high school advisors	None indicated	Structured environment

Influential Sources of Information

The final research question, “What sources of information were most influential in the student’s decision to attend a military junior college?” was formulated to determine how the students were researching the military junior colleges and the influence of the different methods of communication employed by the colleges. The students were

presented with the choices of website, mail, telephone, and campus visit and were asked to indicate which of those methods of communication with the military junior college they used during their selection process and how those methods influenced their decision to attend. The majority of the students did visit the college website.

The researcher also reviewed the websites of the three military junior colleges involved in this study. The researcher found that the students' descriptions of the websites were consistent with the websites. Comments regarding the characteristics and influence of the websites included "neat and organized," "made me see myself as a cadet," "military tradition and structure were appealing," "could see the requirements so I understood what it took to attend," "able to view pictures of the campus and obtain information about the different programs at the school," and "outline of the curriculum was clear and precise."

Mail pieces were also important to the students. Two commented that receiving mail from the college kept the student interested in the school and assured the student that he was wanted by the school, while another three students indicated that a recruiting letter mailed to their homes was the manner in which they first learned about their respective military junior college.

Phone contact with the college positively influenced the student's decision-making process. One student noted that the phone contact was positive because a person always answered the phone, as opposed to an answering machine system. Other students who indicated that phone contact was a factor wrote that the phone calls helped them through the application and enrollment process. In particular, one student was impressed

that she had spoken with the Dean of Admissions, who "talked about the school and its principles as well as … goals for prospective students."

Several of the students stated that they made a visit to the campus, and the visit positively impacted their decision. Comments regarding the influence of the campus visit ranged from "able to believe that I can make it through cadet life" to "see facilities and understand what I was coming into." Table 5 provides a summary of the methods of college communication discussed by the students and the influence of those factors on the students' decision-making process.

Table 5: Methods of College Communication Influential in the Students' Decision-making Process

Methods of College Communication Influential in the College Choice Process				
	Campus Visit	Mail	Phone	Website
Aaron	✓		✓	✓
Alice		✓	✓	✓
Allen	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ellen		✓	✓	✓
Eric	✓		✓	
Gianna		✓	✓	
Harold	✓	✓	✓	✓
Harry		✓	✓	✓
Ingram		✓		✓
Ingrid	✓	✓	✓	✓
Landon				✓
Lee	✓			✓
Nate	✓	✓	✓	✓
Omar	✓			✓
Orrin	✓			✓

Robert	✓			
Russell	✓			
Ursula	✓			

Summary of Research Question Responses

Results of the analysis of the data provided by the interviews and obtained from the data information sheets showed that there are similarities in the demographics of students who attend military junior colleges. The majority of the students who were interviewed for this study were male, and that statistic is similar to the overall gender percentage in all five military junior colleges. All were traditional-age college students, which fits with the age demographics of the five military junior colleges, as well. All of the high school grade point averages were equivalent to a letter grade of "C" or higher, and the arithmetic mean of the students' ACT scores was a 22. Annual household income varied, with four indicating above $75,000; five stating $50,001 to $75,000; four indicating $25,000 to $50,000; and three relating that their annual household income was below $25,000.

These students chose to attend their respective military junior college for different reasons, including the desire for a military career, the offer of scholarship monies to help pay for their college education, and the desire to enroll in a college with a structured environment. Persons influential in their college selection process included their parents, with some indicating a strong influence by their father. All of the students indicated that they knew their parents valued a college education, and that they had begun to think about going to college at least in their teenage years. Likewise, many of the students had

parents who had either graduated with degrees or at least attended college, and several of the students had fathers who had served or were serving in the military.

The data showed that a student's peer group is influential, as well. The students who were interviewed for this study related that a high percentage of their peers enrolled in college, and they had conversations with their peers about college, topics including the ROTC program, sports, majors, and reputation of the college. Students considered several factors as they made their college selection. The cost of financing their college education was important to these students, so they considered the college's offer of scholarships as they made their decision. The availability of structure at the military junior college was important to some students, who indicated their need for a disciplined environment.

The students who participated in this study did go through a college search process, with some proceeding in structured processes, such as making lists and visiting websites that would help match their interests with appropriate colleges, and others randomly visiting websites and talking with siblings who were enrolled in college. The students indicated that the college's communication with them was beneficial and influential in their search process. Their methods of communication with the colleges included telephone, mail, campus visits, and obtaining information from visiting the college's website. All of the student and parent responses to the interview questions are in Appendix J and Appendix K, respectively.

Emergent Themes

Some common themes and a sub-theme relative to the reasons that students choose to attend military junior colleges and the persons and factors influential in the

decision emerged as the data were analyzed. Overall themes that emerged were family influence, peer influence, personal aspirations, finances, and outside influences. A sub-theme that also emerged was that of self-reliance.

Family Influence

A strong, recurrent theme was that of supportive families who value a college education. All of the students who participated in the interviews stated that they knew their parents valued a college education. Some students stated that they knew their parents valued a college education because they (the parents) had a college education while other students indicated that their parents were paying for their college education. Aaron, a student at American Military Junior College stated:

> My dad's biggest thing is he wants to make sure we have a degree to fall back on in life, no matter what. No matter if we want to be an athlete, if we want to do whatever, he wants us to have a degree to fall back on in case anything happens, so yes, they do value it.

Another student, when asked if his parents valued a college education, remarked, "They do because they both went to college." Harry, a student at American, remarked that both his father and mother have master's degrees, and "They've always told me that education is the way that I am going to get through life."

Connected to the parental support theme was the recurrent response that the students had known, for quite some time, that they would go to college. With the exception of one student, all of them indicated that they first began to talk about going to college at least during high school, with several stating that they began to think about

going to college when they were very young with responses such as “since I was little” or “it’s really not an option in my family.” Gianna stated:

> I always knew (that I would go to college). I always liked school so I figured if I go to school now and get it out of the way then I’ll have … a lot more opportunities in the future, rather than … not going to school and just doing whatever.

Peer Influence

Fourteen of the eighteen students who were interviewed for this study indicated that a large percentage of their peers were enrolled in college. Even Harry, who indicated that only a small percentage of his peers were enrolled in college, related that several peers were receiving some type of postsecondary education, such as working toward a paramedic certificate. He stated,

> I have friends that I graduated with – they’re doing requirements to become paramedics and firefighters. They’re getting their certificates. They have to attend a college, but it’s not necessarily college classes….I come from a really rural area, …and they (peers) went into blue-collar jobs.

Fourteen of the eighteen students indicated that that they did discuss their college plans with their peers while in high school. Eric, a student at National, remarked,

> Yes, me and my peers talked about college every day. Of course, the group that I hung around with … we were all educated, and we believed in studying, doing our work, and going to college. That was our top priority. Because my parents always said, ‘You are who you hang around with.’ So, I hung around the educated kids at school, so we talked about going to different schools, the process

> that it would take for us to go to different schools and what we were going to do after that year. We talked about how, after high school, you know, how hard it would be to make that change or transition from high school.

Alice had a mixed response, but she did indicate that initially she and her friends did discuss college options. She remarked,

> We talked about going to different schools and we always wanted to stay with each other, our group and things. I really didn't like it – I really wanted to move far away from my friends and start a new life … in college. And then, we really didn't talk much about it. We might say, 'Hey, I'm going to school. Oh, wow, I'm thinking about applying to that school.'

Some of the students stated that they wanted the approval of their peers as to their plans to attend a military junior college. Additionally, some of the students remarked that like them, their peers were always interested in the military. Ingram stated, "We certainly talked about the ROTC program. Talked about being in the military and how to become officers."

Personal Aspirations

A strong theme that developed through the interviews was that of the students' personal aspirations, beginning with their aspirations to go to college, which was linked to their responses regarding when they first began to think about going to college. Obviously, students who are interested in a military career or who desire the structure associated with attending college in a military environment will be more likely to choose a military junior college. When asked about his search process, Allen, a student at National Military Junior College, remarked:

> It was mainly based on the ROTC program. I was looking for a good ROTC program …because I wanted to be career military. So it was basically about every website and every person I talked to, asking more and more about the ROTC program.

Other students in the study, however, were following their dreams of participating in collegiate athletics. Some students wanted to combine both, their dreams of going to a military college and of playing football at the collegiate level. Orrin stated:

> I made a list of the schools that I wanted to go to …schools that I wanted to play football at… and schools in the military. And then, also, I went on to collegeboard.com and you type in this four-page questionnaire, and it lists all of the schools that fit your profile.

Personal aspirations, for some students, also included a need for a disciplined environment where they could improve themselves or a desire for a sleek and sharp look and personal appearance. Gianna, a student at National, said that she wanted to emulate the "high speed" appearance of the students that she saw from other military academies. Ellen, a student at Federal who wanted more discipline, made these remarks during the interview:

> The thing is, I wasn't the best student in high school. I mean, … I wasn't bad or anything, I, just my focus, I was never able to focus a lot. I didn't have much motivation when it came to doing work. I came home one day, and I got a letter in the mail from (Federal), and it talked about discipline, especially, and how it pretty much prepared you for college. I thought it was perfect for me, especially.

Finances and Self-reliance

As discussed in the section regarding the student's consideration of their family's financial situation when deciding where to go to college, the students that participated in this study were concerned about paying for college. As the tuition and fee amounts for the private military junior colleges that participated in the study were $19,000 and $23,560, it is expected that the students who wanted to attend one of those colleges would be concerned about paying for college. Yet, as previously noted, even those students who attended the state-supported military junior college were concerned about paying for college, as well.

Some students indicated that their parents could not pay while some explained that they did not want to burden their parents with the cost, but almost all of them indicated that they did consider their family's financial situation when deciding where they would attend college. Ellen, a student at Federal, described her situation, " Because …I don't have the money right now. It would have to be funded by loans or financial aid. If the school didn't offer financial aid, I wouldn't be able to go to this school." Aaron, who is enrolled at American, reiterated Ellen's concern and stated:

> Yes, I narrowed it down to …three schools to see who would give me the most money. And, then, I didn't necessarily take the best program. I took whoever gave me the most money because my family, I have a large family, and asking them to pay for college is a little much.

Likewise, a similar theme was evident in the parent interviews. Though four parents indicated that their financial situation was not a factor in their child's college choice process, with two stating that they had already put money aside to pay for their

child's college education, seven stated that the family's financial situation was a consideration. Several parents, like the students, talked about the scholarship offered by the military junior college or finding some method of paying for college.

A sub-theme associated with the financial theme that evolved in this study is that of self-reliance. Some of the students, as noted in the previous section, knew that their parents could not pay for their college education and chose a college and/or a program whereby they would receive scholarship monies to fund their education. Other students, however, sought scholarships and outside funding because they did not want to burden their parents or because they wanted to be self-sufficient. Ingrid responded in this way when asked if she considered her family's financial situation when deciding where to go to college:

> Yes, I did consider (the) financial situation mostly because my parents work a lot and I didn't think it was fair for them to have to put me through school, so I wanted to go somewhere where I could get the most financial aid, such as scholarships and that was another good choice why (National) was important.

Another student, Russell at American, turned back a trust fund so that he could rely solely on himself to put himself through college. He stated:

> I had a trust fund set up for that purpose and upon my graduation from high school, I made the decision that I wanted to support my own way through college and not rely on anybody else. So, I got control of it upon graduation and I signed it back over to my parents, so … I chose a different route.

Other Influences

In addition to the importance of family support and peer influence, which have already been discussed as themes that emerged during this study, the influence of those outside o the family, including the staff at the military junior college, materialized as strong themes. Some students directly answered the question relative to whether there was someone who influenced their decision to attend a military junior college with responses such as JROTC instructors, a neighbor, a policeman, or a coach. Others answered family members and peers, which was discussed in the sections on family support and peerinfluence.

Russell, a student at American, volunteered with his local police force. The commanding officer of the police precinct influenced him in this way:

> My commanding officer there, he actually did the same thing that I am doing here, and I sat down one day and talked to him about it. Well, there is another option for you to go, and that's where I found out what this school has to offer….

During the review of other interview responses, however, additional influencers emerged. Though the students did not specifically indicate that the staff members at the respective colleges were influential, the staff members surfaced as influencers during answers to other questions. For example, when asked how she narrowed her college options and made a final choice, Ingrid at National stated:

> I had two colleges that I really wanted to go to, which were National and (another college). And, my final decision was based on, basically, the contact that I had with the school. National was very involved and very correspondent, and

(another college),it was harder to get in contact with people. So, I kinda just gave up on them.

Similarly, two other students remarked about the positive influence of their phone contact with the military junior college in which they enrolled. Ingrid spoke of always being able to talk to a person, rather than getting an answering machine. Ellen noted that she was able to speak to the college's Dean of Admissions. She indicated in the data form section regarding phone contact with the military junior college, "The Dean of Admissions talked a lot about the school and its principles as well as its basic ideas and goals for prospective students."

The themes that resulted from the analysis of this data, and the frequency of their occurrence for the students, are summarized in Table 6. The frequency of occurrence for the themes resulting from the analysis of the parent data is portrayed in Table 7.

Table 6: Theme Occurrence by Student

Participants (N=18)	Theme Occurrence By Student				
	Parent Influence	Peer Influence	Personal Aspiration	Finance/Self-Reliance	Other
Aaron	✓	✓	✓	✓	Coach
Alice	✓		✓	✓	
Allen	✓	✓	✓	✓	Neighbor
Ellen	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eric	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Gianna	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Harold	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Harry	✓		✓	✓	
Ingram	✓	✓	✓		JROTC
Ingrid	✓		✓	✓	JROTC
Landon	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Lee	✓	✓	✓	✓	Brother
Nate	✓	✓	✓		High School Instructors
Omar	✓		✓		
Orrin	✓	✓	✓	✓	Brother
Robert	✓	✓		✓	
Russell	✓	✓	✓	✓	Police Officer
Ursula	✓	✓	✓		

Table 7: Theme Occurrence by Parent

Theme Occurrence By Parent					
	Parent Influence	Peer Influence	Personal Aspiration	Finance/Self-Reliance	Other
Aaron's Parents					Military Personnel/Coach
Alice's Parent				✓	
Allen's Parent			✓		Neighbor
Ellen's Parent			✓	✓	High School Personnel
Gianna's Parent			✓	✓	
Ingrid's Parent	✓			✓	Grandparent
Lee's Parent	✓			✓	College Personnel
Nate's Parent	✓				
Omar's Parent	✓				
Russell's Parent				✓	College Fair

Summary

No one single reason is responsible for a student's decision to attend a military junior college. Reasons include the goal of a military career, the offer of scholarship monies, and the desire for a structured environment where the students will have fewer distractions. Several persons and factors influence the college-choice processes of students who choose to attend military junior colleges, including, foremost, the students' parents. Several students indicating that their father was influential in their enrollment in a military junior college. The students' peer groups were influential as most of them also enrolled in college and served as sounding boards for discussions involving college and career aspirations. Certainly, the offer of a scholarship is significant when a student is

deciding where to attend college, and that is true with the decision to attend a military junior college.

The study results showed that there are some characteristics common among the 18 students who participated in this study. The majority of the students began to think about going to college in their sophomore year in high school or earlier, with some of them indicating that they first began to think about college when they were young children. All of them indicated that they knew that their parents valued a college education. The students reported that they did discuss college with their high school peers and that their peers did enroll in college. Almost all of the students did go through a search process as they were deciding where to go to college, and they did consider their family's financial situation as they went through their college choice process. Twelve fathers and mothers had received at least a bachelor's degree, with an additional six parents attending college for some period of time.

To summarize, the students in this study all had parents who valued a college education. The students had peers with whom they discussed their college plans, and peers who planned to attend college and did enroll in college. The consideration of how they would pay for their college education was foremost in their minds as they conducted their college search process and made their final decision concerning the college in which they would eventually enroll.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to understand the reasons that students choose to attend a military junior college and determine those factors that influence the student's decision-making process. Data was collected by interviewing six students at each of three military junior colleges and obtaining demographic information and educational background characteristics through the students' completion of data forms prior to their interviews. Additional data was obtained through telephone interviews with the students' parents. The purpose of the parent interviews was to supplement the data provided through the 18 student interviews. In total, data was collected from 29 participants. The analysis results were reported in Chapter 4, while Chapter 5 presents an in-depth discussion of the results and interpretation of the data. The information contained in Chapter 5 is presented in the following sections: (a) discussions of the findings; (b) implications of the study; (c) limitations of the study; (d) recommendations for further research; and (e) conclusion.

Discussion of the Findings

As the data were reviewed and analyzed for responses to the research questions that served as the basis for the study, themes emerged that answered the research questions, confirmed earlier research findings regarding college choice, and provided new information relative to why students choose to attend military junior colleges and the persons and factors influential in the student's decision-making process.

The six research questions were answered through the analysis of the data. The first question, "Why do students choose to attend a military junior college?" had more than one answer. Though, obviously, some students choose to attend because they wish

to pursue a career in the military as an officer, others chose to attend because of their desire for a structured learning environment or the amount of scholarship money offered them by the college. Persons or factors influencing the students' decision-making process, which was the basis of the second research question, included, foremost, the students' parents, along with their peer groups.

The third research question related to which students choose to attend a military junior college. These students have parents who value a college education, a peer group that also plans to go to college, and begin thinking of going to college quite early. A unique characteristic of these students was their self-reliance, which became obvious as the data were analyzed. These students were concerned about burdening their parents with the cost of their college tuition and chose to find ways to finance their college education themselves.

The process that students go through as they choose to attend a military junior college, which was the substance of the fourth question, included reviewing college websites, communicating with the college, and making visits to the college campuses. They did consider their family's financial situation as they went through the search process and made their decision. The fifth question posed in the study was, "What are the significant personal experiences that influence the student's decision-making process?" The offer of financial assistance from the college was significant, as well as college-related experiences such as a visit to the campus or receiving mail from the college.

The final research question dealt with the sources of information that were most influential in the student's decision to attend a military junior college. The majority of

the students did visit the college's website. Mail pieces were also important to these students, as well as phone communication with college and campus visits.

Relevant themes included the influence of the student's family and peers, the connectedness of the student's personal aspirations and their matriculation at a military junior college, the strong consideration of financing their college education, and, uniquely, the powerful self-reliance of the students who choose military junior colleges as their college of choice. Inherent in all of these themes is the concept that students who attend military junior colleges, like most other college students who matriculate to civilian colleges and universities, do go through a college search process. Tables summarizing thematic occurrences for both the students and the parents are found in Appendix L and M, respectively.

Parental Influence

The literature review for this study discussed work by Don Hossler and Karen Symms Gallagher, who developed a three-stage college choice model. The three stages inherent in their model are predisposition, search, and choice (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999). The first stage of predisposition is the phase in which the students make plans for either continuing their education or working after graduation from high school. Hossler and Gallagher indicate that the student's development in this stage is influenced by their family background, and the students who were interviewed for this study did indicate significant influence by their families.

The students interviewed for this study all stated that they knew their parents valued a college education, and many of the parents had earned at least some college credits, with some of the parents obtaining bachelor's and advanced degrees. In addition

to their parents having some college credit, many of the students began to think and talk about going to college during their early years. Conklin and Dailey (1981) wrote that an essential component of strong family influence is the long-standing assumption that the child will go to college. The students in this study noted that they knew that their parents valued a college education and that they had known, some since they were in elementary and middle school, that they would go to college.

In her research on college-choice process, Patricia McDonough related the importance of cultural capital. "Parents transmit cultural capital by informing offspring about the value and process for securing a college education, and its potential for conversion in the occupational attainment context" (McDonough, 1997, p. 9). Several of the students who participated in this study reported that their parents did inform them of the advantages of earning a college degree. One of the students, when asked if his parents valued a college education, remarked that both of his parents valued a college education as both have a college degree, and they see that as the key to their son's ability to become a white-collar worker and have a career.

Significant in this study was the parental influence on their children to not only attend college, but to attend a military junior college. Several students indicated that their fathers influenced their decision to attend a military junior college. Six of the parents who were interviewed indicated that the student's father had served in the military. One father, in particular, related that his son had some learning difficulties, and that he felt that a military junior college would provide an environment in which his son could succeed. Another student remarked that her mother instilled in her the value of a college education for the sake of education. The young woman's father, however, also wanted

her to attend college so that she could be an officer, rather than being enlisted. Both of her parents instilled cultural capital in their daughter, but they had different motives for encouraging her to attend college.

It is interesting to note that, though seven students indicated that their father, family, or mother influenced their decision to attend a military junior college, only three parents indicated that they had influenced their child's decision to attend a military junior college. One of the three, furthermore, did not match with the student's response. This mismatch was especially true of the influence of the father. Five students indicated that their father influenced their choice, while only two parents indicated paternal influence. This information is indicative of the strength of parental influence, even if the influence is not overt. Obviously, these students were influenced by their fathers, even if the parents did not see that they had influenced their child's decision.

Bourdieu's characteristic of "habitus" was also evident in the students who participated in this study. Bourdieu indicated that habitus was an internalized system of beliefs that one learns from his or her immediate environment. He noted that to enter a field, or to play a game, which, in this instance, was the act of enrolling in college, one must possess the habitus which predisposes one to enter that field (Bourdieu, 1993). Participants of this study were brought up in families where the belief system indicated that they would go to college and that their college education would provide them with the tools to succeed in life.

Hossler and Gallagher also noted the importance of the student's holding a positive attitude about college. Without exception, students who participated in this study had parents who encouraged them and helped them maintain this positive attitude.

Many of the students related that their parents made remarks such as "education was the most important thing," "the way to a better life," and that one "always needed an education to fall back on."

McDonough's work (1997) emphasizes that students who are in a high socioeconomic class have a seamless quality to their world, as parents, peers, and school personnel all expect that everyone in their group will go to college. It was discussed in the results section of this study that the researcher believes that the majority of those who participated in the study were low to middle income. Most of the students who participated in the study, however, did have peers and parents for whom college appeared to be an understood goal. The evidence of this goal in the case of parents was the students' unanimous remarks regarding their parent's value of a college education.

Peer Influence

The students verified that they did discuss their college plans with their peers, and that their peers, like them, did enroll in college. McDonough (1997), Chapman (1981), and Hossler and Gallagher (1987) all indicate that peers play an important role in a young person's college selection process. The influence of the students' peer group was evident in the conversations that the students stated they had with their peers regarding college and in the students' estimates of how many of their peers enrolled in college.

All but four of the students who were interviewed remarked that they did discuss college with their peers, and thirteen of the students stated that 75 percent or more of their high school peers did enroll in college. This high percentage of peers enrolling in college matched with Jackson (1986), who reported that a high percentage of peers planning to enroll in college was a strong determinant of a student's likelihood of

enrolling in college. For five of the students, conversation with peers, or parents of their peers, was, in fact, the manner in which the students first heard of the military junior college in which they eventually enrolled.

Not only were the conversations with the peers influential in their college choice process, but the students' choice of peers was also an important piece of information that came out of the study. Several students spoke of the characteristics of their peers, such as their peers being athletes and looking for athletic scholarships, military-minded students who wanted to pursue a military career, or, as one student remarked, "…the group I hung around …we were all educated, and we believed in studying and doing our work and going to college." The descriptions of the students' peer groups clearly confirm McDonough's work on bounded rationality. She indicates that a student's college choices are influenced by their social network (McDonough, 1997).

Personal Aspirations

David Chapman (1981) differentiates between a student's educational expectations and aspirations, with expectations being what a person perceives he or she will be doing or will have accomplished while aspirations refer to wishes or desires about the future. Chapman indicates that both influence students' college choice plans. A factor that evolved as the data was analyzed was the influence of the student's personal aspirations and expectations in their choice to attend a military junior college. It is not surprising that those students with a desire for a military career chose to attend a military junior college, but the desire to "do better" was voiced by several students, along with their indication that they saw the military junior college as an avenue for their self-

improvement. Chapman's work on the external influences of college student choice corresponds with this factor, yet, at first glance, it would seem adverse to personal aspirations.

Though personal aspirations and expectations are internal to a student, the significance of a fixed college characteristic, which is one of Chapman's external characteristics, is relevant here. This research strongly supports a correlation between a military college's structured setting and a student's sense of need for a structured learning environment. A fixed college characteristic of military junior colleges is that of the structured, disciplined environment, and that same environment is attractive to students who perceive that they need a college setting that will help them focus on their school work and eliminate distractions common to many civilian college campuses.

Kotler and Fox (1995) referenced Maslow's hierarchy of needs when discussing college choice theory. Though they discuss Maslow's work in terms of a student's evaluation of need and the effect of that need on the college choice process, which would certainly be applicable in this context as the students are searching for a disciplined setting for their collegiate experience, Maslow's self-actualization level would also be a consideration in this situation. These students are aspiring to move beyond basic needs to that of being self-actualized individuals. They view a structured college environment as one of the tools to help them reach a level of optimal performance.

Bounded rationality, as defined by McDonough (1997), was obvious in the students' statements regarding their college entrance examination scores and grade point averages. Students stated that they did not apply to any schools where they thought their applications would be rejected for academic reasons. This action indicated that they

excluded from their list schools where the admissions requirements did not match their particular academic credentials. In some instances, bounded rationality did not apply, especially in the area of cost. Though two of the military junior colleges were quite expensive, students did consider them and eventually matriculate at the colleges. The difference appeared to be that the colleges provided scholarships to the students, so they were able to attend a school that they might not have otherwise considered.

Financing of the College Education and Self-reliance

Significant in the data obtained from the student and the parent interviews were the statements relative to paying for the students' college education. Students and parents emphasized that the students did consider the family's financial situation when deciding where to go to college. Additionally, the students stressed the importance of scholarship offers in the discussion of how the college options were narrowed and a final choice made. Some of them indicated that the offer of a scholarship was the significant experience that influenced them to attend a military junior college.

The amount of aid that a student receives and the total cost of tuition and expenses are definitely factors that affect the college choice process. Both of these factors play a role in both the search stage and the choice stage, as designated in the Hossler and Gallagher model. McDonough (1997) related that student aid has both increased consumption of higher education and facilitated a redistribution of enrollment to private and smaller institutions, which is applicable for students attending at least two of the three colleges that participated in this study.

As noted in Chapter 4, some of the students narrowed their college options and then chose the college who would provide them with the most financial assistance.

Others knew, early on in the process, that they would have to finance their own education, due to their family's financial situation. Harry, a student at American, answered the question regarding whether he considered his family's financial situation as he was deciding where he would to college by stating that he knew that his family could not pay for him to go to college, as he had held a job since he was sixteen, and he felt he was on his own to pay for college.

Cost is a fixed college characteristic, or another external characteristic, as noted by Chapman (1981). Though Chapman discusses cost as a factor that is a concern to the students but is mostly under the control of the college, most of the students appeared to be concerned about paying for college in general, not necessarily just the military junior college in which they planned to enroll. Some did indicate that the military junior college in which they enrolled was expensive, but others talked about choosing a military program at the military junior college, not just because the tuition was expensive, but because the military program would pay for their college education.

A sub-theme that evolved during the data analysis was self-reliance, as it related to paying for the college education. Additionally, the theme of self-reliance also surfaced as responses were reviewed where students spoke about the need to improve their focus and discipline. Those students chose a military junior college, at least in part, because they felt that the structured, military-type environment would provide an atmosphere where they could perform better than they had in high school. Ingrid, a student at National Military Junior College, related that she was not a strong student in high school and needed to go to a college that would be smaller and provide a structured setting for her academic program.

Most of the students related their self-reliance as a consequence of their family's financial situation. As Harry noted, he knew that he was on his own to pay for his college education. Others, though, wanted to rely on themselves to pay for their college education to not burden their parents, to show that they were responsible, or because they felt that it was the right thing to do. Eric at National explained his motivation by stating that he had to "grow up" and go to college where his college would be paid for, so his family would not be in debt.

External Influences

Outside influences are a theme that encompasses several factors, including high school JROTC instructors and the JROTC program, college staff, and methods of communication that colleges employ to communicate with students. It is expected and understood that students who have participated in a JROTC program in high school would be informed about military junior colleges, probably through being heavily recruited by the military junior colleges. It is worth noting, however, that one student noted that he had always admired his high school instructors, who were military, and that influenced his desire to attend a military junior college. Another student spoke of the positive influence of his JROTC drill team's visit to the military junior college where he eventually matriculated.

Though researchers who write about the college choice process, and in particular, Patricia McDonough (1994, 1997), speak of the strong influence of high school guidance counselors, only one student in this study talked about her "high school advisors" and their influence on her college choice process. McDonough has remarked, however, that public high schools, due to budget cuts, have basically ceased college advisement

(McDonough, 1994). Since only a couple of the students who were interviewed for this study mentioned that they attended a private school, it can be assumed that most attended public schools, and that public school attendance could contribute to their lack of emphasis on their interactions with guidance counselors or high school advisors.

Hossler and Stage (1992) stated that it appeared that counselors have little influence over the predisposition stage of the search process. Several students did, however, mention the importance of JROTC instructors and the program, in general, in their decision to attend a military junior college. As JROTC is a program that the students would attend regularly for as many as four years and participate in outside activities with their instructor and fellow students, it is not surprising that the program and instructors would exert influence on them, especially if they were already thinking of choosing a military career.

David Chapman's college choice model (1981) denotes the influence of college communication with prospects. Chapman stresses that college communication efforts are a factor that can be quickly adjusted to meet the needs of identifying and recruiting students. This study showed that students who enroll at military junior colleges did communicate with the colleges by visiting their websites, participating in phone conversations with college personnel, receiving recruiting letters and literature, and tours of the campus, and that those methods of communication did have an influence on their decision to attend a military junior college.

In particular, two students talked about the phone calls, one indicating that she eliminated another military college because she repeatedly could not get in touch with them and another relating that she was favorably impressed because she had been able to

speak directly with the Dean of Admissions. Though Chapman found that students did not select a college based on its written materials, two of the students in this study did indicate that they chose their respective military junior colleges based on recruiting letters that they students had received from the college.

Implications of the Study

The analysis of the data generated in this study answers the research questions and coincides with the study's theoretical framework and the review of literature. Corresponding to the information contained in the literature review and the work of researchers cited throughout the study, the results showed that there are several reasons that students choose to attend a particular college and several factors influencing the decision, yet most do go through a search process and all do use various means of communication with the college. Additionally, there are some demographic characteristics in common among those who attend a military junior college.

Persons who exert significant influence on students during the college choice process are their parents, though, for most all of the students, the influence began early in their lives. Most of them grew up knowing that they would go to college. When asked if there was a person who influenced their decision to attend a military junior college, most of the students who answered affirmatively reported family members, and a significant number reported the influence of their fathers. This familial influence means that successful college admissions personnel will befriend and communicate with the prospect's family members, as well as the student.

The students' peer groups were influential, as well. Most of the students' friends were likeminded, in that they planned to go to college, and a high percentage of them did

enroll in college. The students discussed their college plans with their peers, some joining in the conversations regarding going to college, in general, but others indicated that they sought approval for their college choice from their peer group.

Another influential factor is the concern regarding a way whereby the students and families can receive assistance in paying for the student's college education. It is important to the students who attend military junior colleges, and the parents of those students, to hear and see how they can pay for the college education. In some instances cited in this study, the offer of a scholarship helped to make the enrollment decision for the student and the parents.

The student's peer group is influential. Students in this study reported being around students who were planning to go to college and discussing those plans with their peers. Some of the students reported that they first heard of the military junior college either from their peers or parents of their peers. This revelation indicates the importance of military junior college admissions personnel asking currently-enrolled students to serve as marketing assistants who go back to their high schools and recruit their friends and acquaintances.

The importance of positive communication between the military junior college and the students was also demonstrated in this study as being important to the students. Those participating in this study visited the college websites and noted when the website was well-organized and informative. Some of the students indicated that visiting college websites was one of the first steps in their college search process.

Though some admissions personnel may feel that postal mail is no longer effective, they should note that two of the students decided that they would attend a

particular military junior college because a letter about the college came through the postal mail for them and that three students noted that their initial contact with the school was a recruiting letter. The importance of telephone communication and the person making or answering the phone call were also noted by respondents in the study, as well as the caller's or answerer's ability to walk the applicant through the admissions process during the phone call. Finally, the students who participated in the study verified that a campus visit positively affected their college decision-making process.

Virtually all of the students who participated in the study indicated that they did go through a search process very similar to the three-stage model noted in the work of Hossler and Gallagher (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999). The three stages included predisposition (where the students understand the value of a college education), search, and choice. For some students, the search process was orderly and included making lists, and for others, it was more random. Their participation in a search process, however, tells college administrators that it is important to get the name of the college and information about the college out to the public.

As the students noted that their college-choice process was influenced by others, it is also important that the college be advertised in places where the general public and persons of potential influence will receive the information, not only where students would most likely find information about the college. Initial building blocks of the search process were that all of the students had parents who value a college education, virtually all had known for some period of time that they would go to college, and that most had high school peers that also enrolled in college.

Finally, there were similarities in the demographic characteristics of the students who participated in the study and similarities in the parent demographics. All interviewees were traditional college-age students, and all received a high school diploma. The average ACT score was 22, with only one score being below 17, and the average high school grade point average was 3.2 on a 4.0 scale, with no high school grade point average below a 2.0 on a 4.0 scale. The students came from families that, most likely, are low to middle-income families. Most of the parents are employed in white-collar positions, such as office and business positions, and likewise, most had earned at least some college credits, with several having a bachelor's or an advanced degree.

In addition to practical implications, this study has policy implications, as well. As noted earlier in this study, the five military junior colleges enrolled over 3,000 students, and this number does not include the large civilian program at Georgia Military College. Collectively, these colleges enroll a large number of students and fulfill a mission that that is unique to these five schools. As federal and state budgets tighten, it is important to remember that these colleges do serve a significant number of students and have a distinctive purpose, and therefore, should continue to receive sufficient funding to maintain operation and flourish. It is imperative that federal policymakers continue to support the scholarships that are provided to military junior college students.

Limitations of the Study

This study on why students attend military junior colleges and the persons and factors influential in their college choice process has three limitations. The number of students that were interviewed for the study was a sample of only 18 students, or six at

each military junior college. Eleven parents, however, were interviewed to obtain more information and enhance validity. Another limitation of the study is that only twelve parents could be reached for an interview, and one of them declined to be interviewed. Though the parental participation was valuable to the study, the parental input would have been more valuable if all of the students' parents could have or would have agreed to be a part of the study. Triangulation of the data

would have been further enhanced if all of the students' parents participated in the study. Participants' opinions and statements were respected and protected throughout the study.

Additionally, none of the three military junior colleges that participated in the study are located in the southern area of the United States where the military has a large military infrastructure and regional presence. Only the western, northeastern, and central areas of the country are represented in the study. The two colleges located in the southern region were not included in this study as one college was where the researcher was employed as a full-time administrator, and the other college was excluded as it has a large civilian enrollment.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study focused on currently-enrolled students at military junior colleges and the reasons that they chose to attend a military junior college and the factors and persons who influenced their decision. As the number of participants in the research study was somewhat small, there are several recommendations for further research.

As this was a qualitative study involving only 18 students and 11 parents, another research study could be conducted that would involve a larger quantitative study. All first-year students at each of the five military junior colleges and their parents could be

surveyed to obtain additional information regarding the college choice process and factors that influence the process.

Future research could involve contacting students who applied and were admitted, but chose not to attend. This study would provide military junior college administrators with valuable information relative to the reasons that students are not matriculating. If the reasons are under the control of the military junior college, then perhaps changes could be made that would entice those accepted students to matriculate.

Other than parents, no other persons who might have been influential in the decision-making process, such as counselors, JROTC instructors, or peers were interviewed. Future study might include projects whereby those who are generally considered as influencers would be interviewed. This additional research would be especially valuable as most of the researchers who study high school influencers discuss the importance of the high school counselors (McDonough, 1997).

This study did not involve the review of admissions brochures or conversations with admissions personnel. A future research project could incorporate these types of data to determine if the image, programs, and environs that the military junior colleges are marketing match what the enrolled students indicate is attracting them to the military junior college.

Finally, the opinion of the alumni of the military junior colleges, as for all colleges, is valuable in making improvements and adjustments to programs, facilities, and campus life. Contacting the alumni to ask them why they chose to attend a military junior college and how their initial expectations compared with their experience would also be valuable information for the military junior college administrators.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the reasons that students attend military junior colleges and the persons and factors that are influential in the decision-making process. The findings from the interviews with students and their parents indicate that, although there are a number of reasons that students choose to attend a military junior college and several factors and persons who influence the decision, some persons and factors are truly significant.

The strongest personal influence was that of the students' parents. The parents indicated their value of a college education to the students, either by having a college education, verbally relating the importance of a college education, helping pay for their child's college education, or early discussions of their plans for the child to attend college. The students indicated strong influence by their fathers, and several of the fathers had served, or were serving, in the military. The influence of the peer group was also significant in the college-going process as the students had peers who shared their common goal of attending college and from whom some of the students sought approval of their military education plan.

The students' personal aspirations, including their quest for a military career, were obviously strong for many of the students. For both groups, those planning a military career and those planning a civilian career, the offer of a scholarship was a significant factor for students attending both the private military junior college where the tuition was quite expensive and those attending a state-supported military junior college where the tuition was much lower. Self-reliance, a characteristic of those students choosing to attend a military junior college, was evident in both their concern and plan

for paying for their college education and in their plans to attend a college that provided a disciplined environment, for those who felt they needed this type of structure to facilitate their future success.

The study produced several results that are of importance to administrators at military junior colleges. First, the various means of communication that colleges use in initially contacting and in remaining in touch with the students are relevant. As expected, almost all visited the college's website, and for many, that is their initial contact with the military junior college as they begin their college search process. It is important that the website be easy to navigate, present a professional image, and provide information relative to the college's programs, size, location, and cost. Students in this study indicated that the website helped them see themselves as cadets at the school. Administrators, therefore, need to be mindful that the website will be viewed by those students who plan a military career and who plan a civilian career.

Secondly, though many admissions offices might believe that the cost of postal mail now outweighs the benefits, this study showed that postal mail is still an effective tool in communicating with students, in both initial contact and in retaining the students' interest in the college. The students indicated that phone contact was valuable as a tool to assist them in finding out more about the college and in helping through the application and enrollment process. Other important factors relative to phone contact, as related by the students, was that they spoke with a person, rather than a machine, and that their phone calls were returned in a timely manner.

This study produced results that, though similar in some regard to previous work on college choice theory, are unique to students who enroll in military junior colleges.

Researchers who study college choice and military junior college administrators who wish to more tightly align their admissions practices with the thought process of students that they wish to recruit will have additional insight into reasons that students choose to attend military junior colleges and the persons and factors who are influential in their decision-making process.

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APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL CONTACT LETTER

June 18, 2008

Chief Academic Officer
American Military College
100 Military College Blvd
Military City, USA

Dear Chief Academic Officer:

I am a doctoral candidate at The George Washington University, and I am writing to ask your permission to include American Military College in my research study. My research topic relates to how and why students choose to attend a military junior college. The results of this study would be beneficial to your Institute and to the other four military junior colleges in improving recruitment plans and in providing better service to our student population.

My research plan includes visiting your campus to conduct six pre-arranged interviews with first-year students. I would ask that you provide me with a list of the names of the first-year, degree- seeking students. I will randomly select the six students to be interviewed. The interviews will be open-ended, semi-structured interviews, with the questions focusing on why the students chose to attend a military junior college and the factor or persons that influenced their choice to attend.

Prior to the commencement of the interview, each student will be asked to sign a consent form, which indicates that they are consenting to participate in the interview. At the end of each interview, the students will be provided with a form, asking their consent to contact their parents for a telephone interview which will focus on their impressions as to why their children chose to attend a military junior college.

During the interview, the students will complete a Student Data Form that will ask questions regarding their name, age, gender, method of high school completion, high school grade point average, college entrance examination scores, career goals, and methods of communication with the military junior college prior to enrollment. No student will be identified by name in the study as all will be given pseudonyms when the results of the study are reported. I would ask that I be provided a place on campus where I could conduct the interviews that would be convenient to the students.

In a few days, I will call you to further discuss your participation in the study. When we have confirmed your participation in the study, I will be sending you copies of a "Response Form" and asking you to have the six students that agree to participate in the study complete the form and return it to me in a stamped, self-addressed envelope that I will provide. Please feel free to contact me through telephone at (334) 207-8085 or through email at s2stevenson@bellsouth.net or my dissertation chair, Dr. Mikyong Minsun Kim, through telephone at (202) 994-3205 or through email at kimmi@gwu.edu if you have questions at anytime.

I look forward to your participation in this study.

Best regards,

Susan G. Stevenson
Doctoral Candidate
Graduate School of Education and Human Development
The George Washington University

APPENDIX B

RESPONSE FORM

_____ Yes, I am willing to participate in an on-campus interview for this research study: *Reasons Students Attend Military Junior Colleges and Factors Influencing Their Decision-making Process*

_____No, I will not be able to participate in this study.

Interviews will be set up on your campus in coordination with you and the Chief Academic Officer at your college.

Name (Printed): _____

E-mail Address: _____

Campus Mailing Address: _____

Signature Date

Please return this form in the accompanying stamped, self-addressed envelope to:

Susan G. Stevenson
203 Clay Street
Marion, AL 36756

Please contact me if you have questions at: sstevenson@marionmilitary.edu or through telephone at (334) 207-7531 (cell).

Thank you for your consideration of participation in this research study.

APPENDIX C

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

REASONS STUDENTS ATTEND MILITARY JUNIOR COLLEGES AND FACTORS INFLUENCING THEIR DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

GW IRB Number: 070836

Principal Investigator: Mikyong Minsun Kim, Ph.D Telephone Number: (202) 994-3205

Sub-Investigator: Susan G. Stevenson Telephone Number: (334) 207-7531 (c)
(334) 683-2052 (h)

Sponsor: No Sponsor

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1) Introduction

You are invited to participate in a research study under the direction of Dr. Mikyong Minsun Kim of the Department of Educational Leadership, Higher Education Administration Program, George Washington University (GWU). Taking part in this research is entirely voluntary. Your academic standing will not, in any way, be affected should you choose not to participate or if you decide to withdraw from the study at any time.

2) Why is this study being done?

The purpose of this study is to ascertain why students choose to attend a military junior college and the factors that influence their decision-making process. You are being asked to take part in this study relative to why students choose to attend a military junior college because you are enrolled as a student in a military junior college.

3) What is involved in this study?

The research will be conducted at New Mexico Military Institute, Valley Forge Military College, and Wentworth Military Academy and Junior College. A total of 6 participants at 3 institutions will be asked to take part in the study. Additionally, parents of those participants who consent will be contacted for a telephone interview, for a maximum of 18 parent participants. You will be one of approximately 6 participants to be asked to take part at this location.

If you choose to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in the following items.

- I will conduct an interview where you will be asked questions related to your perspective on why students choose to attend a military junior college and the factors that influence their decision-making process. I will audio-record the interview as well as take notes during the interview.
- The interview will require approximately one hour of your time.
- The taped interview will be transcribed verbatim, following our interview session.
- I will ask for your email address so that I may send you a copy of the transcription so that you may verify for accuracy.
- I will ask for your permission to contact your parent for a phone interview; however, you may agree to participate in the study without consenting for your parent to be contacted.

4) What are the risks of participating in this study?

There are no physical risks associated with this study. You may feel some psychological discomfort. You may refuse to answer any of the questions, and you may take a break at any time during the study. You may stop your participation in this study at any time. There is minimal risk of loss of confidentiality.

5) Are there benefits to taking part in this study?

You will not benefit directly from your participating in this study. The results of this study, however, will add to the general body of knowledge relevant to how students choose the college which they will attend and the specific body of knowledge relevant to why students choose to attend a military junior college.

6) What are my options?

You do not have to participate in this study if you do not want to. Should you decide to participate and later change your mind, you can do so at any time.

7) Will I receive payment for being in this study?

You will not be paid for taking part in this study.

8) Informed Consent

The Informed Consent form will be given to potential participants along with the response form by each Institution's Chief Academic Officer in order to allow advanced review.

9) Can I be taken off the study?

The investigator can decide to withdraw you from the study at any time.

10) How will my privacy be protected?

If the results of this research study are reported in journals or at scientific meetings, the people who participated in this study will not be named or identified. Each participant will be identified only by a pseudonym and the data key will be maintained by the researcher. GW will not release any information about your research involvement without your written permission, unless required by law.

11) Problems or Questions

The Office of Human Research of George Washington University, at telephone number (202) 994-2715, can provide further information about your rights as a research participant. If you think you have been harmed in this study, you should report this to the Principal Investigator of this study. Further information regarding this study may be obtained by contacting Dr. Mikyong Minsun Kim, Principal Investigator and Dissertation Chair, at (202) 994-3205. For any other concerns, you may call Susan G. Stevenson, Student Researcher, at (334) 207-7531 or at (334) 683-2052.

*Please keep a copy of this document in case you want to read it again.

If you agree to participate in this study, please sign below.

_____ _____

Subject's Name (Printed) and Signature Date

_____ _____

Name (Printed) and Signature of Person Obtaining Consent Date

_____ _____

Principal Investigator's Signature Date

APPENDIX D

CONSENT TO PARENT CONTACT

I, _____, consent to my parent being
Printed Name of Student

contacted through a telephone call by Susan Stevenson as a part of the research study: *Reasons Students Attend Military Junior Colleges and Factors Influencing Their Decision-making Process.*

_____

Student Signature Date

Parental Contact Information

Parent's Name:_____

Parent's Telephone Number: _____

Parent's Email Address: _____

Parent's Postal Mail Address: _____

_____

APPENDIX E

PARENT INFORMATION SHEET

REASONS STUDENTS ATTEND MILITARY JUNIOR COLLEGES AND FACTORS INFLUENCING THEIR DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

GW IRB Number: 070836

Principal Investigator: Mikyong Minsun Kim, Ph.D Telephone Number: (202) 994-3205

Sub-Investigator: Susan G. Stevenson Telephone Number: (334) 207-7531 (c)
(334) 683-2052 (h)

Sponsor: No Sponsor

---

1) Introduction

You are invited to participate in a research study under the direction of Dr. Mikyong Minsun Kim of the Department of Educational Leadership, Higher Education Administration Program, George Washington University (GWU). Taking part in this research is entirely voluntary.

2) Why is this study being done?

The purpose of this study is to ascertain why students choose to attend a military junior college and the factors that influence their decision-making process. You are being asked to take part in this study relative to why students choose to attend a military junior college because you are the parent of a student enrolled in a military junior college. The on-site research will be conducted at New Mexico Military Institute, Valley Forge Military College, and Wentworth Military Academy and Junior College. A total of 6 participants at 3 institutions have been asked to take part in the study. You, as a parent of a participant, are being contacted for a telephone interview, for a maximum of 18 parent participants.

3) What is involved in this study?

If you choose to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in the following items.

- I will conduct a phone interview where you will be asked questions related to your perspective on why your child chose to attend a military junior college and the factors that influenced their decision-making process. I will record the interview as well as take notes during the interview.
- The interview will require approximately 45 minutes of your time.

- The taped interview will be transcribed verbatim, following our interview session.

- I will ask for your email address so that I may send you a copy of the transcription so that you may verify for accuracy.

4) What are the risks of participating in this study?

There are no physical risks associated with this study. You may refuse to answer any of the questions, and you may take a break at any time during the study. You may stop your participation in this study at any time.

5) Are there benefits to taking part in this study?

You will not benefit directly from your participating in this study. The results of this study, however, will add to the general body of knowledge relevant to how students choose the college which they will attend and the specific body of knowledge relevant to why students choose to attend a military junior college.

6) What are my options?

You do not have to participate in this study if you do not want to. Should you decide to participate and later change your mind, you can do so at any time.

7) Will I receive payment for being in this study?

You will not be paid for taking part in this study.

8) Can I be taken off the study?

The investigator can decide to withdraw you from the study at any time.

9) How will my privacy be protected?

If the results of this research study are reported in journals or at scientific meetings, the people who participated in this study will not be named or identified. GW will not release any information about your research involvement without your written permission, unless required by law.

10) Problems or Questions

The Office of Human Research of George Washington University, at telephone number (202) 994-2715, can provide further information about your rights as a research participant. If you think you have been harmed in this study, you should report this to the Principal Investigator of this study. Further information regarding this study may be obtained by contacting Dr. Mikyong Minsun Kim, Principal Investigator and Dissertation

Chair, at (202) 994-3205. For any other concerns, you may call Susan G. Stevenson, Student Researcher, at (334) 207-7531 or at (334) 683-2052.

APPENDIX F

STUDENT DATA FORM

1. Name: _____

   Home City and State:_____

2. Gender: Female_____ Male_____

3. Age: _____

4. High School Completion: Diploma _____ GED_____

5. Final High School Grade Point Average: _____

6. Composite ACT Score _____ or SAT Combined Score _____

7. Category that best describes your annual household income:

   $25,000 or less _____

   $25,001 to $50,000 _____

   $50,001 to $75,000 _____

   Over $75,000 _____

8. Career Goal: Civilian _____ Military _____

   Specific Goal:

9. Was there someone who influenced your decision to attend a military junior college?
   Yes _____ No _____ ; If so, who? _____

10. How did you first learn about (New Mexico Military Institute, Valley Forge Military College, or Wentworth Military Academy and Junior College)?

    _____
    _____
    _____

11. During your decision-making process, did you have any of the following methods of contact with the college that you now attend?

Visit college website _____

Receive mail pieces from the college _____

Speak on the phone with a college representative _____

Visit the campus _____

For those methods of contact that you indicated that you had with the college, please indicate how that method of contact influenced your decision to attend the college where you are now enrolled.

Website

_____

_____

Mail Piece

_____

_____

Phone Conversation

_____

_____

Campus Visit

_____

_____

APPENDIX G

STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. When did you first begin to think about going to college?
2. Do your parents value a college education? If so, how do you know?
3. After deciding to go to college, did you go through a search process? If yes, describe the process.
4. How did you narrow your college options and make your final decision?
5. Think about your peers in high school. What percentage of them is enrolled in college?
6. Did you discuss your college plans with your peers? What kinds of thing did you and your peers discuss about college?
7. Did you consider your family's financial situation as you thought about where you would go to college? If so, how did the financial situation influence your decision?
8. Did you consider your high school grade point average and/or your college entrance examination scores as you thought about where you would go to college? If so, how did your grade point average and/or your college entrance examination scores influence your decision?
9. Was there a significant experience that influenced your decision to attend a military junior college? If so, please describe the experience.

APPENDIX H

INITIAL CONTACT LETTER TO PARENT

July 12, 2008

Ms. Cadet Parent
202 Military Junior College Blvd
Roswell, NM 20909

Dear Ms. Parent:

I am a doctoral candidate at The George Washington University, and I am writing to ask you to participate in my study. My research topic relates to how and why students choose to attend a military junior college. I have interviewed your child, Cadet Student, who is enrolled at New Mexico Military Institute, and he gave me permission to contact you.

I will be calling you in a few days to ask you some questions relative to your child's college college process. All responses will be kept confidential. Any reports written from this study will not include the real names of the respondents. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me through calling my cell phone at (334) 207-7531 or through emailing me at s2stevenson@bellsouth.net.

I thank you in advance for taking time to speak with me.

Best regards,

Susan G. Stevenson

APPENDIX I

PARENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. When did your child first begin to talk about going to college?
2. Did you influence your child's decision to attend a military junior college?

   If so, how did you influence your child's decision?
3. Was there another person or persons who influenced your child's decision to

   attend a military junior college? If so, who was the person or persons?
4. Was the family's financial situation a consideration in the college choice process?

   If so, how did the family's financial situation influence your child's choice to attend

   a military junior college?
5. Was there a significant experience in your child's life that influenced his/her

   decision to attend a military junior college? If so, what was the experience?
6. Were you aware of any communication between the military junior college and

   your child? If so, what was the means of communication

   and how did that communication influence your child's decision to attend a

   military junior college?
7. What is the highest level of education that you and your spouse obtained?

You	High School Completion Bachelor's Degree Master's Degree Beyond Master's Degree
Your Spouse	High School Completion Bachelor's Degree Master's Degree Beyond Master's Degree

8. Are you employed? If so, what is your occupation?

9. Is your spouse employed? If so, what is your spouse's occupation?

10. Are you or your spouse serving (or have served) in the military? If so, what branch?

11. What is the income category that best describes your annual household income?

$25,000 or less
$25,001 to $50,000
$50,001 to $75,000
Over $75,000

APPENDIX J

VERBATIM STUDENT ANSWERS TO INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Question 1: When did you first begin to think about going to college?

Aaron: As soon as I can remember starting school. It wasn't a question in my household. It was you're going to college. It was planned, it was planned for me whether I liked it or not, starting probably grade six or eight.

Alice: Well, from school to my senior year, and I applied to a lot of colleges. Well, actually, not a lot. I applied to about 10. And, I knew I didn't have the grades, that was one of my big things, but I had a lot of talent. So a lot of schools sent me rejection letters, I had took my audition dates after, but once I took my audition, I got the schools based on scholarships. But they had academic restrictions.

Allen: In my household, college is kinda like the next step. Just growing up, you go to college after high school.

Ellen: Since I was younger, actually. My, not a lot of people in my family go to college. I am actually the first person. I decided when I was younger that I wanted a career. I wanted to go to college and get an education and definitely be successful.

Eric: I first started thinking about going to college when I was in the ninth grade. It was something that my parents instilled in my head, that you were going to college and that's there's no exceptions. So, probably around my freshman year.

Gianna: Since I was little. I always knew. I always liked school so I figured if I go to school now and get it out of the way then I'll have, like, a lot more opportunities in the future, rather than, like, not going to school and just doing whatever.

Harold: When I was a little kid – it was always talked about.

Harry: Uhm, I really didn't think about going to college until the school started sending me some information, and with my ACT scores and my ASVAB scores, I was really planning on enlisting. But when they started sending me academic information, they offered me the ROTC program and the ROTC scholarship and they'll help me pay for college, I started looking at colleges.

Ingram: College was one of the paths that my parents had for me ever since I was little, so growing up, going to school, my parents always enforced school work before everything. Growing up, I liked to play sports, I liked to hang out with friends, but everything I did, my parents just emphasized how school work was important in life and how they gave me examples from how they were brought up by their parents back home – it was very strict. College was always in my mindset.

Ingrid: When I was a junior in high school. I'm pretty sure that was it.

Landon: Uhm, I went into my college process, deciding where I wanted to go probably my sophomore year. But, I always really wanted to attend (another college) because my parents had a friend that always came over to the house all the time, and he grew up in Philadelphia, and he went to (another college). And he talked about how it had great undergrad Political Science Department and philosophy classes and department and a great College of Liberal Arts.

Lee: During my senior year in high school.

Nate: When I was a freshman in high school.

Omar: Well, when I first began to think about going to college was when I graduated from high school, well probably half-way through junior, senior year. At that time, I wasn't sure where I wanted to go, but I dug down with a lot of people and a lot of them gave me input. My dad was the one that actually decided to have me come here.

Orrin: Junior year. Well, I always thought about it but my junior year was when I first began the process of looking at schools.

Robert: Sophomore year in high school.

Russell: It was not really an option for me. I knew that I would be going to college. It's not an option in my family.

Ursula: Probably my freshman year of high school.

Question 2: Do your parents value a college education, and if so, how do you know?

Aaron: My dad's biggest thing is he wants to make sure we have a degree to fall back on in life, no matter what. No matter if we want to be an athlete, if we want to do whatever, he wants us to have a degree to fall back on in case anything happens, so, yes, they do value it.

Alice: Yes, they really do value it a lot. Cause my parents are separated, and my mom came here and she didn't get to go to college, and my dad, he wasn't able to go to college, either, but he was in the military. And, uhm, he loves the military lifestyle, that's one of the things, and uhm, he really wants me to go to college. He's like, you want to make your life, you gotta go to college. He always showed me, he's always pushed me in different ways. He would say, hey, you know, this is better for you. And, like, growing up, I didn't understand how he wanted me to get that education, but he'd always say it's all I want so that I know that when I die, that you could survive in a world like this.

Allen: Very, very much. They both have one, and they see value in getting an education and becoming a white-collar worker and having a career.

Ellen: Yes, they do because they're one of the reasons that I'm actually going to college. They're paying for it. They're funding it. They also thought it was, it was a good idea to go to college. Uhm, they're definitely a major part of my college choice.

Eric: Yes, my parents do value a college education because education in my family is a primary source, at the foundation for every person in my family. I could tell because when I was a kid in middle school they would drill things in my head and make me study, quiz me, and do various other things to make sure that I finish my homework.

Gianna: Yes, my parents do value a college education because education in my family is a primary source, at the foundation for every person in my family. I could tell because when I was a kid in middle school they would drill things in my head and make me study, quiz me, and do various other things to make sure that I finish my homework.

Harold: They do because they both went to college. My dad went to West Point, and my mom went to (another college). And, uh, they both went to grad school, too, so I know college is important.

Harry: Uhm, very much so. My father has a master's degree, and my mom has a master's degree, bachelor's degree and several associate's degrees. And they've always told me that education is the way that I am going to get through life.

Ingram: My parents – I come from a family of six – as the world is changing, as the American society is changing – you must have a college diploma or it's going to be hard to get a job. I mean, you can get a job, but it's hard to get a good job, those that pay well. My parents, my dad – he went straight into the Army after high school, and he said life was difficult. If you went to college straight out of high school and obtained a college degree, it would be easier. So he made me think about the possibilities of not going to college, and he said if I went to college and had a degree, it would be a little bit easier.

Ingrid: Yes, I know they do value a college education. My mom more than my dad because she's really educated. And, my dad thought I should go to college, mostly to be an officer in the Army and not so much enlisted. I think that's mostly why.

Landon: Oh, very much. My mother comes from the former Soviet Union, and, uh, like my grandmother, like, grew up in an orphanage because during World War II and my family's Jewish, so her father and her mother died during the Holocaust. So, she grew up in an orphanage and the education was very poor. When she was 14, she had to go out and work, but she attended college at the same time. She worked during the day and took classes during the night. And to provide a better life for my mother, so she met my granddad. They started out together. He got a job as a jeweler, and they were like, you know, upper middle class, so my mother went to college, and she was a teacher. But when they came here, they had to give up everything to the Soviet Union because that's

how the whole immigration process was, and they came here with absolutely nothing. They were able to make a life for me that I was able to go to a very good high school, and now, I'm going to try to go to Temple, you know, go through a better education process, higher education, so that I can become a lawyer because education is very important in my family.

Lee: Yes, because they constantly tell me that. It's good to have a college education, and also, my brother goes to college.

Nate: They sure do, and they certainly influenced me to get into college. Uh, they said it was the best way to succeed in life.

Omar: I believe they do, and the reason that I say this is they're the ones that are paying for me to come here, and they're also the ones that decided to have me come here. And they see me get good grades here, they're really for it and really excited and when they see me get bad grades here, they're not too happy with that, obviously.

Orrin: Yes, very much 'cause my dad went to Harvard Law and my mom. They always talk about college.

Robert: Yes, they do just because it helps me build a better career and it's easier.

Russell: Yes, they do. My mother has a bachelor's in accounting, and my father has a master's degree and is working on a Ph.D.

Ursula: Yes, I'm from (foreign country), actually, so education is a very big part since I was young, my parents would stress education because it is very hard to get a job. That's how I know.

Question 3: After deciding to go to college, did you go through a search process, and if yes, describe the process.

Aaron: Yes, I really wanted to go to West Point, and so I did the whole application process for West Point and didn't get in; didn't get my nomination, and, so I really wasn't thinking of a military school at all. And, then, I just applied to several other colleges and also was looking to play golf in college. And so I was talking to golf coaches and stuff like that. And that's kinda how I stumbled upon (National).

Alice: Yes, I started taking out a lot of colleges, between, cause I wanted to go to the Marine Corps, and I looked at all Naval schools, all Naval ROTC, and a big thing was I did play softball, so I had those two listed, and I had music, and I kinda had that lined up. So a lot of schools, they had one thing, but they had to have two or three, so I kinda narrowed everything down to two or three.

Allen: I did. It was mainly based on the ROTC program. I was looking for a good ROTC program, and, uh, because I wanted to be career military. So it was basically

about every website and every person I talked to, asking more and more about the ROTC program.

Ellen: Yes, I definitely went through a lot of colleges to choose which one was best for me. I chose through my major which ones would be the best. I guess I skipped through it. Some of them weren't for me, some of them were too far or I guess the population was uhm, I kinda like small schools, in a sense, uhm, it also depended the area surrounding it. Like if, the people that would be in the school, if it would be close to home, if it would be easier to get home for vacation. There's a lot of factors in making the choice.

Eric: The search process really started around the end of my sophomore year. I got in contact with an Educational Opportunity Center, the EOC, which helped me kinda figure out who I was as a person and what schools I'd best fit in and how much money I would have to get when I'd become a senior. So, I would say for my personal process, I just kinda looked up colleges by states that I probably once visited or spent time in for a while, the course of education that I wanted to take as my studies, which was business, the best business schools and therefore, I came up with a decision.

Gianna: I didn't really go through a search process. Uhmm, coming here was kinda like a last-minute decision because right after school, I went straight to basic and AIT and then during high school, I was accepted here and I was just like, well, okay, I guess I could just go here and get my education out of the way, so I came here to do school for my degree.

Harold: Right out of high school, I didn't think I was ready for college, so I just wanted to chill out for a little while, so I went to community college, but I didn't really search around that much until I just kinda decided that I didn't want to go to community college anymore. And, then I just thought a military institution would be good. I didn't really search. I saw Valley Forge and I thought it would be good.

Harry: Uhm, I looked at three colleges in the state of (home state). I wanted to still receive in-state tuition. I looked at University of (home state) , (home state) State and American. And, of those three, uhm, the thing that struck me most about this campus that it was clean. I'm going to be very honest about that. Cause when it looks good on the outside, it seems like there is something going on good on the inside, too, so that's what struck me as the most appealing about this school.

Ingram: I received about five scholarships from different colleges, University of Hawaii, Oregon State, one from UNLV, one from our community college back home, and one from (National) and another from (American). The reason why I picked National is because I will obtain a college degree and on top of that, I will be a commissioned officer in the military and it will benefit me because after a career in the military, going to civilian life, searching for a job, it will be easier. And my reputation will be higher, and I will be able to obtain higher jobs that will pay well for me and my family.

Ingrid: I didn't really go through too much of a search process. I mostly… I knew I wanted to do the military, so I looked at military colleges. And (National) I mostly looked at because when I graduated high school, every year between my freshman and senior year, there were several cadets that would go to (National) on different scholarship programs and they liked it a lot and were successful. That's how I picked (National).

Landon: Uhm, I was thinking about (another college), but, uhm, it has a very big reputation as a party school, so I didn't want to go there exactly, and (another college), but it's too small. So I figured I'd start out, maybe do two years here, but when I came here, I don't really like the whole military type of life. I'm too liberal for that. And so, uhm, I decided that I'd go to (another college) as soon as possible.

Lee: I looked basically on the website and called up the school, talked to them, and then we came to look around campus and stuff. I also considered (another college).

Nate: Uh, yes, I did. Mostly, it was internet searching. Searching first for the best colleges in the United States, moving on to their requirements, what they needed, such as SAT scores, grade point average, and what classes they required.

Omar: I did. I went and researched some in-state places around where I lived. And, uhm, decided, well, maybe I could go to this college or that college. As a matter of fact, before I came here, I went to a community college at first. And I didn't do so good in that place at all. Didn't have time to study or anything. So, then I decided that maybe I should take my research a little further and talked to my parents and talked to all my friends and made the decision to come here.

Orrin: Yes. Well, the first place I went to was, well, I made a list of the schools that I wanted to go to, schools that I wanted to play football and schools in the military. And, then, also I went on collegeboard.com and you type in this four-page questionnaire and it lists all of the schools that fit your profile. And they matched a lot of the schools that I wanted to go to.

Robert: No, I really didn't do a search process. It's just kinda whatever school came to me. I play baseball, so it was basically whichever school would offer me a scholarship.

Russell: Upon my graduation from high school, I immediately enlisted in the United States Army, and that's when I learned about the commissioning program here. And that was my main reason for coming here.

Ursula: Yes, I researched online. I talked to my high school advisors that I had back home to try and make a decision on where I wanted to go.

Question 4: How did you narrow your options and make your final decision?

Aaron: After I didn't get into West Point, I emailed about 20 golf coaches to see how many offers I'd get to continue playing after playing four years of high school. And, I

was offered three scholarships and 1 happened to be at (American). So from the 20 schools I picked, I narrowed it down to those three and tried to see who would give me the most money to go to school.

Alice: Wow, my final decision wasn't even a military school. It was (another college.) They offered me music, but the music program wasn't as strong, so I had to give up that to play in a higher softball team, D-2, and they offered me a scholarship. But it came out that money was a big thing for my father. And, he was like, you know, I don't wanna pay for you to go to that school for that amount of money when you could go like your brother. He said my brother because he just graduated from college. He was, like, you could go to (another college) and pay about the same amount of money. You'll be on campus and you'll be able to do things on your own. And, at that point, I was just, like, and my dad said, I'm not going to pay for college then. And it was like, I either had to wait a semester, and I didn't want to push my education back. I wanted to start fall, like everybody else. So, then, the big thing that happened was I was moving, my mom, she was moving. So I moved back with my dad, and I found a letter that (Federal) sent me, and I looked at it, and I was, like, I'll give them a call. They offered me a scholarship cause (Federal) is really pricey. So I told my dad, and my dad was like, alright, and he thought, my dad thought I was bluffing to try to go to a different school that he didn't know about, but my dad is military, and I said, "Dad, it's a military school, and they offered me a scholarship. I'll be away from home and I'll be in a different environment where I can put my grades to work."

Allen: Well, I talked to my next door neighbor. He told me about a website that had the military junior colleges on it. So I went to that website, and I had never heard of this, and I liked the accelerated military science program, and I liked the idea of taking the basic courses to get the associate's degree before going on to your major. The requirements were – I met all the requirements and seemed like the best career choice.

Ellen: I actually chose to stay in the area that I grew up in, but, uhm, I guess after I found here, found (Federal), I seemed to take a liking to it, and I live in New York. It's about, you know, it's not as far, but it's not okay.

Eric: My final decision was very…I would say that it took a long time for me to really think about coming to (National). My first choice was to go to (another college), but I didn't have enough money to attend that college. So I decided that I would need somewhere else to get me on my feet so I would have enough money to build up. And I found out about the ROTC program at (National) which kind of got my attention and I talked to them about the program and they told me that I could come here for two years and go to a college of my choice for the next two years and that would definitely be (another college). So I believe that (National) was kind of a good choice for me to make before I went down to my next college."

Gianna: I only considered this school.

Harold: I thought about going to state colleges which I could have gone to. I am sure that I would have been accepted, but I just thought this would be a better place. I kinda wanted, you know, some structure, and I looked at (Federal). My dad knew a couple of people that went here, too, who he met at West Point, so that influenced me a lot.

Harry: I looked at degrees that they offered. I looked at the academic level on the test scores that the exiting students received, the ones getting out of here. I looked at job placement, and I also looked at tuition.

Ingram: Out of all the colleges, the military junior colleges, as opposed to the four-year colleges – after two years, I'll have my second lieutenant's bars as opposed to waiting four years. The reason why I chose the military academy was because I'll be in a military environment, and the discipline will be enforced and there will be a routine that we go through every day. Going to a four-year college, there would be a lot of distractions, so coming from a disciplined family – I knew a lot of friends who went to a four-year school and came back home because they had been drinking too much, party-hardy, and I didn't want to go through that. I want to go and do what I'm supposed to do and that's why I chose (National).

Ingrid: I had two colleges that I really wanted to go to which were (National) and (another college). And, my final decision was based on, basically the contact that I had with the school. (National) was really involved and very correspondent, and (another college), it was harder to get in contact with people. So, I kinda just gave up on them.

Landon: Size and considering ROTC.

Lee: Being from a military family, they offer the ECP program here. So that's what really got me and they offered me a scholarship.

Nate: After being in the JROTC program, I wanted to apply to the top military school, so I applied to West Point, and I applied to all the other military schools.

Omar: Yes, just, uhmm, like I said. I went to a community college beforehand and didn't do so good there. And, therefore, just decided where could I go to maybe give myself a better chance to do better and decided to go here.

Orrin: Well, I talked to my brother about it and he's in college right now, and he knew a lot about schools, talked to my mom about it and reputation of schools and the research I had done.

Robert: Location. This school was real close. I live in town, so it's real close to my family.

Russell: I didn't really consider any others because I knew that after my two years here I was going to be going to another one. And, right now, I am in contact with (two other colleges), and I have conditional acceptance from there.

Ursula: I wanted to go to a school where I could easily integrate into a new culture and a new country, so coming to a military school where the student and teacher ratio is smaller. There's just rules and structure. I chose here.

Question 5: Think about your peers in high school. What percentage of them is enrolled in college?

Aaron: Probably, I'd go 75 percent of them.

Alice: I would say about 85 percent.

Allen: I went to a private school, and so probably like…. Actually, out of my graduating class, I can only think of one person that didn't go somewhere. So, 99 percent.

Ellen: Honestly, I'd have to say, I went to a catholic school, and, uhm, with my catholic school, definitely a lot went on to college. I'd say in the 90's. About 90 percent. High percent.

Eric: I really can't give you a number, but I would say that I know it's not a lot.

Gianna: I'd say maybe 75 percent of them are.

Harold: Probably 80 percent, not counting the ones that have dropped out.

Harry: I have friends that I graduated with – they're doing requirements to become paramedics and firefighters. They're getting their certificates. They have to attend a college, but it's not necessarily college classes, it's more of degrees of completion. I have another friend who always said he was going to go to college and always said that he was going to play on the football team and he's a babysitter now. I come from a really rural area, so most of it is farmland and they went into blue-collar jobs. But, so far as I know, out of my friends, I think there's me and one kid that went to the Air Force Academy and two of them that are at (home state) Tech. I think that's it.

Ingram: Back home, a high percentage of kids graduating from high school, they join the military. But less of them are in the community college and a portion of them are in different colleges spread throughout the United States. Kids from back home, they usually go to colleges close to family. My hometown has a high percentage rate of illiterate people. Others go find a job, so I am lucky to have come here.

Ingrid: I would say probably 70 or 80 percent because there was a good percentage of my high school that goes to some type of college.

Landon: Ninety-eight percent.

Lee: Maybe 15 percent.

Nate: I would say probably 75 percent of them went to college.

Omar: I'd actually say probably a good 85, 90 percent.

Orrin: Ninety-nine percent.

Robert: I'd probably say 45 percent.

Russell: That was about 500 people, so quite a few. But I would probably estimate around 75 percent. Now, granted, the 75 percent, they are enrolled, but how many will actually continue and get their degrees, I would probably estimate somewhere around half.

Ursula: I'd say 100 percent.

Question 6: Did you discuss your college plans with your peers and if so, what kinds of things did you talk about?

Aaron: Yes. What college we wanted to go to; what we were looking for in a college. What we wanted to do after college, all through college. Just the whole college experience.

Alice: We talked about going to different schools and we always wanted to stay with each other, our group and things. I really didn't like it – I really wanted to move far away from my friends and start a new life, kinda, in college. And then, I don't know, we really didn't talk that much about it. We might say, "hey, I'm going to school. Oh, wow, I'm thinking about applying to that school. And that's kinda how things worked out for each other, and that's as far as it went.

Allen: We talked about scholarships and we talked about locations and majors. But mine didn't apply as much because I was the only person going to the military so it was a different route.

Ellen: Yes, definitely. We all decided we wanted to go to college. As a matter of fact, now that I talk to them – they are enjoying it. They're having fun out there. Uhm, we, it was definitely a goal, definitely in our future plans. Everything from the looks of it to the dorm to the people that might go to the school. Uh, I guess, uh, whether or not it was a good school. Uh, the admissions. All of it. We considered all the factors. We talked about a lot of it.

Eric: Yes, me and my peers talked about college every day. Of course, the group that I hung around, you know, we were all educated, and we believed in studying and doing our work and going to college. That was our top priority. Because, my parents always said, you are who you hang around. So, I hung around the educated kids up at school, so we

talked about going to different schools, the process that it took for us to go to different schools and what we were going to do after that year. We talked about how, after high school, you know, how hard it would be to make that change, or transition, from high school to college. If we were going to be able to pass certain classes, you know, what would happen about parties and stuff like that.

Gianna: We all talked about where we were gonna go. Like, which schools we wanted to go to. What we were gonna do there. Most of us, we went to college for scholarships on athletics, so most of them went for athletic scholarships and all that. So they're going there for sports, and like, what we wanted to major in. We all discussed that, and I want to go pre-dentistry. And I know that's going to be a long time. But's that okay. But that's all we really discussed.

Harold: Not much. I had already decided to come here, but I kinda wanted to see what their opinion was. They didn't want me to leave, but I mean, they thought it was good for me. Cause I really wanted to come here, so.

Harry: They knew what I was doing. They never really thought much about it – I never really discussed it with them. They just knew that I was going to go to (American) and that's as far as it went. A lot of my friends wanted to stay home. I didn't. So, I wanted to go out and see more of (home state), see more of the nation, see more of the world. I was that adventurous one. Of all my friends, I'm also the only one who enlisted in the military. I have a couple of them that I'm talking to over the email and they're enlisting now. But initially, I was the only one that wanted to go anywhere. Everybody else just stayed where they're at.

Ingram: That's kind of funny, because the only thing that I talk about with my peers is playing football. I've been playing football my whole career in high school and I thought about going to the NFL. Every kid's dream is to go to the NFL. But, my dad, he was in the military for 28 years. He retired last year. The thing about it – if I took a football scholarship, if I got injured, my scholarship would be dismissed, as opposed to here in the military, I see an assured career. I've got benefits and stuff like that. And my peers, some of them who went on football scholarships are now going back and joining the Army, so I'm ahead of them right now.

Ingrid: That's tough, because I had a lot of different interests than my friends. Mine was mostly – I wanted to go to a military academy where it was structured. I'm from (home state). And a lot of my other friends wanted to go to a junior college at home or somewhere by the beach that would be more kicked back and enjoyable. So it was kinda tough.

Landon: Yeah, yeah. College selection, yes. All my friends go to, the wrestlers at my school, who I hung out with because I was on the wrestling team, go to (another college). Ah, the intellectual people from my school, some of them go to (another college), some others go to, some of them went to (another college). And, I'm one of the only people who went to a military college because my school's rather, like, you know, preppy, and,

like, very liberal, and so, uhm, I'm one of the very few that actually attend a military college. Most of them go to schools with partying reputations or highly intellectual reputations.

Lee: Yes, we did. We talked. The schools that we were going to, uhm, what we were going to major in, stuff like that.

Nate: Uh, yes we did. We certainly talked about the ROTC program. We talked about being in the military and how to become officers after completing the bachelor's degree in our different fields in medical, engineering, things like that.

Omar: Actually, I didn't really talk with a lot of them. I mean, I know that some of them were going to go to, like, (another college). Other than that, I really didn't talk to them about their college plans. And it wasn't til I came here and started emailing them that I found out where they actually went.

Orrin: Yes. We always talked about sports in college but also, like, where we wanted to go and what we wanted to do. Party schools. Talked about big schools.

Robert: Yes. Just like what we would want to major in, stuff like that. Or what we'd be playing as in athletics.

Russell: Yes, to a degree. But it was not ever an in-depth conversation. For the most part, the friends that I was really close to, we all worked together, working on ranches and what have you and a discussion would be something to the degree of I'm going to the veterinary department of this or I wanna go do this. And it would be which college would allow that. Something like that, but never anything more than that.

Ursula: When me and my peers discussed college, I told them the benefits of coming here and things like that.

Question 7: Did you consider your family's financial situation as you thought about where you would go to college?

Aaron: Yes. I narrowed it down to those three schools to see who would give me the most money. And, then, I didn't necessarily take the best program. I took whoever gave me the most money because my family, I have a large family, and asking them to pay for college is a little much.

Alice: Yes, a lot. It was one of those things, that, like, I knew my mom – she just got a new house – it was a lot of things that I put into consideration. And going to a higher priced school than my brother, and my brother had better grades than I did. And, kinda a lot of family stuff, too. My brother had better grades, and in school, I didn't do too well. And I kinda had to prove to my dad that I was going to survive college and get my grades, and show him that, hey, listen, you know I messed up through high school, but I can do better. It was just my mindset, my friends, whatever it is, I am showing you that I

can do better. And my dad gave me that chance when I decided to come to (Federal) and pull everything together.

Allen: My grades here are, well, I had a 4.0 last semester. In high school, I had a 2.9, and my scholarship options were a lot lower. My family, my dad could have paid for my college, but I don't think he was going to because of my performance in high school, I don't think he trusted me to do very well here. So, the Army. I've always wanted to go into the Army, but really, it came down to that they were going to pay for college. And, now, if I make good grades, my parents are more willing to put money in to help me out.

Ellen: Yes. Definitely. Definitely. Because, I mean, I don't have the money right now. It would have to be funded by loans or financial aid. If the school didn't offer financial aid, I wouldn't be able to go to this school.

Eric: My family's financial situation influenced my decision a lot. My parents, we're well off, but we're not rich. And, I mean, seriously, I don't believe a rich family could take on the course of paying for someone's college because it costs a lot of money. So, it was a hard decision, but it was a selfless decision. I kinda made it, kinda determining where my parents would be in paying for my college because I knew they would have to have some kind of say-so or money situation in it, but coming to (National), they haven't had to put a dime on my education. So, I believe that I made the best decision for them and me.

Gianna: I didn't really considered it because I went through the military way and I was, like, if I go through this route, it won't be such a burden on them to pay for me, so I went through that way to kinda make it easier for everyone.

Harold: I did. They didn't want me to, but I did. I mean, we're good, and I got a scholarship to go here and that really helped out a lot. So this place was great for that, too. They gave me a pretty good scholarship.

Harry: I knew that my family could not pay for me to go to college. Uhmm, my parents are divorced. My dad lives in Maryland and my mom is a single mother with three children. Uhm, I held a job from when I was sixteen til the time that I graduated, and I knew that I had to pay for my college. There's no way that my family could have paid for my college – no way, shape or form. So, I am on my own.

Ingram: I come from a family of six kids, and the main reason why I chose a military academy was the ROTC scholarship – where the Army paid for everything. I didn't want to put a lot of burden on my parents to pay for my education and to pay for my little siblings education. So I chose the scholarship here where everything's paid for. And if I graduate, I'll help pay for my little siblings – their college education.

Ingrid: Yes, I did consider financial situation mostly because my parents work a lot and I didn't think it was fair for them to have to put me through school so I wanted to go

somewhere where I could get the most financial aid such as scholarships and that was another good choice why (National) was important.

Landon: Yes, definitely. I, first. First my mom pressured me into doing the ROTC program. I tried it, and uhm, I qualified for the scholarship, but I didn't take it because I soon realized that there was no way that I would be able to do a military kind of service because I like to do things my own way, and there's no way I could possibly conform to a system that I considered to be sometimes irrational.

Lee: Yes, because, my brother, he's in college right now, and he actually got a full scholarship to (another college). So me getting a scholarship, too, also helps. I still got little brothers and sisters who probably will also want to go to college.

Nate: Not at all. Not at all.

Omar: I really didn't think too much about it because they were going to pay for it, and if they couldn't pay for it, my grandpa put away a lot of money for me to go to college before he died. And so, I had quite a lot of money coming in on me to be able to go wherever I wanted.

Orrin: Yes, a little bit. Not so much 'cause this school's really expensive. So, not so much.

Robert: Yes, well, we really wouldn't be able to pay for college, like, if we didn't have scholarships. I went to where, like, everything would be paid for and stuff.

Russell: Actually, that was a very interesting story because to be perfectly honest with you, I had a trust fund set up for that purpose and upon my graduation from high school, I made the decision that I wanted to support my own way through college and not rely on anybody else. So, I got control of it upon graduation and I signed it back over to my parents so it wasn't an option, but I chose a different route.

Ursula: Yes, money was not a factor with my family. But, turning 18, 19, I wanted more independence. And, coming to a military school, it was less money, obviously. So it helped them out, and they appreciated that, too.

Question 8: Did you consider your high school grade point average and/or your college entrance examination scores as you thought about where you would go to college?

Aaron: I thought they were too low. I, uhm, thought they all needed to be higher to get to where I, just to be successful. I wanted them to be higher. So, yes, I considered them.

Alice: In the beginning, yes, it was, I was really nervous because I didn't have a great SAT score. I took the ACT. It was okay but it still wasn't enough for the college that I dreamed of going to like (another college) and be part of the music program. But my

teacher, I had a teacher who sat down with me and did a resume, and she really guided me through my whole process. She's like, listen, you know, I know you're a very smart person, very talented child. She's like, you could use your music. Don't let anybody tell you that music can't take you far. And, I really listened to her. And music did take me far. It gave me a lot of opportunities for different colleges.

Allen: My high school GPA was obviously not the best, and mostly, it got better. It was my freshman year that was terrible, and obviously, that took out several options. I looked at several schools and their GPA requirements were too high for me. But when I was looking at the military colleges, I was high enough for all the military colleges and it seemed like I had decent scores to get into this kind of school.

Ellen: Yes, definitely, because college entrance exams are, like, a major part. SATs, ACTs, they definitely play a major role. Some colleges consider the SAT to be more important when choosing whether or not to go there – when to pick which students to go there. Others, they take grades over the scores, but, definitely, it is a huge factor.

Eric: Yes, I did. Considering that I had a very good GPA and a good ACT score, I applied to some of the top schools because I felt like I was a competitive student. And I did get into all seven schools. So, yes, I pretty much made sure that I knew the ACT and GPA to get into some schools. I didn't go to a school that was out of my league. I didn't believe any school was out of my league because I did my best in high school to make sure that I could go to any school that I wanted to when I got out.

Gianna: My grade point average and my ACT, like, weren't the best, but it was good enough to get two places, so, like, coming here I figured, since I was already in the military, I could come here and learn even more about it, because I know about it, but I don't really know a lot about it. So I was like, military academy, alright, I'm already in the military so let me learn more while I can and all my education at the same time.

Harold: I did, but, I didn't really apply anywhere. It was like I could have gotten into some schools, some good schools, you know. Maybe not like Ivy League schools, or anything like that, but I mean some good schools. But, you know, I just wanted to come here, which is a good school, too.

Harry: Yes, I know that I had an okay GPA; I didn't graduate at the top of my class, but I didn't graduate at the bottom of my class. I was exactly fifty percent in my class graduates. I knew that I wasn't going to go to (another college) or any of those prestigious schools. And, I knew that the area that I was from primarily focused on agriculture foundations and not academic foundations, so I needed a place to build an academic foundation before I went anywhere else and this school, uhm, offered those programs to me that I can actually go to.

Ingram: Hmm, I scored high on the SAT and I had a high grade point average, but the only thing that was on my mind was either football or the military. I didn't really think about my GPA.

Ingrid: Yes. I wasn't a very strong student in high school mostly because I didn't apply myself so I knew that I needed to go to a college that would be more academically structured and also a smaller campus helps because you're, you have more time to get involved with the teachers and interact so I think that coming to a smaller campus with smaller classes makes you more successful. So a military academy helps give you that little bit of discipline that you need to figure out that it is important to study and not to play so many sports.

Landon: Yes. Uhm, when I was talking with the colleges and talking with my counselor, they told us that colleges were starting to look more toward GPA and they always looked really high on your GPA but less on your SAT scores. It's been known that it's been unreliable in balancing people from different schools. So, uhm, activities, extracurricular activities, like all that played a large part when applying for colleges. So that's what we really worked toward. We discussed that a lot. When I was thinking about (another school), I was a little concerned when I heard that they raised their GPA a little bit higher, but, uhm, not as much because my GPA was on the border, so I figured that extracurriculars and all that would cover up for that. But I noticed that my SAT was rather low. I only broke, like, a thousand. I'm just not good at those type tests. So, I figured, okay, I'll go to, if I don't get into (another school) now, I'll get my semesters in college to show the colleges that I can do the work, and I'll transfer. So that's how it played into when I didn't get accepted into (another college), I looked at this as a school where I could show what I have in me to that school.

Lee: Yes, I did. I tried to go to (another college), but I don't think I had the ACT score.

Nate: Yeah, definitely. You know, I always thought that the higher your GPA, the higher your SAT scores would get you into the college that you wanted. Basically, since I got the scores that I got. They weren't the best, but they were average. Because of that, I didn't get into the top schools or something like that, but I was able to get into (National). So that was a positive thing, I think.

Omar: I did, because I didn't do so good in high school, and there's a lot of colleges that didn't like that at all and kinda looked down on that and that's why I kinda went to a community college. Because I was going to go to (another college) first, but they didn't like the grades that I had so I went to a community college.

Orrin: Yes, some.

Robert: No.

Russell: Not really because my ACT scores were high enough so that I could get into anything in (home state), and my grade point average was a 3.6, so it was adequate to get scholarships.

Ursula: Yes, I tried very hard in high school and got a decent GPA and my SAT score was pretty high, so that opened up a lot more options for me.

Question 9: Was there a significant experience that influenced your decision to attend a military junior college? If yes, describe the experience.

Aaron: The fact that it was a military school was just kind of a bi-product of the scholarship that I was offered. I was offered a full-ride to come here, and I knew I could hack it at a military school, it wasn't going to be that tough, if I just put my mind to it.

Alice: Yes, it was little things, like I would always go out and I didn't really have, like, my own restriction on myself. I really didn't know how to sit down and say, "I've got to do this." Have a mindset to do what I have to do. And, I was always familiar with the military, and my dad was, like, I want you to go in the military and have a career afterwards. And he always wanted my education. And, it was, like, how can I have both of these? And, it was like, I got the letter. I can't go on leave all the time, and if I have to be here, I am going to study. So it was kind of funny how everything has fallen into place and how I've dealt with grades and how, like, I have a big test tomorrow, so I'm not gonna go on leave, I'll stay here and study.

Allen: I wouldn't say so, because I have always wanted to join the military, so what it came down to was picking the best option, and a military junior college ended up being the best option.

Ellen: The thing is, I wasn't the best student in high school. I mean, not like, I wasn't bad or anything, I just, my focus, I was never able to focus a lot. I didn't have much motivation when it came to doing work. I came home one day, and I got a letter in the mail from (Federal), and it talked about discipline, especially, and how, uhm, it pretty much prepared you for college. It gets your grades up, you know, it gets you your first choice, second choice, third choices of colleges, and I just thought it was a great idea. I thought it was perfect for me, especially. Because, I, honestly at this point, I'd probably be going to community college if it wasn't for this. I'd probably, uhm, I'd honestly, I definitely needed a place like this to bring me back, to bring my grades up, bring me closer to where I want to be and to the school I want to go to.

Eric: Again, with my parents' financial situation, I actually had to grow up and stop living in a fantasy and come to reality and say that I don't want my family to be in debt, so what would be the best school for me to go to, financially, right now. So I made a very financial situation, which was a grown-up decision, my dad said, and I used that in order to come to a military academy and the military academy's going to pay for my next school. So, it kinda keeps me and my family out of debt.

Gianna: I don't know. I always, like, I always, when I saw different military academies, they always looked so, they always looked sharp and they looked like they were high-speed. They always looked like that, and I was, like, you know what, I want to do that. Looked fun. They enjoyed what they were doing. So I was, like, I want to go there. I

want to see what they do, and, like, most of them were disciplined. And I was, like, I'm pretty sure I need some discipline. So, I came here and even though, like, it's different than how you see it, it's kinda still the same. Just some people take it in more than others. So that, and the uniforms.

Harold: Nothing specific. Well, you know talking to, I met some people in the military, and my dad, like I said. Uhmm, I just thought I would like to try it out to see if I really want to do the military thing, and now, I do.

Harry: I was enrolled in JROTC for four years and I was Commander of the Armed Drill Team and I brought my team here to a drill meet they hold every October. And, that's where I first found the school. Everybody was polite; everything was clean. Uhm, it was just different. And, it was something that I liked.

Ingram: As I said before, ma'am, my dad was in the military, and ever since I was little, I've been looking up to my dad. If I didn't go to a military academy right now, I would have been enlisted in the Army. But my dad, he wanted me to go a different route. He didn't want me to take the route that he took as an enlisted soldier. He wanted me to go higher, aim higher, so he wanted me to become a military officer. That's the main reason why I came here.

Ingrid: Yes, when I came for my campus visit, I stayed in the female barracks, and I saw, like, how the high school females are more, really less disciplined and I like leadership so I wanted to come here and be their commander and help straighten them out some day. And so, since I've attended (National), I met that goal. And, the other thing, that made me really choose to come to a junior college, military, was the fact that you can commission in two years over four so it's a jumpstart to your career, which I think is a really neat experience.

Landon: I went to LTC with the ROTC Department and it's like a really, it kinda showed me a new part of me cause it was, like, boot camp, kinda. So, like, it showed me that I have a lot more in me than I thought I did. So, I figured, you know, if the school's kinda like this, then maybe it'd be really good for me, but uhm. So, I came here, and there's some things I do like about this school because it does discipline you, but it doesn't really offer me what I need to go into my career. So that's why I'm transferring out. But, LTC was definitely an experience that kinda drew me toward the school.

Lee: Yes, living with my father, who's military, and my brother, made me want to join the military. I want to become a pilot. What better way to do it than to join the military?

Nate: Yes, definitely. I always admired my instructors back in high school because they were in the military. I actually don't have any family in the military but it was mostly outside people and certainly my peers as well. You know, I really wanted to be in the military, especially with the JROTC program.

Omar: Yes. Like, my dad, is a Lieutenant Colonel in the Army and works with a lot of people that graduated from here and a lot of them told him that this would be a great school for me to go to and I'd probably do really good here. Then I decided to go ahead and give it a try and see what would happen.

Orrin: Most of my friends, well, a lot of them, actually, well, not a lot of kids in my school go to the military or go to military colleges but, like, somehow we all, all the kids who do are friends, so most of my friends, we've been talking about go into the military since we were younger. For a while, we've always known that we wanted to join. So I've always known that I was going to a military school and it would help me in the future.

Robert: No, not really. Just baseball, really.

Russell: I went, my junior year, I had a couple of instances where I was not in trouble but where I was involved with the police. There were people getting in trouble and what have you, and I ended up volunteering with the local police force, doing various things. It started with filing papers and it got all the way up to drug operations at our high school. My commanding officer there, he actually did the exact same thing that I am doing here, and I sat down one day and talked to him about it. Well, there is another option for you to go, and that's where I found out what this school has to offer other than just driving down the road and seeing it.

Ursula: It's kind of embarrassing to say, but in (foreign country), there's a lot of negative views on the American military. There's a lot of incidents where GIs, you know, would do things and cause not only a negative impact on the American military but also on the country. I disagree with that. I wanted to come to a military college, and I wanted to do ROTC and become an Army officer, not just because I wanted to do that, but I wanted to go back home and prove that America has not such a bad image. It's pretty positive.

APPENDIX K

VERBATIM PARENT ANSWERS TO INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Question 1: When did your child first begin to think about going to college?

Aaron's Parent: Junior high school.

Alice's Parent: She didn't really talk about it until she finished high school.

Allen's Parent: Sophomore year. We all talked about college because his grades weren't that good, and we were trying to get him to think ahead. We began to have those conversations.

Ellen's Parent: Sophomore year of high school.

Gianna's Parent: Junior or senior year in high school.

Ingrid's Parent: Junior year.

Landon's Parent: Eighth grade.

Lee's Parent: High school – I know that he was talking about it in high school, because we just really talked about that's where you were going.

Nate's Parent: That was when he was in (foreign country), when he was eight or nine years old. We always wanted him to go to college.

Omar's Parent: Sophomore year.

Russell's Parent: High school.

Question 2: Did you influence your child's decision to attend a military junior college?

Aaron's Parent: No, he always wanted to do something military-wise like flying or something.

Alice's Parent: No, she is the one that came up with the idea.

Allen's Parent: No, actually he did the research and introduced (National) to us.

Ellen's Parent: No, it was pretty much her. She came up and told us that she was interested in this college. I supported her sister, and I supported her – that's the way I always do.

Gianna's Parent: No.

Ingrid's Parent: No.

Landon's Parent: "Yes, it is my dream for him to become a JAG officer.

Lee's Parent: No.

Nate's Parent: Yes. My dad was a military person back in (foreign country), even though I wasn't. He liked the Army here. He wanted to become part of the Army here, and I said I support you.

Omar's Parent: Yes, I basically arranged it for him.

Russell's Parent: No.

Question 3: Was there another person who influenced your child's decision to attend a military junior college?

Aaron's Parent: His golf coach.

Alice's Parent: No.

Allen's Parent: Next door neighbor. (Allen) was interested in the military and our next door neighbor was a retired military recruiter. And, so, they began to have a casual conversation. I think that's how (Allen) first found out about (National).

Ellen's Parent: Not sure. Maybe somebody at her high school.

Gianna's Parent: No.

Ingrid's Parent: No.

Landon's Parent: My great grandfather was an officer during World War I. My father was in the Army. And in (foreign country) where we came from, it was an honor to be in the military.

Lee's Parent: The college called us up.

Nate's Parent: Grandfather.

Omar's Parent: Yes, my wife.

Russell's Parent: A college fair. As far as I know, I guess, when he was a senior in high school, they had different people from different colleges at an activity to introduce them to different colleges, and that's probably where he learned the most.

Question 4: Was the family's financial situation a consideration in the college choice process, and if so, how did it influence your child's choice to attend a military junior college?

Aaron's Parent: No.

Alice's Parent: Yes, I had to think about how much the college was going to cost.

Allen's Parent: No, because he didn't have the grades to go to an Ivy League school, so it wouldn't have come up at any of the schools that he would have been choosing from.

Ellen's Parent: Yes, of course. Something like that always is. We spoke about it and figured out a way around it.

Gianna's Parent: No, she had a grant or scholarship.

Ingrid's Parent: Yes, (National) offered a scholarship.

Landon's Parent: No answer.

Lee's Parent: Yes, it was the only one that offered a full academic scholarship without qualifying for.

Nate's Parent: Yes, that was part of it. They offered him a scholarship. When he went to high school, I asked him if he would like to be part of the International Baccalaureate Program. And even though he wanted to go to a different high school, I told him how important it was to go to this high school as it was the best in the county. He said that he would like to join the JROTC program, and he joined his freshman year.

Omar's Parent: No. (American) was definitely the school that he was going to. I had the money set aside to send him to college.

Russell's Parent: Yes, it was because he needed to find somebody to help pay for college.

Question 5: Was there a significant experience in your child's life that influenced his or her decision to attend a military junior college?

Aaron's Parent: Yes, a couple of things. He spoke to a couple of family friends that were military and flew, as well as golf. He ended up going on a golf scholarship.

Alice's Parent: Yes, she thought she needed discipline.

Allen's Parent: I don't know that there was a single event. He had been interested in the military for a long time. It fits him real well. Once he began to research what we thought was a good fit for him, we encouraged him, and it's turned out to be a good fit.

Ellen's Parent: No, I really wish I knew that, but it was just something that she came to us, and we just supported her.

Gianna's Parent: ROTC. She liked ROTC.

Ingrid's Parent: No. I was in the military, and she was born. I mean, she was just born on the military base. We moved off when she was a couple of months old. She was never on a base after that, but I think the fact that she was born at Fort (base) may have had a little mystique for her.

Landon's Parent: His grandfather was talking about it, also.

Lee's Parent: Yes, his dad is retired from the Marine Corps.

Nate's Parent: No.

Omar's Parent: Yes, my son has some learning difficulties. He had brain cysts removed when he was nine years old. He wants to go into the Army, but he does not do well on tests. He did okay the first time that he took the ASVAB, but he wanted to do something different so he took it again and did not do well.

Russell's Parent: No.

Question 6: Were you aware of any communication between the military college and your child?

Aaron's Parent: Yes

Alice's Parent: No answer.

Allen's Parent: He went online and filled out a form that requested information, and they followed up pretty quickly.

Ellen's Parent: Yes, email and phone.

Gianna's Parent: Yes, they sent her mail, and I think they came to the school and talked to her.

Ingrid's Parent: Yes, only after she wanted to go there.

Landon's Parent: I don't know.

Lee's Parent: Yes, they called him on the phone.

Nate's Parent: Yes.

Omar's Parent: No. I'm an Army officer and I know the (American) program.

Russell's Parent: No.

Question 7: How did that communication influence your child's decision to attend a military junior college?

Aaron's Parent: It influenced him. It was after his golf coach contacted the school.

Alice's Parent: No answer.

Allen's Parent: Yes, I'm sure that it did, because he looked at several.

Ellen's Parent: It definitely influenced her.

Gianna's Parent: Possibly influenced her.

Ingrid's Parent: We went out to (state) before she went to school. She looked at the website and received mail.

Landon's Parent: No answer.

Lee's Parent: It influenced him. They called him and offered him a scholarship. We were very impressed with them.

Nate's Parent: In May or June of his senior year, he received something from (National). I know that he was applying to different academies at that time. I know that one of them was West Point. I have a sister working there as a teacher, so I talked to her. She said that she would be glad to help him if he wanted to come and visit. So he went up and stayed for a week and loved it. That was his junior year, and he began applying to the Academies.

Omar's Parent: No answer.

Russell's Parent: No answer.

Question 8: What is the highest level of education of the student's mother?

Aaron's Parent: Bachelor's degree.

Alice's Parent: High school diploma.

Allen's Parent: Bachelor's degree.

Ellen's Parent: Some high school.

Gianna's Parent: Some college.

Ingrid's Parent: Bachelor's degree.

Landon's Parent: College graduate.

Lee's Parent: One year of college.

Nate's Parent: Associate's degree issued in (foreign country).

Omar's Parent: Bachelor's degree.

Russell's Parent: College graduate.

Question 9: What is the highest level of education of the student's father?

Aaron's Parent: Bachelor's degree.

Alice's Parent: Two years of college.

Allen's Parent: Ph.D

Ellen's Parent: Some high school.

Gianna's Parent: High school.

Ingrid's Parent: High school diploma.

Landon's Parent: College graduate.

Lee's Parent: Associate's degree.

Nate's Parent: Bachelor's degree in economics and associate degree in business administration and one in international trade, all issued in (foreign country.)

Omar's Parent: Master's degree – two.

Russell's Parent: College graduate.

Question 10: What is the occupation of the mother?

Aaron's Parent: Self-employed as a travel agent.

Alice's Parent: Postal service.

Allen's Parent: Second grade teacher.

Ellen's Parent: Self-employed in web design.

Gianna's Parent: School bus driver.

Ingrid's Parent: Accountant.

Landon's Parent: Not employed. Disabled. Have had cancer and lost a kidney. But I'm very involved in the community. We started a charitable, non-profit organization to help people with a disability.

Lee's Parent: Senior staff accountant.

Nate's Parent: Publix and assisted living.

Omar's Parent: Government auditor.

Russell's Parent: Self employed with husband in own business.

Question 11: What is the employment of the father?

Aaron's Parent: Route manager for UPS.

Alice's Parent: Transportation.

Allen's Parent: Senior Pastor.

Ellen's Parent: No answer.

Gianna's Parent: Mail service.

Ingrid's Parent: Switch Technician

Landon's Parent: Electrician and president of our non-profit organization.

Lee's Parent: School teacher.

Nate's Parent: Bus driver for County Department of Transportation.

Omar's Parent: Colonel in the Army.

Russell's Parent: Self employed with wife in own business.

Question 12: Did the student's mother serve in the military?

Aaron's Parent: No.

Alice's Parent: No.

Allen's Parent: No.

Ellen's Parent: No.

Gianna's Parent: No.

Ingrid's Parent: No.

Landon's Parent: No.

Lee's Parent: No.

Nate's Parent: No.

Omar's Parent: No.

Russell's Parent: No.

Question 13: Did the student's father serve in the military?

Aaron's Parent: Yes, Army.

Alice's Parent: Yes, Army, six years.

Allen's Parent: No.

Ellen's Parent: No
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Gianna's Parent: Yes, Army.

Ingrid's Parent: Yes, Army.

Landon's Parent: No.

Lee's Parent: Retired Sergeant Major.

Nate's Parent: No.

Omar's Parent: Yes.

Russell's Parent: No.

Question 14: Would you say that the total annual household income is less than $25,000; $25,000 to $50,000; $50,001 to $75,000, or over $75,000?

Aaron's Parent: Over $75,000.

Alice's Parent: Over $75,000.

Allen's Parent: Over $75,000.
Ellen's Parent: $25,000 to $50,000.

Gianna's Parent: Less than $25,000.

Ingrid's Parent: Over $75,000.

Landon's Parent: $50,001 to $75,000.

Lee's Parent: Over $75,000.

Nate's Parent: $50,001 to $75,000.

Omar's Parent: Over $75,000.

Russell's Parent: $50,001 to $75,000.