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## Describing the Experiences of Peer Tutors: A Phenomenological Study of Undergraduate Students at Federal Service Academies

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FEDERAL SERVICE ACADEMIES

by

Drew John Van Dam, Jr.

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of undergraduate students who served as peer tutors (PT) at federal service academies. The following research question provided the framework for this study: How do undergraduate students describe their peer tutoring experiences in federal service academies? Further, I used subquestions in order for participants to fully describe the phenomenon. These included: What were participants' expectations for being a PT prior to the start of this experience? In what ways were participant expectations met or not met during the peer tutoring experience? What expected and unexpected outcomes were realized by participants during this experience? How do participants describe their short-lived and enduring influences of their peer tutoring experience? Transition theory served as the theoretical framework as it postulates how one transitions during a change in one's assumptive world. I collected data by seeking voluntary participation through purposeful sampling procedures including both criterion and intensity types. Identified participants recorded information pertinent to their experience through the use of journaling. Participants underwent individual interviews and participated in a focus group in order to describe their experiences. Data were analyzed using the transcendental phenomenological reduction process. Overall, participants described their need to help others, in order to do so, participants described steps they took to ensure they were successful and in doing so, they described the feeling that this role would continue beyond their time at their respective academies. Limitations, implications, and suggestions for further research are also addressed.

*Keywords:* peer tutor, service academy, military education, transition theory, academic support, transcendental phenomenology.

## Dedication

Over the course of my time at Liberty University, I learned a great deal from the professors and peers I went through the classes with. However, I learned more about myself as a man than I have ever learned during the previous years of my life. Family comes first, regardless of what I want to do. I cannot begin to thank my wife, Stacy, enough. During this experience I've been difficult, a challenge, short at times, and because of that, I have had to learn to be a better husband. This dissertation could only have been completed with your help, love, and support. I only hope that the personal lessons I've learned going through classes as well as writing this will help me continue to become a better husband moving forward.

To my children, God gave me the best gifts he could possibly give me, and I hope that I am providing you an example of what teamwork, dedication, and hard work can accomplish. Colby and Nathan, my whole being has been made better by your involvement in my life. There were times you were asked to "hang on a second" which turned into 5, 10, 30 minutes—for this, I apologize. I tried my best to work when you were either asleep or at school, and I know that wasn't always done to the best of my ability. I hope that I provide you with half as much joy as you've given me, and that by trying to be a good example you may have learned something from my experience. I truly believe that you are both exceptional in every way, that you will do whatever it is you want to do, and that you'll do it to the best of your abilities.

I recognize my limitations and faults, and I understand that we are not perfect as individuals. As a family, I could not ask for more, we are perfect and I'm a better person because of us. I dedicate this paper to you guys.

## Acknowledgments

Hard work seems to go hand in hand with our family. I'd like to start out by thanking my Uncle Jim, my brother Kevin, and my mother Kathy, who have driven this lesson home to the nth degree. I'll never forget my brother working his tail off in the basement in high school, or at the dining room table studying for his finance tests. I'll never forget the sound of the typewriter clacking away as both he and I slept in our beds as my mother would work into the late hours of the night. I'll never forget the hours Jim put into getting ahead at work. These lessons helped me become the professional I am today; further, they helped me find my wife, who fits right in with all of us. I know I can depend on you all for anything and that when needed, you'll be there without questions asked. I hope that you know I'll always be there for you all.

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lead or for Dan prodding me along. Dr. Fielitz, you've read multiple papers for me, have been a mentor in the academic and physical realms, and been an amazing friend at the same time, I'm glad there's a couch in your office with my name on it!

To Will, Grandma, Grandpa, Crazy Grandma, Pop-Pop Dave, and Sheila—thank you for always pushing me and providing me of memories of how proud you were of me and my family. I know each of you are in Heaven smiling down, and I miss you all incredibly.

To Dad, whenever I need your help, you're there. You've shown me the gift of helping others in need without question. You're so proud of me and I'll never forget that, thank you.

I never thought I'd see "the light at the end of the tunnel," but it is now here. I could not have written this paper without the love and support I've been shown from so many friends and family members. For those not mentioned, for actions seen and not seen that facilitated my personal achievement, I am so humbled and grateful, as I would not be here without you.

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### **List of Abbreviations**

The following is a list of abbreviations found within this dissertation.

College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA)

Center for Army Profession and Ethic (CAPE)

Center for Enhanced Performance (CEP)

Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS)

Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC)

United States Air Force Academy (USAFA)

United States Coast Guard Academy (USCGA)

United States Merchant Marine Academy (USMMA)

United States Military Academy at West Point (USMA)

United States Naval Academy (USNA)

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological research was to describe the experiences of undergraduate students who served as peer tutors (PT) at federal service academies. In the initial chapter of this qualitative dissertation, I will provide the reader with a comprehensive background of the problem that I posed. I endeavored to answer proposed questions regarding the description of these select students at higher educational service academies. Participants' answers to the planned questions highlighted their descriptions of their experiences as being a PT at a service academy, which has not previously been studied. Further, I will describe the structure of the research plan, detail my intentions for conducting the study, including philosophical assumptions that I used to frame the inquiries made. In addition, I will identify the significance of the study, provide definitions for commonly utilized terms, and conclude the chapter with a summary that synthesizes the state of current knowledge on this topic.

### **Background**

Efforts by colleges and universities to provide academic support to their students has yielded a number of programs which assist a variety of students in their efforts to succeed in the classroom (Banbel & Chen, 2014; Clarence, 2016; Clark & May, 2015; Taylor, Krajic Kachur, Hofhansl, & Marz, 2014). Identified efforts by institutions of higher education include supplemental instruction, peer teaching, collaborative learning, cooperative learning, establishing learning communities and a wide range of peer tutoring strategies (Arendale, 2015; 2016). Peer tutoring describes when an individual from a similar social group assists another member of the same social group in teaching and

learning (Topping, 1996). Learning from how former PTs describe their experiences within the setting of a federal service academy through the lens of Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory will hopefully build upon previous literature concerning peer tutoring as transitioning to college life as well as other roles an individual takes on during the college experience would affect a person to some degree (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002).

Learning from experienced PTs at federal service academies may provide valuable information to service academies, civilian institutions with Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) programs, as well as colleges and universities that actively seek veterans as members of their student body. The mission of the federal service academies can be synthesized into one general statement, to educate and train future leaders so that graduates can commission as officers into the desired branch (USAFA, 2018a; USCGA, 2018a; USMA, 2018a; USMMA, 2018a; USNA, 2018a). In order to accomplish this, service academies promote academic excellence, and much like civilian institutions of higher education, academic support is available to students seeking help in overcoming learning obstacles. One specific program that each of the five service academies relies on is a peer tutoring program.

### **Historical Context**

In order to fully understand the importance of peer tutoring in colleges and universities, it is critical to present information alluding to the history of how peer tutoring not only started but grew into the nationwide program it is today. While a great deal of information regarding peer tutoring is contemporary, the role of tutoring has its roots in early education. Since the start of higher education in America, college administrators have recognized that tutoring serves a purpose. Sheets (2012) reported

that “tutoring has been provided in some form since Harvard opened its doors in 1636 as America’s first college” (p. 3). According to Sheets (2012), “Until the 1960s, specific tutoring content and circumstances were poorly documented” (p. 3). This is important to note as it relates to a lack of historical content regarding specific tutoring platforms. A link can be drawn to the monitorial system that Lancaster and Bell utilized in the early 19th century, when older students were required to instruct younger students. In this instance, students provided instructional support during the academic day instead of trained teachers. This process of passing knowledge from one person to another within the same or similar social standing is very much like the peer tutoring model of today (Mesquita, 2012; Nisbet, Haw, & Fletcher, 2014; Rayman, 1981).

Tutoring services were reported to be available on many campuses starting in the 1960’s and typically were for those identified as having low family income, or students considered underprepared for college which included women and students of color (Maxwell, 1997). In response to the success of tutoring programs at that time, California State University-Long Beach began a formalized system called a Learning Assistance Support System model, which was designed to help all students identified by institutions as being important to them. This opened the way for all students, regardless of classification or status, to be able to receive academic support should they want it (Sheets, 2012).

The idea of helping students has blossomed into the development of a number of support services that continues to be studied today. This is witnessed with the establishment of the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS), founded in 1979. The CAS has responded to the needs of students and has

created credible guidelines “designed to lead to a host of quality programs and services” (CAS, 2018, para. 1). CAS has approximately 41-member organizations including ACUI (formerly known as the Association of College Unions-International), the American College Counseling Association (ACCA), and the College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA). Each member organization is devoted to improving student life on college and university campuses. Higher educational administrators seeking to develop programs can find a number of items designed by each member organization that focuses on a desired need. One example is the CRLA (2018), which is a “group of student-oriented professionals active in the fields of reading, learning assistance, developmental education, tutoring, and mentoring at the college/adult level” (para. 1).

New students in higher education often struggle academically. This struggle is typically attributed to either a lack of being prepared for the academic rigor (Arendale, 2015; Topping, 1996), challenges posed by institutions themselves that complicate learning such as classroom size (Hornsby & Osman, 2014; Stigmar, 2016), or a variety of characteristics personal to the individual such as participating in athletics or demographic and psychological background (Arco-Tirado, Fernandez-Martin, & Fernandez-Balboa, 2011; Arco-Tirado, Fernandez-Martin, Heilborn, & Lopez, 2005; Arendale, 2015; Banbel & Chen, 2014; Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989).

The efficacy of tutoring has been evident for quite some time, yet the idea of ones’ peers leading them in a tutoring session or sessions seems to be relatively new and falls under the umbrella of peer-assisted learning (PAL; Berghmans, Neckebroeck, Dochy, & Struyven, 2013). PAL is defined as “the development of knowledge and skill through active help and support among status equals or matched companions” (Topping,

1996). Further, “PAL appears to create a safe learning environment with lower thresholds, as such stimulating students’ self-confidence and lowering their anxiety” (Berghmans et al., 2013, p. 704). Tinto (2004) referred to a number of programs that institutions can provide to enhance retention, some of which included programs that fall under the PAL umbrella. One of the listed programs is peer advising. In response to these challenges, colleges and universities have attempted to provide academic support in an effort to provide students with additional resources that facilitate learning. Supplemental instruction, peer-assisted learning, and cooperative learning, along with peer tutoring, are only a few of the many programs currently found on campuses throughout the nation (Arendale, 2016).

As these programs grew, however, greater intrigue has developed concerning how tutors were trained to become tutors, as well as whether tutoring actually helps students. Of great interest to peer tutoring administrators is the study conducted by Boylan, Bliss, and Bonham (1997), who found no link between tutoring and student grade point average (GPA) or retention, yet discovered that tutoring programs which held training for tutors did have a positive impact on learning, concluding that tutor training was the best indicator of a successful tutor program.

As the number of students in secondary education continues to rise, the need to address challenges posed to students learning will also continue. Administrators working with undergraduate armed forces students who have left the service will benefit from this study by reading the descriptions from those currently learning in service academy higher educational institutions. Further, current and future service academy students will also learn from their peers who have transitioned through the experience of being a PT.

Descriptions from the experiences of those who have transitioned into, through, and out of the role of PT would not only aid service academy students, but PT program administrators at civilian institutions would also be afforded information not previously provided, which can be used to recruit students who have served in the armed forces. This would provide other veteran students with an opportunity to work with PTs who understand what they may be going through personally or academically, which other civilian peer tutors would not be fully able to grasp.

### **Social Implications**

Each site has a peer tutoring program available to students seeking to improve academically. Students attending service academies are faced with challenges that civilian students may not be faced with (Elliot, Gonzalez, & Larsen, 2011; Smith, Vilhauer, & Chafos, 2017) due to multiple factors including relying on a chain of command and dealing with members of a different rank (Wilson, Smith, Lee, & Stevenson, 2013). Young adults attending service academies do so at no cost, however, in most cases, they are obligated to serve as a commissioned officer in the armed forces for a term no less than five years within their respective service. Further, students excelling at these academies will commission to a branch, or section of the armed forces, and post (i.e., location) of their choosing, while those falling behind academically may not be able to have a choice, which leads to an increased competitiveness amongst the student body. Students seeking to stay competitive may choose to take on the role of tutee and rely on a PT to help stay competitive within their class year; however, this has not been previously identified in the literature.

### **Theoretical Context**

In this study, I sought to expand the body of knowledge regarding transition theory by providing a voice for armed forces students serving as PTs as they move in, move through, and move out of being a PT in the described setting (Schlossberg, 1981). Transition theory (Schlossberg, 1981) was originally used for business purposes, however, it has since been applied in areas outside business including personal adult life experiences (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012), as well as events and non-events as perceived by adults (Schlossberg, 2011). Further, this theory has been linked to how individuals take on new roles within their personal surroundings, such as being a PT in a college or university (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002). I aimed to add to the literature on transition theory, specifically in the context of undergraduate PTs in the federal service academy setting and provide context as to how they move into, through, and out of this role. This may prove to be beneficial to their future career as an officer in their desired branch of service.

### **Situation to Self**

My desire to conduct this research study stemmed from my drive to help others in need. As a former athletic trainer and current faculty member at one of the federal service academies within this study, I constantly strive to help others pursue excellence. To me, potential undergraduate PTs recognize their abilities and wish to share them with their peers. This selfless service is one of the many aspects that each academy strives to instill in their graduates. Studying former undergraduate PTs at federal service academies, specifically, how they transition into, through, and out of this role was an idea that arose due to the nature of who I am and the value I place on helping others.

Upon finding a gap in the literature, I was able to find historical information relating to higher educational systems that promote academic excellence and provide programs that help sustain that excellence. Providing former undergraduate PTs a venue to elaborate on their time spent as a facilitator in the learning process is of extreme interest to me, especially as they described how they moved into, through, and out of their peer tutoring role. Further, I have always been driven by a passion to lead others. These specific academies seek to create leaders within the armed forces. Undergraduate PTs seeking to help facilitate the learning of others could potentially create a leadership style that differs from their own peers in the PT community.

The concept of how individuals perceive what it is to be as well as to understand that various realities exist regarding the phenomenon being studied is referred to as ontology (Van Manen, 1997). The constructivist approach requires valuing all statements regarding the experience from each individual who undergoes the experience (Patton, 2015). On a personal note, my understanding of people is that each person has experienced their own set of natural occurrences that have crafted their personal worldview. Their pre-experiences played a role in how they perceived their own understanding of the transition they underwent as a PT at a federal service academy. My own personal ontological stance leads me to gather data from multiple participants. This was extremely important, as each individual provided me with a number of valuable statements that were crafted into themes related to the experience of being a PT in a service academy environment (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). As a social constructivist, I seek to understand the world that is created by those within it (Creswell, 2013). This was the very essence of this study, as PTs in this environment have yet to be

heard from. Their descriptions provide texture for those related to the role of PTs, as well as those within the service academy educational system.

As mentioned, I have been employed at a federal service academy, and while I do not oversee students who are PTs, I do instruct students during the academic day. Peer tutoring in the federal service academy setting was of particular interest because this presents two specific types of assumptions, epistemological and axiological. An axiological approach is characterized as when researchers actively state their values and biases and “positions themselves in a study” (Creswell, 2013, p. 20). While I am biased towards the value that the armed forces have for modern society, I take a naturalistic stand as it relates to multiple realities. As previously stated, each person at each academy brings with them their own personal experiences that crafted a unique understanding. By bracketing myself out of this study and recognizing that I am employed in this setting, I was careful to avoid inserting myself in this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Milacci, 2003; Moustakas, 1994).

Working as a civilian in the military also presented a unique challenge as I could have attempted to interpret participants’ voices simply because I am familiar with their surroundings. Epistemological assumptions are due to prolonged time in the field in order to gain context of what individuals know (Creswell, 2013). This is the opposite of what I did, because I recognized that my career posed a risk when I described my participants’ voices. While I was on temporary leave in order to complete this dissertation, I was careful to report only what was said as the participants meant it, not how I felt they meant it. Gaining clarity through open-ended questions aided in avoiding

an epistemological approach and helped to prevent the potential of a “reactivity threat” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 96).

### **Problem Statement**

Peer tutoring is an approach that many higher educational institutions organize to aid the facilitation of learning amongst the student body, specifically with students who may be falling behind academically (Banbel & Chen, 2014; Clark & May, 2015; Taylor et al., 2014). There is a gap in the literature, however, specifically concerning undergraduate PTs within higher education at federal service academies. Armed forces students are accustomed to a chain of command and rank (Wilson et al., 2013). I determined that it was important to understand how their experience of being a PT differed when compared to PTs at civilian institutions.

Undergraduate service academy students seeking additional experiences were thought to attempt to experience a role whereby they can lead other students who are struggling in the academic pillar. Within this study, the choice to become a PT was considered to be the beginning of the transition, as these students are no longer solely service academy students. Individuals making this choice have decided that their life is going to change, and becoming a PT marks the beginning of taking on a new identity (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002).

Students choosing to become a PT attended professional development (PD) sessions to gain an understanding of the learning environment (Clarence, 2016), which helped to develop behavioral strategies needed during tutoring sessions (Berghmans et al., 2013). These sessions provided structure for the moving-through (Anderson et al., 2012) portion of their experience; however, how this related to the armed forces culture

had not been previously studied. There is a lack of qualitative data regarding the experiences that undergraduate students undergo through the role of being a PT at federal service academies; therefore, a gap existed in the literature that has now addressed that lack of understanding. By giving a voice to undergraduate service academy students who have transitioned into, through, and out of the peer tutoring role, I have provided a description to future officers commissioned into the United States armed forces. Due to this gap, a problem existed whereby federal service academies did not fully understand the positive and negative aspects of being a PT in this environment and how the student is affected by these aspects.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of undergraduate students who served as PTs at federal service academies. Peer tutoring is an approach which involves individuals who are not trained as teachers but are from similar social groups assisting each other in teaching and learning (Topping, 1996). The theory that guided this study was transition theory (Schlossberg, 1981), which postulates how people transition during a change in their assumptive world, which applies to the undergraduate students who move into the role of being a PT, during their evolution from novice to experienced PT, and how they transition out of the role of being a PT at federal service academies.

### **Significance of the Study**

The empirical and practical significance of the current study's results came from the approach that I took to guide this study. The sole purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of undergraduate students who

served as PTs at federal service academies. This purpose was to provide a voice for service academy students who wished to serve as a PT at their own institution, and benefits other service academy students, college and university administrators, and leadership. By hearing participants' thoughts regarding this specific role, the reader will learn about challenges and benefits that PTs experience (Stigmar, 2016; Taylor et al., 2014; Topping, 1996; Vuuren, 2017), as well as how these items were managed. I also provided results of theoretical significance by viewing the experiences of undergraduate PTs through the lens of the transition theory as posited by Schlossberg (1981). The transition theory has been utilized with young adults (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002) and adults (Schlossberg et al., 1989); however, it had not been applied when researching undergraduate college students at a federal service academy.

### **Empirical Significance**

By gaining knowledge about the experience of being an undergraduate PT in this setting at higher educational institutions, I aimed to add to the literature on peer tutoring. Further, service academy higher educational settings, including ROTC programs at civilian institutions, have not been described as they relate to peer tutoring. While there may be evidence of PT programs in the literature in civilian colleges and universities (Arendale, 2016; Batz, Olsen, Dumont, Fastoor, & Smith, 2015; Clarence, 2016), there have been no studies identified in the area of peer tutoring within the service academy educational setting. The findings of the current study will benefit future armed forces students wishing to become a PT, as well as to provide insight to tutoring administrators and university officials who request that students become PTs. Hearing the thoughts and opinions of those who participated as an undergraduate PT in this environment will

benefit the previously mentioned shareholders, in that these thoughts and opinions are different than those presented in studies that have been conducted at civilian secondary educational institutions.

### **Theoretical Significance**

In this study, I aimed to expand upon the literature regarding the transition theory by providing a voice for undergraduate students serving as PTs as they move in, move through, and move out of being a PT in the described setting (Schlossberg, 1981). Schlossberg's transition theory was originally used for business purposes; however, it has evolved into several areas, including college life experiences (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002), and now includes events and non-events as perceived by adults (Schlossberg, 2011). This includes how individuals take on new roles within their personal surroundings, such as being a PT in a college or university. Undergraduate students seeking additional roles on college campuses will learn how other students move through the specified role of being a PT. Understanding the strategies used to move into, through, and out of an experience may very well help other students understand the various coping mechanisms that can be used when they are faced with their own personal transition. Further, university officials, offering support to their student body through the establishment of support programs, may benefit from hearing the voices of current students who have experienced this role. Additionally, while the transition theory has been used in many circumstances, scholars have not yet applied this lens to those currently serving in the armed forces. By exploring how college-aged students transition during the experience of being a PT, I aimed to shed light on how these service members

view a transition, which could help provide context to those helping service members struggling through an experience.

### **Practical Significance**

By describing the experiences of previous undergraduate PTs in the federal service academy setting, federal service academies may choose to highlight the potential benefits that are described by PTs. Further, being an undergraduate PT may provide additional challenges that could enhance certain qualities that a leader should have, such as dealing with an unmotivated population. It is my hope that understanding participants' experiences will educate others as to the potential positives or negatives of becoming a PT. These results could be beneficial to other students within the armed forces and service academies, as well as students going through an ROTC program.

### **Research Questions**

Through this study, I endeavored to report the descriptions that undergraduate service academy students have after they experienced the role of a PT. I hoped to obtain participants' descriptions of their experiences utilizing a transcendental phenomenological approach, guided by the transition theory to grasp the process of transition as it relates to the federal service academy setting (Anderson et al., 2012; Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002; Schlossberg, 1981, 2011; Schlossberg et al., 1989). All data collected was gathered from undergraduate PTs still currently enrolled at the identified academies who performed this role for greater than one semester. All data pertained to the central research question and subquestions associated with this phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

### **Central Research Question**

The central research question asked: How do undergraduate students describe their peer tutoring experiences in federal service academies? Students within the armed forces are accustomed to a chain of command and rank (Wilson et al., 2013), which could pose as a challenge to the peer tutoring process, how they experience the role of being a PT at a federal service academy will differ when compared to the same role at a civilian institution. Through the central research question, I aimed to describe the central phenomenon of peer tutoring at a federal service academy.

### **Subquestion 1**

The first subquestion asked: What were participants' expectations for being a PT prior to the start of this experience? In this study, the experiences of PTs at federal service academies are described using the transition theory as the theoretical framework (Schlossberg, 1981). The transition theory postulates how a person transitions during a change in an individuals' assumptive world by viewing the transition in three stages: moving into, moving through, and moving out of the experience. Through this question, I aimed to describe students' initial thoughts of what a PT was, as well as to obtain participants' opinions regarding the potential challenges and benefits of a PT that led them to volunteer for this role.

### **Subquestion 2**

The second subquestion asked: In what ways were participant expectations met or not met during the peer tutoring experience? This question was designed to hear participants describe the process of being a PT and recognizing the role that they are now involved in. The potential benefits that these students identified prior to being a PT

evolved when answering this question; conversely, the challenges they faced also surfaced with this question.

### **Subquestion 3**

The third subquestion asked: What expected and unexpected outcomes were realized by participants during this experience? This question served as a direct link to the moving-through portion of the transition theory (Schlossberg, 1981). How undergraduate PTs experienced their time during their role was answered with this prompt. Further, the PD sessions that undergraduate PTs received prior to and during the start of their time as a PT helped them understand the learning environment (Clarence, 2016) and aided them in developing behavioral strategies to deal with challenging situations during tutoring sessions (Berghmans et al., 2013). Hearing former undergraduate PTs describe these challenges and strategies as they faced them during the time spent as a PT yielded information that is potentially fruitful for federal service academies, as well as those considering becoming a PT in this context.

### **Subquestion 4**

The final subquestion asked: How do participants describe the short-lived and enduring influences of their peer tutoring experience? This question was directly tied to the “moving out” portion of the transition theory (Schlossberg, 1981). Hearing the thoughts of students who have served as an undergraduate PT in the federal service academy setting regarding the lasting impression that this role has had on their life or will have on their life was directly tied to the central research question. The responses to this question also provided information pertaining to many aspects to a future graduate of a federal service academy seeking a future as an officer.

## Definitions

I used the following terms frequently throughout this dissertation.

1. *Moving in* describes the initial transition stage, which occurs when an individual cognitively or not moves into a new role (Anderson et al., 2012). For the purposes of this study, *moving in* was considered the point at which students recognized that they wanted to be a PT.
2. *Moving through* is the stage which follows moving in. This is considered the point at which a PT understood their role and experienced the ability to handle peer tutoring conflicts. Anderson et al. (2012) considered this to be when a person “knows the ropes,” (p. 57). For the purposes of this study, PTs transitioned to this stage when they could describe feelings of understanding their role. Due to this study’s parameters, PTs were required to have a minimum of two semesters of peer tutoring experience. During their time spent as a PT, they experienced multiple sessions with a variety of tutees, and were better able to understand their role.
3. *Moving out* is the final stage of the transition theory. At this point, PTs have recognized the experience of their time spent as a PT and have chosen to move on to a new experience. By moving out of the role of being a PT at a federal service academy and choosing to stop the experience, they are conscientiously deciding to take on a new experience (Anderson et al., 2012; Schlossberg, 1989).
4. *Peer tutoring* describes an approach which involves individuals who are not trained as teachers but are from similar social groups assisting each other in teaching and learning (Topping, 1996).

5. *Qualitative research* is a process that begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks which inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. These problems lead to researchers inquiring about the world, which provides a collection of data from the natural setting which are sensitive to the people and places under study. This culminates with data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes (Creswell, 2013).
6. *Transcendental phenomenology* defines a scientific study of the appearance of things, of phenomena just as they are seen and used in consciousness (Moustakas, 1994).
7. *Transition* occurs if an event or non-event results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world, and thus requires a corresponding change in one's behavior and relationships (Schlossberg, 1989).

### **Summary**

A number of colleges and universities rely on academic support programs to support their students (Banbel & Chen, 2014; Clarence, 2016; Clark & May, 2015; Taylor et al., 2014). Peer tutoring is one such method. The rigors of academics at the federal service academies have led to each service academy creating a peer tutoring program that avails itself to the assistance of undergraduate service academy students seeking to improve their understanding of important academic concepts. Undergraduate students seeking to provide selfless service to their classmates may opt to become a PT. As discussed, there are recognized challenges and benefits to being a PT (Batz et al., 2015; Cohen, Kulik, & Kulick, 1982; Fantuzzo, King, & Heller, 1992; Lin & Lin, 2016);

however, a qualitative, transcendental phenomenological study was needed to hear the voices of PTs regarding their descriptions of their experiences so leaders, academy administrators, and service academy students may value this role. Through this qualitative research study, I obtained and explored the descriptions of former undergraduate students who experienced being a PT in a federal service academy setting.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Overview**

In Chapter Two, I will provide an overview of the literature and theoretical framework of peer tutoring in higher educational settings. The purpose of Chapter Two is to provide a context for the present research and to demonstrate its importance based on the problem demonstrated via the literature as well as the need or gap in the literature. Chapter Two includes four sections: (a) the overview, (b) a theoretical framework section, (c) a related literature section, and (d) a summary. While the transition theory (Schlossberg, 1981) provided the context to the descriptions of the experiences that PTs have had in service academies, the related literature includes: (a) an overview regarding service academies, (b) the design of the peer tutoring model in colleges and universities, (c) the impact that peer tutoring programs have on student academic performance for both tutors and tutees, (d) the benefits gained by participating as a PT, and (e) the influence that peer tutoring has on students who served as a PT. The use of the transition theory within this study is applicable because it has previously been applied to investigations of higher educational learning (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002; Schlossberg et al., 1989). I will conclude Chapter Two with a summary of the subject and pinpoints the gap in the literature that I attempted to fill through this study.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The guiding theory or theories which form the raw structure of a dissertation or research study is considered to be the theoretical framework (Wolcott, 1995). Theorists have recommended that all researchers conducting scholarly work rely on a theory or theories to provide a lens of which is used to view the phenomenon of interest, as “it is

impossible to observe and describe the way things really are, free of any prior conceptual scheme or theory...without some theory of what is relevant to observe, how what is to be observed is to be named, and so on” (Anfara & Mertz, 2006, p. 8). Recognizing the importance of the theoretical framework on research studies, the descriptions of the experiences that PTs underwent are viewed through the lens of transition theory as formulated by Schlossberg (1981).

### **Transition Theory**

Originally developed within the business world to describe how dealing with the loss of a job affects a person, the transition theory describes a life altering experience, positive or negative, which changes one’s role, relationship, routine, or assumption (Leibowitz & Schlossberg, 1982). Focusing on the aspect of job loss, Leibowitz and Schlossberg (1982) wrote, “All transitions—whatever the unique qualities of each—can be described using a common set of variables: onset, source, timing, affect, duration, and degree of stress” (p. 207). This description of the characteristics of a transition can therefore be applied to other areas where transitions can occur.

If one’s assumptions about oneself are altered, then a transition can be said to have occurred (Schlossberg, 1981). Although much of the initial attention regarding transition theory dealt with job-related events, the concepts discussed within the transition theory applied to others matters throughout life outside of the business world. Stated more succinctly, “As people move through life they continually experience change and transition, and that these changes often result in new networks of relationships, new behaviors, and new self-perceptions” (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 2). It is through this

concept, experiencing transitions throughout life, that I narrowed the focus of the current study to the college learner.

“Everyone experiences transitions, whether they are events or non-events, anticipated or unanticipated” (Schlossberg, 2011, p. 159). How a person adjusts to the transition and grows from it all depends on how the individual copes with the transition. Common factors that help individuals cope are identified in the “4 S system” (Schlossberg, 1987), which includes a person’s situation, one’s self, their supports, and the strategies used to cope with the transition (Schlossberg, 2011). The *situation* aspect refers to the situation at the time of the transition, specifically the person’s view of their world and the experience they are about to undertake. The ability to control the situation, as well as what occurred throughout the person’s life, may also affect the current situation as it may be viewed as positive, negative, or neutral based upon previous transitions (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002; Schlossberg, 2011). Every person experiencing a transition is affected by the various factors that make up the situation itself. These factors include the trigger (i.e., what sparked the transition?); timing (i.e., is this situation something that challenges the individual due to the time in their life it occurs?); control (i.e., what can the individual control in this transition?); role change (i.e., a change in the “behavioral enacting of the patterned expectations attributed to a position;” Merton, 1957, p. 368); duration (i.e., how long with the transition last?); previous experience with a similar transition; concurrent stress (i.e., what stresses are presented because of the transition and how significant are they?); and assessment (i.e., how does the person view the situation they are undergoing?; Anderson et al., 2012, pp. 67-68).

The second factor in the system is the term *self*, which refers to the ability that a person has to rely on him or herself through the transition, as every person “has both assets and liabilities; resources and deficits” (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 73). A major aspect of self includes whether or not a “person (is) optimistic, resilient, and able to deal with ambiguity” (Schlossberg, 2011, p. 160). The personal characteristics that an individual possesses can be developed over time, especially by individuals who have faced a number of transitions previously; therefore, those with a more pessimistic outlook can learn the skills to be optimistic and look at the transition from a different lens, which may help them respond more favorably. Characteristics of self that are relevant in managing a transition include: socioeconomic status, gender and sexual orientation, age and stage of life, state of health, ethnicity/culture, psychological resources, ego development, personal outlook (including optimism and self-efficacy), commitment and values, and spirituality and resilience (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 73).

The third factor in the system is the term *supports*, which are considered to be the surrounding programs or systems that a person can benefit from. These programs could be institutional programs, social relationships, or a physical setting. A support system includes affection, affirmation, assistance or aid, and feedback, while a physical setting may illicit a change in mood that could result in positive or negative behavior (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002; Schlossberg, 1981). Peer tutoring programs are one specific example of a support program that students can use to find academic help, as well as to help others or gain experience with leading others through academic challenges.

The final factor in the system is the term *strategies*, which include the reactions that a person has to a transition that alters the situation in an effort to illicit some aspect of control over the transition (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002; Schlossberg, 1981). One example of this is the reaction that a student may have when struggling with academic rigor, the subsequent conscientious decision to seek out an academic support program to address this negative situation would be a strategy they could use. This provides them with a sense of control that may help improve their academic standing. From a PT perspective, if a potential PT is looking to lead others, or help facilitate the learning of others through providing academic support, then choosing to become a PT is a strategy that would address this need. When a person desires to learn a new skill or craft, they often choose to take on a role of an intern to learn the details of the job at hand. Should future academic leaders want to bolster their teaching resume as a college student, the potential to be a PT would be classified as a strategy to address this need. Researching the armed forces student population at a federal service academy provides fruitful information regarding what students wanted to gain out of the experience of being an undergraduate PT. This strategy helps not only with teaching in the armed forces, but also with leading a potentially unmotivated group of students either in a group format or in a one-on-one situation.

A transition has three distinct phases: moving in, moving through, and moving out (Anderson et al., 2012; Schlossberg et al., 1989). The initial phase, *moving in*, is considered to be when an individual first understands that they are starting a transition. “People who move into a new situation... have some common agendas and needs. They need to become familiar with the rules, regulations, norms, and expectations of the new

system” (Schlossberg et al., 1989, p. 15). In the sense of becoming a PT, the *moving in* point is when a student decides to become a PT. This step should include basic research regarding the understanding of what the PT role is. Those interested in the position would also consider the potential to be asked to interview for the position and once accepted into the PT program, the individual would then need to attend all mandatory tutor training sessions which would include participating in all practice scenario sessions required of the tutor training program.

Following the moving in phase is the *moving-through* phase. The moving-through phase is considered to be when people “know the ropes” (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 57; Schlossberg et al., 1989, p. 16). Entering into any situation can lead many to feel uneasy or anxious. Up to this point, undergraduate PTs at each of the federal service academies have experienced a complete vetting, completed an extensive training process which provided them with tools and strategies to perform their duties as a PT, and have experienced some tutoring sessions as the sole PT in a one-on-one session or with several other tutees in a group format. Even after going through the initial training, PTs may still not completely understand their roles and expectations as they may not have yet become comfortable within their role. For the purposes of this study, a PT was only considered as being in this phase if they could pinpoint the timeframe that they felt they fully understood their role and could lead an effective peer tutoring session without a sense of uneasiness.

The final stage of the transition is the *moving-out* stage, where an individual is seen as transitioning into a new experience. “Learners’ moving out can be seen as ending one series of transitions and beginning to ask what comes next” (Schlossberg et al., 1989,

p. 16). For the purposes of this study, PTs who decide to stop engaging in this role were considered to have entered the moving-out phase. There are a number of possible reasons that armed force PTs could transition into the moving out phase which could be similar to the civilian PT population. There are many tasks that come up during the year in a service academy schedule that a civilian would not experience; therefore, some reasons for leaving the role of a PT may be due to mandatory tasks which have not yet been described.

### **Related Literature**

Earning a degree from a higher educational institution is a challenge for many learners, which is supported by evidence of an increase in students failing courses on their way to their degree (Lin & Lin, 2016). There are a number of challenges leading to poor academic performance; of interest in the current study, however, was the person and how they transition into, through, and out of higher educational learning while attempting to succeed academically in order to accomplish a career goal. Challenges to an individual could be classified as expected or unexpected events (Schlossberg, 1981) and cause one to utilize an approach in order to deal with events in a manner which they are accustomed to. This systematic approach relies on people's previous experiences, the stressfulness of their situation, the setting where this event occurs, and the strategies used to cope with the event (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002; Schlossberg, 1981).

High school students seeking a higher educational degree have a choice to do so through the United States service academies. Attending a service academy is an experience that is unlike any faced at a civilian institution. Students choosing an education at a federal service academy begin in basic training and are indoctrinated into a

new life and culture once they first set foot on campus. Many high school graduates leave home and begin a higher educational career at a college or university that place a priority on academic learning alone. Military academies, including The Citadel and Virginia Military Institute, face the additional challenges of training new students academically, militarily, and physically. Federal service academies are slightly different as they also have the burden of maintaining accreditation while being monitored by Congress (Watson, 2007). This rather large responsibility by the service academies leads each school to take on a dual role, one that abides by higher educational standards and one that adheres to a military structure all while the costs are paid by the American taxpayers.

Students embarking on this journey must face the task of thinking at a higher level, while also maintaining standards, combined with this is the additional task of adjusting to the academic rigor of producing work at the college level. Said another way, “It is apparent, therefore, that the conflicting demands of training, education, and increased time pressures experienced at a military training establishment require an approach to training and education that is somewhat different to that at a civilian university” (Thain, McDonough, & Priestley, 2008, p. 299). Although many new college students struggle with academic rigor, or with a number of personal dilemmas such as being alone and away from home for the first time, service academy students have the added challenge of learning what their branch is and how to perform within that system.

### **Federal Service Academies**

The decision to attend a federal service academy is made by roughly 4,500 young men and women each year. These academies are the United States (U.S.) Air Force

Academy at Colorado Springs, Colorado; the U.S. Coast Guard Academy at New London, Connecticut; the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy at Kings Point, Long Island, New York; the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York; and the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland (Watson, 2007). These five United States service academies are devoted to commissioning officers into their specific military branch (USAFA, 2018a; USCGA, 2018a; USMA, 2018a; USMMA, 2018a; USNA, 2018a) and are considered to graduate some of the “finest military leaders in the country” (Luhrs, 1996, p. 1). Once accepted to a federal service academy, students begin to develop an interest in a branch (i.e., profession) and post (i.e., location). In order to achieve a desired branch and post, students at each academy must achieve academic, military, and physical excellence to raise their personal class rank. Students at the top of their class get first choice and have little difficulty choosing a branch or a post, while those that are towards the bottom of their class may not be able to choose either a branch or a post, as each have a specific number of positions, and once all positions are taken, students must take a second, third, or undesired choice.

Due to the nature of commissioning officers who will lead the armed forces, each service academy must attempt to enroll the most competitive potential students, therefore service academies must contend with civilian institutions. Scholars have argued that the service academies do an adequate job as shown by the number of scholarships and academic fellowships achieved. Forest (2003) confirmed this, writing:

For example, West Point has graduated fifty-five Rhodes scholars, placing it squarely in the same league as Harvard, Yale, Stanford, and Princeton universities. The Naval Academy has produced thirty-three Rhodes scholars, and

the Air Force Academy has graduated twenty-five. West Point's "model United Nations" team is ranked top in the nation, and its engineering department has for decades been rated among the top five in the nation. Together, the service academies have produced hundreds of astronauts, Medal of Honor awardees, and members of Congress as well as several state governors and U.S. presidents.

Collectively, the alumni of these institutions represent the most impressive kind of student outcomes for which we in higher education aim. (p. 80)

The competitive advantage maintained by service academies is of utmost priority. Their admissions departments are purposeful to find potential students and each academy strives to develop the best potential students through the use of effective teaching and learning strategies (Thain et al., 2008) that facilitate the success of the student body.

As mentioned previously, the experience of moving from one stage in life to another is considered a transition which can have various effects on ones' life. Transitions come in a number of various types, "they are events or nonevents, anticipated or unanticipated" (Schlossberg, 2011, p. 159), yet they have the power to change the life of a person and affect future transitions. "A life change or turning point requiring an alteration in everyday patterns of behavior and thinking and necessitating new coping strategies" (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 205) best summarizes the result of the transition that has taken place. Students transitioning to a federal service academy undergo a distinct change in their life. Regardless of branch, students embarking on a journey to degree through a service academy undergo a change in their life they likely have never experienced before. This transition can be difficult as learners often take on new roles, adopt new routines, gain new relationships, and alter personal assumptions (Chickering &

Schlossberg, 2002), which is especially witnessed when leaving a civilian high school and entering the military learning atmosphere where academic, military, and physical success are all priorities. When people take a deeper look at themselves, however, they may realize they have resources that they can rely on to cope with a situation. Within the transition theory (Schlossberg, 1981) is the guide for reflecting on potential resources that each individual has. The “4 S system” (Schlossberg, 1987) helps individuals understand what they have to rely on in order to cope with a transition. The factors used when a person embarks on a transition can best be seen by using the depiction from Anderson et al. (2012; see Figure 1).

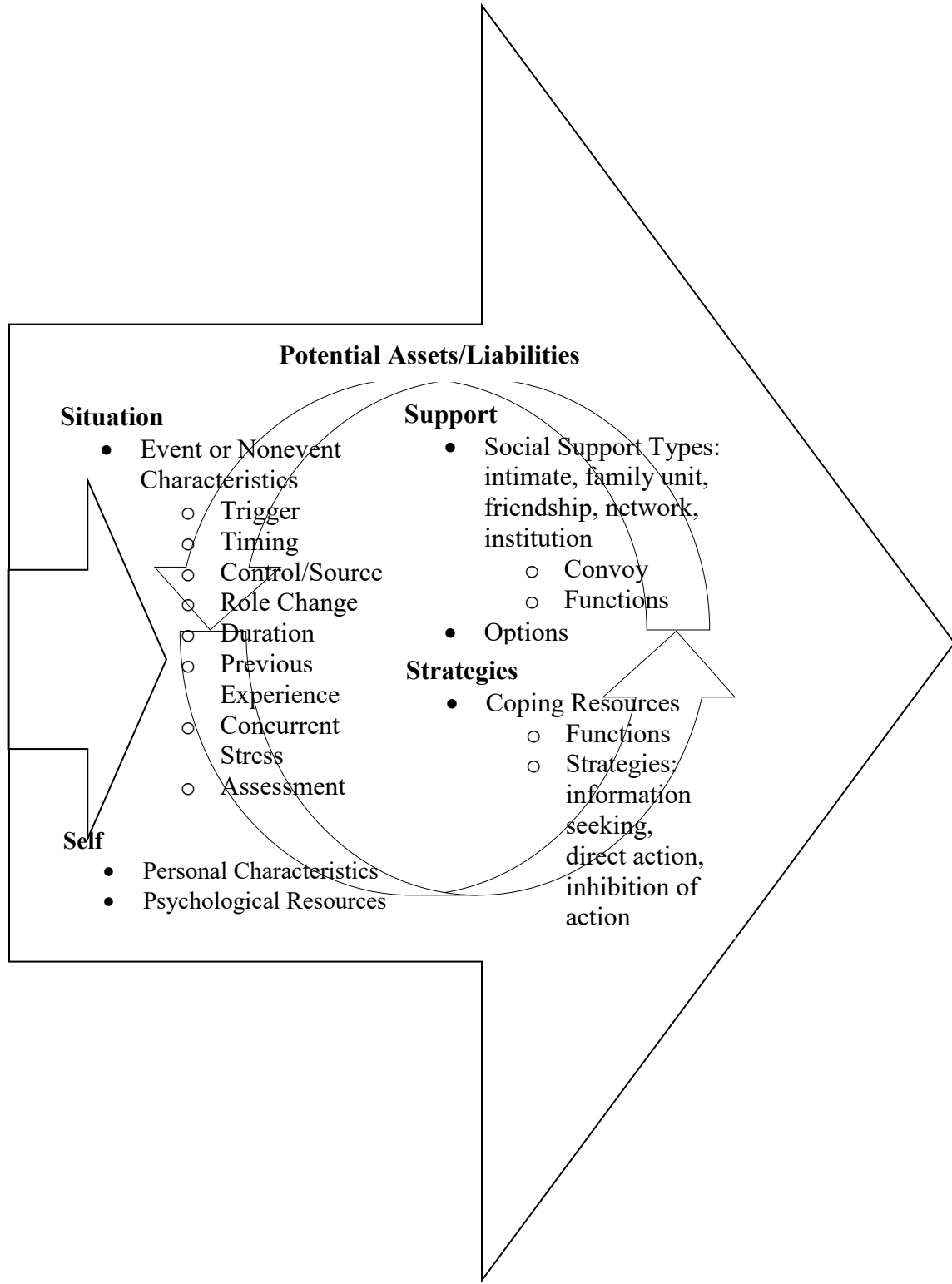


Figure 1. Coping resources – the 4 S system. Reproduced and adapted with permission (see Appendix N)(Anderson et al., 2012).

Service academies present a unique aspect to the idea of the *situation* discussed within the “4 S system” of Schlossberg’s (1981) theory. The situation that undergraduate armed force students who have been accepted into the role of PT have done so voluntarily, yet, this choice is compounded by additional tasks that civilian PTs do not have to concern themselves with. While undergraduate service academy PTs will have chosen to enter this role, they must also account for time they must spend on mandatory training and extracurricular activities which are performed on a daily basis. The time constraints placed on a student at a federal service academy cause challenges that civilian students are not accustomed to (Hornyak, Green, & Ciccotello, 2000; Thain et al., 2010; Turner, 2004). This differs greatly from a civilian PT, as learning is not mandatory, nor are any other extracurricular activities. Service academy students must report to class which is their mandatory place of duty, while these students do not have the option to skip classes; therefore, of interest with this population were the items that affect the situation itself. In response to this specific challenge, federal service academies have developed regulations and programs in an effort to develop time management skills or even provide more time to service academy students for school work, reflect on concepts discussed in classes, or find time to study (USAFA, 2009; USMA, 2018; USNA, 2018f).

Just as the situation is unique, so too is how each federal service academy affects the individual student, or self. Each institution within this study is devoted to creating future leaders within their respective branch (USAFA, 2018a; USCGA, 2018a; USMA, 2018a; USMMA, 2018a; USNA, 2018a), and therefore the personal development of each student plays a role in how they will transition into, through, and out of the PT experience. This has a potential to change one’s self-efficacy, their commitment, and

how resilient they are which are key components of self, the second factor of the “4 S system” (Anderson et al., 2012; Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002; Schlossberg, 1987). Each academy presents a unique aspect of the students that opt to attend their institutions. The choice to attend a certain academy is a choice to enhance and challenge oneself. In order to do this, federal service academies have mandatory and voluntary programs to educate future leaders.

Just as each academy is unique, so too are the various programs that have been designed to enhance the individual growth. The following are just a few of the examples that three federal service academies offer in the realm of facilitating student growth within each branch: a six-week nautical course on the USCGA Eagle at the Coast Guard Academy to learn basic seamanship skills and nautical traditions (USCGA, 2018b); cadet field training, which “is a three-to-four week program of instruction that emphasizes general military skills, individual preparedness training, preparations for extended field operations, and leading, participating in, and conducting small unit tactical operations” (USMA, 2018b); and “a two-week Operation Air Force program [whereby] cadets are sent to bases across the world and exposed to the roles, responsibilities and expectations of second lieutenants” (USAF, 2018b). By mandating that students participate in these programs, service academies directly affect the individual. How students respond provides them the ability to grow from the experience and improve themselves. The decision to become a PT is another opportunity to develop oneself, yet this is a voluntary position, which provides further insight into the experiences described by these students.

Anderson et al. (2012) discuss the support factor of the “4 S system” by defining it through an operational perspective as support “comes in many sizes and shapes and can

be for better or worse” (p. 83). Further clarity regarding student life can be found through Chickering and Schlossberg (2002), who included the following when discussing support: affection (i.e., individuals who respect, love, care, and understand the person going through the transition), affirmation (i.e., people who agree with the person or who deem their actions as appropriate), assistance or aid (i.e., what help does the person in the transition have to use to help with their daily tasks, or relief of stress), and feedback (i.e., individuals who can “provide a different perspective, challenge or reaffirm your interpretation;” p. 50). Service academies provide numerous support groups and programs that help individual students not only succeed academically, as well as voluntary extracurricular activities which enable these undergraduate students to de-stress from daily life (USAFA, 2018e; USCGA, 2018e; USMA, 2018e; USMMA, 2018d; USNA, 2018d). Further, each PT program discussed in this study provides supports to their PTs through PD sessions.

The final factor in the “4 S system” (Schlossberg, 1987) is *strategies*, which relates to how individuals cope with or respond to an experience. Pearlin and Schooler (1978) posed three reasons why people use coping strategies, writing that use responses to “change the situation, control the meaning of the strainful experience after it occurs, [and to] use responses that function more for the control of stress itself after it has emerged” (p. 6) all in an effort “to avoid being harmed by life strains” (p. 5). When specifically speaking of strategies, service academy PTs are afforded the ability to work with a managing director for each PT program at each academy. Further PTs benefit by attending PD sessions which expose future PTs to potential challenges and stressors that they may experience during one-on-one sessions.

Understanding the “4 S system” (Anderson et al., 2012; Schlossberg, 1987) helps students grasp the tools that they have available to them. Federal service academies not only challenge students, but also provide a number of resources which enable students to succeed. It is because students at these academies present with various strengths and weaknesses that it is possible to observe an active coping resource mechanism. While federal service academies are designed to challenge a person in order to improve himself or herself through difficult situations, they also provide more than adequate support, through effective strategies to create future leaders in the United States armed forces.

To improve teaching and learning at service academies, each institution has fashioned several programs within specific pillars (i.e., academic, military, and physical) to address the needs within each pillar. Just as each academy has unique programs which help to improve leadership and intelligence for the student body, so too do they focus on PD through tutoring which fosters a professional relationship with a superior officer. Mentorship and tutoring within the military context were discussed by Cojocaru and Ion (2014), who wrote that developing military students includes mentoring and tutoring by “all teachers, weekly, [which] aim[s] to build a partnership relationship with military students” (p. 2). While this example differs from the peer-to-peer educational setting, it does provide background information regarding the desire to improve the overall student body at each service academy.

While tutoring and mentoring is comprised of a student and an officer or professional teacher, the unique aspect of peer tutoring in many cases is the idea that a student chooses to volunteer as a PT in an effort to help their peers or possibly to improve one’s own development. This is very different within the service academy setting, as

many programs designed to develop students are mandatory. Service academy programs are designed to reinforce branch customs, such as a chain of command in order to ensure a total military setting (Goffman, 1961); however, others facilitate the ability to effectively teach and learn. These programs not only aid students in transitioning from high school student to college student, but also to aid in experiencing a new role they may undertake while attending a service academy. One such program that is consistent throughout the service academies is the peer tutoring program.

### **Peer Tutoring in Colleges and Universities**

Higher educational organizations have always understood that college learners have difficulties moving to the new learning environment they have transitioned into (Collier, 2015; Schlossberg et al., 1989). Graduating from a four-year institution with a degree has proved to be difficult for many students, as “more than two out of every five students who enrolled in college in 2007 failed to graduate by 2013” (Pugatch & Wilson, 2018, p. 151). The challenges college students faced include the wide range in student age, experience level, motivation, and learning need (Arco-Tirado et al., 2011), issues with subject matter, unpreparedness, illness (Arendale, 2015), student socio-economic status and increased classroom size (Hornsby & Osman, 2014), a failure to develop more than surface level understanding of content due to lecturing (Topping, 1996), challenges with managing time due to participating in athletics (Banbel & Chen, 2014), learning or physical disabilities (Arendale, 2015), and reduced resources which encourage a more traditional teaching approach (Stigmar, 2016). At the same time, many colleges and universities are experiencing budgetary constraints, which are coupled with rapid

technological improvements and a growing demand for accessibility (Arco-Tirado et al., 2011).

In response, these institutions have created several support programs to assist students with transitioning to higher learning and to facilitate student academic performance (Arco-Tirado et al., 2005; Brown, Nairn, vanderMeer, & Scott, 2014; Kim, 2015; Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Kinzie, 2009). Amongst the academic support programs that Tinto (2004) considered to be beneficial to enhancing retention and graduation rates are tutoring, mentoring, study groups, and supplemental instruction. One method to enhance student academic performance is peer-assisted learning (PAL), which encompasses “a group of strategies that involve the active and interactive mediation of learning through other learners who are not professional teachers” (Topping & Ehly, 1998, p. 113). This “is a voluntary relationship between the tutor and the trainee that provides challenge, growth, and motivation to develop professional, collegial skills” (Krautter et al., 2014, p.323). Examples of PAL programs include cross-year peer tutoring, near-peer tutoring, and peer tutoring (Brown et al., 2014; Cianciolo, Kidd, & Murray, 2016; Krautter et al., 2014; Nomura, Onishi, & Kato, 2017).

Tutoring has existed in some capacity in higher education since Harvard opened as the first college in the United States in 1636 (Sheets, 2012), and today, “tutoring is omnipresent at the college level and plays a critical role in supporting the success of undergraduate students” (Velasco & Stains, 2012, p. 1). Several variations of tutoring exist and often the terminology used to for various methods can be confusing as many use these terms interchangeably (Topping, 2005). These terms include mentoring, proctoring, cross-year peer tutoring (CYPT), near-peer tutoring, and peer tutoring

(Arendale, 2015; Krautter et al., 2014; Nomura et al., 2017; Saunders, 1992; Topping, 2005). Peer tutoring differs from the traditional learning platform because it is a collaborative learning process that tends to be more engaging and active (Brown et al., 2014; Walvoord & Pleitz, 2016).

While various terms are used in the tutoring world, experts have relied on the peer tutoring definition that considers a PT to be a person who is of the same or similar status as the individual being tutored. Examples of this include one student learning from another student or one student leading a small group of students in an effort to develop study skills, evaluate work, provide encouragement, or help with independent understanding of the material (Allen, 1983; Colvin, 2007; Falchikov, 2001; Kim, 2015; Nisbet et al., 2014; Stigmar, 2016; Yook & Kim, 2014). Peer tutoring programs have found their niche amongst many student-centered learning programs (Saunders, 1992) on college campuses including academic support services, athletic support services, communication services, and writing centers (Banbel & Chen, 2014; Kim, 2015). In addition to aiding students within specific groups such as athletics, numerous scholars have concluded that PT services and programs have shown favorable outcomes for those seeking assistance in academic classes and majors. This has been supported by researchers studying medical education (Gaughf & Foster, 2016; O'Doherty et al., 2018; Scherer, Reichrath, Tschernig, & Maxeiner, 2019), mathematics (Kim, 2015), performance of sport and exercise science (Viana et al., 2019), and in instances where students are learning a new language (Lam & Chung-Woon Chan, 2014).

Several researchers have suggested that students can benefit from a PT close in age who has successfully engaged in a course or content area as they can discern as to

why specific issues presented during the learning process arose (Arendale, 2015; Brown et al., 2014; Cantinotti, Désormeaux-Moreau, & Balbinotti, 2017; Clarence, 2016; Khalid, Shahid, Punjabi, & Sahdev, 2018; Moust & Schmidt, 1994; Topping, 2001, 2005). These benefits include enabling “students to know, understand, and decide how to spend time on task, engage in quality effort, and participate more actively in learning” (Arendale & Hane, 2014, p. 775) as well as being effective when improving student academic performance, increasing “student retention, graduation rates, final grades and course completion” (Banbel & Chen, 2014, p. 53).

In relation to the current study, scholars have found that students who tutor have also improved academically as they are learning with their peers in an environment that is more comfortable (Berghmans et al., 2013). Typically, PTs are students who have succeeded in the academic realm and have been accepted as a PT (Walvoord & Pleitz, 2016). With this role, however, comes additional training and time spent helping others (Arco-Tirado et al., 2011), often with little or no pay (Kim, 2015). The benefits of being a PT include improved cognitive, metacognitive, and social skills, which lead to improved performance in personal academic classes (Arendale & Hane, 2014). The act of tutoring itself provides tutors with the opportunity to retain knowledge more effectively as they must be able to communicate the content to their tutees, which tends to increase content mastery (Astin, 1993; Topping, 1996). These benefits come from PTs asking “questions to scaffold and optimize tutees’ understanding and to inquire about the progress of collaborative learning” (De Backer, Van Keer, & Valcke, 2017, p. 621). DeFeo and Caparas (2014) highlighted several outcomes reported from those that served

as a tutor, and pointed out the difficulty with understanding how these results were developed, stating:

Though the literature documents some positive outcomes for tutors including camaraderie, growth in writing and social skills, knowledge-building, teaching-skills development, and the opportunity to help others, there is little information about how this happens, how it is facilitated by program administrators, or how these development opportunities are perceived by tutors themselves. (p. 142)

Specific benefits perceived by undergraduate service PTs from the act of being a PT were found during the *moving-thought* and *moving-out* phases. The comparison of these benefits to those of civilian PTs in higher educational settings is of interest to service academy administrators.

From a higher educational standpoint, peer tutoring has been a cost-effective strategy employed to increase academic retention (Kim, 2015; Topping, 1996). Rather than paying professional tutors and professors to help struggling students, many peer tutoring programs have relied on voluntary students to apply to the program. Further, removing the hierarchical structure in the learning process can benefit students by motivating them to learn (Colvin, 2007). This strategy can also empower students to teach others and learn from their peers which may decrease “student dissatisfaction” (Topping, 1996, p. 325). The ability to have PTs spend time with struggling students provides professors and instructors additional time during the day to focus on other endeavors such as research (Topping, 1996). Getting the learner to take responsibility for their own learning is a key component to college education and peer tutoring. PTs must

take responsibility for the education of their peers which helps promote ownership from the learner as well as content mastery by the PT.

While “just preparing to be a peer tutor has been proposed to enhance cognitive processing in the tutor—by increasing attention to and motivation for the task, and necessitating review of existing knowledge and skills” (Topping, 1996, p. 324), Boylan et al. (1997) found no relationship between GPA or retention and tutoring. The authors did conclude, however, that tutor training is one of the best indicators of a successful college developmental program (Boylan et al., 1997). Other authors have confirmed that when schools implement peer tutoring programs, results are positive when institutional administrators pay close attention to several factors including the implementation of a peer tutoring program, the creation of a peer tutoring program that works for the institutional goals, keeping to the student body in mind, and maintaining integrity within the program (Topping, 2001, 2005; Topping & Ehly, 1998). This success and demand for success was witnessed in the study of Blohm et al. (2014), who provided data suggesting “that a peer tutor-led skills lab course might be effective in preparing medical students for clinical clerkships and hence from the foundation for successful workplace learning” (pp. 14-15). These researchers also concluded that because approximately 19.8% of the student body “participated in the course within less than one academic year[, this] strongly emphasizes the demand for a basic skills course to prepare the students for their future practical workplace learning” (Blohm et al., 2014, p. 15).

Institutions have also experienced challenges by offering peer tutoring programs. The decision to employ a peer tutoring program is often to support the student-body, but this is an active choice to utilize students, who are not professional teachers, to facilitate

the learning process (Topping, 1996). “The main disadvantage is that, as students themselves, tutors are also still growing their disciplinary knowledge, skills and dispositions” (Clarence, 2016, pp. 41-42). Further, tutors who have more experience may potentially take on “an authoritative role, acting as more of a lecturer than a peer advisor” (Clarence, 2016, p. 42). Kim (2015) suggested that universities take an acute look at the available resources currently found on campus and ascertain, through student feedback the, whether the choice to begin a peer-tutoring program is worthwhile. While current resources may be available, accountability of services must be taken into consideration. Establishing an effective peer tutoring program costs time, money, and effort to ensure that PTs understand their role in the learning process and that they are following appropriate guidelines (Arco-Tirado et al., 2011).

Colleges and universities have adjusted to the growing needs that students have due to the increased challenges reported. In response, a variety of programs have been created to facilitate student learning. While there are potential benefits and challenges to establishing an effective peer tutoring program, the choice to become a PT should not be taken lightly. Students must take a realistic approach and weigh the positives and negatives of becoming a PT, which should be thought of during the *moving-in* phase of the transition theory (Schlossberg, 1981). Additional time spent with tutees will come at a cost to the PT, as they will no longer have time to focus on their own needs.

### **Becoming a Peer Tutor**

The decision to become a PT is considered to be the start of accepting a new experience in one’s life, which would be the start of the *moving-in* phase of the transition theory (Schlossberg, 1981). There are some similarities among civilian higher

educational institutions and service academies as they relate to the requirements of potential PTs including academic performance and tutor training. Throughout higher learning, students seeking the role of being a PT are required to take the course prior to engaging the material as a tutor (CRLA, 2018; Walvoord & Pleitz, 2016). Accepted students must sit through mandatory certified training lessons offered by the institution, which helps potential PTs meet the guidelines to become a certified level one tutor as determined by a variety of associations (CRLA, 2018; CAS, 2018). Students successfully completing the International Tutor Training Program Certification (ITTPC) have completed at least 10 hours of required training at the first level, with at least six of those hours being supervised in live tutoring sessions by a tutor-trainer (CRLA, 2011). Training tutors through the CRLA certification program is not only effective, but also ensures that tutors understand the strategies to engage struggling students or to deal with difficult situations and will ultimately improve the skills of the potential PT (Boylan et al., 1997). Included in the training program is scenario training which stems from “preparing specialized personnel (e.g., in the military or law enforcement) by providing situations in which participants are challenged to examine their appraisals of situations” (Way, 2012, p. 58). Scenario-based training is beneficial as potential PTs are able to experience potential problems and can ask questions regarding potential difficulties they may face. In addition to the ITTPC, some institutional peer tutoring programs require students to view online training videos (McCann & Pomeroy, 2012) and complete the Felder-Solomon Index of Learning Styles Questionnaire (Solomon & Felder, n.d.). While these similarities are common among all higher educational academic support

programs, service academies have some additional complications that PTs must deal with in order to accomplish their goal of becoming a PT.

Prior to taking the certification course, each undergraduate service academy student must apply to the peer tutoring program. In addition to successfully passing the course they wish to tutor, they must also go through a formal interview process (USAFA, 2018a; USCGA, 2018a; USMA, 2018a; USMMA, 2018a; USNA, 2018a), which is not necessarily a component at other civilian institutions. This interview process includes providing a resume, sitting with program administrators, and discussing course content demonstrating their abilities to tutor. These additional steps are confounded by additional requirements placed upon them by their respective institutions and include mandatory attendance at formations throughout the day, meals, academic classes, as well as competitive sports events (USAFA, 2018a; USCGA, 2018a; USMA, 2018a; USMMA, 2018a; USNA, 2018a). Collier (2015) pointed to additional conflicts in a student's schedule may be restrictive when attempting to be a peer mentor. While Collier addressed mentoring programs, many authors have regarded peer tutoring and mentoring in the same breadth of support services (Agee & Hodges, 2012; Bester, Muller, Munge, Morse, & Meyers, 2017; Cantinotti et al., 2017; Goodlad, 1998; Hornsby & Osman, 2014; Taylor et al., 2014; Schlossberg et al., 1989). The additional conflicts in a persons' daily schedule, which may be taken on voluntarily at civilian institutions, are mandatory for students at service academies. The choice to become a PT is a choice to spend one's free time with other students further which may further complicate a PT's daily schedule.

As mentioned, each student at a federal service academy who wishes to be a PT does so as a volunteer (USAFA, 2018c; USCGA, 2018c; USMA, 2018c; USMMA,

2018c; USNA, 2018c), and are unpaid tutors, putting additional time constraints on their life without compensation. Nisbet et al. (2014) reported that PTs regarded payment as a significant factor in building confidence, as receiving payment meant that the PT must know what they are doing otherwise they would not have received compensation. Nisbet et al. (2014) also cited, "Payment is not the only method that can serve to instill this confidence, as some tutoring programmes offer credit towards the tutors' degrees, which is also a beneficial form of compensation" (p. e19). Colleges and universities can afford to allot for small stipends to student PTs and mentors, as this is much more cost-effective than using existing faculty members, who would command a larger fee for their services (Collier, 2015). How service academy PTs gain confidence is not yet known, as there has not been research conducted to ascertain this specific question.

At many civilian higher educational institutions, the PTs are students themselves; however, they are comprised of postgraduate and senior undergraduate students (Underhill & McDonald, 2010). Each of the five service academies rely on undergraduate students to act as a PT, these students are typically in the same class year (e.g., sophomore to sophomore) or one year older (e.g., sophomore to freshman; USAFA, 2018d; USCGA, 2018d; USMA, 2018d; USMMA, 2018d; USNA, 2018d). Of note, however, is the idea of rank which is of importance at a service academy. Students enrolled at a federal service academy are considered active duty. As students mature, they advance in their career and are promoted accordingly. Due to the structure of the rank system students are accustomed to a chain of command (Wilson et al., 2013), which is not seen at civilian institutions and therefore the complexity of tutoring a student who may outrank the tutor has not been previously studied.

The *moving-in* stage of becoming a PT is a significant one. A transition that students, civilian and armed forces alike, must ascertain whether they can withstand due to the additional tasks that come with the position. Effective PTs undergo certification training to help them understand the potential problems associated with difficult tutoring sessions. Service academy students have the additional stress of training and a rank system that has not been previously discussed in the literature, and is therefore an obstacle that these students must consider.

### **Peer Tutors Working with Students (Tutees)**

Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory has three distinct phases within the entire process. As noted, for the purposes of this study, the *moving-in* phase was considered the point at which a student recognizes the desire to become a PT and undergoes the formal process to begin working as a PT. The *moving-through* portion is generally considered to be when a person understands their role and has experienced the ability to handle specific situations within the PT session. Anderson et al. (2012) considered this to be when a person "knows the ropes" (p. 57). While the CRLA (2018) has established guidelines for certifying PTs, and offer scenario-based training (Way, 2012) to assimilate students to potential problems and difficulties when tutoring, PTs can only truly be considered to be in the *moving-through* portion after they have fully understood their role and can describe their feelings within the role. By understanding this, PTs can begin to focus on many of the problems that have been reported by researchers who have studied civilian PTs.

Several researchers conducting studies at civilian colleges and universities have found significant findings regarding PTs working with tutees, or students seeking peer guidance. Velasco and Stains (2013) wrote, "In general, tutors see themselves as

providers of academic help to students in need” (p. 857); however, this viewpoint can lead to positive and negative situations. Berghmans et al. (2013) reported that the behavior of PTs can cause an increase in learning opportunities within peer tutoring programs yet point out that previous studies “have shown that PTs struggle to adopt facilitative and constructivist-oriented strategies” (p. 703). This is especially poignant, as military education seems to have struggled with this shift in teaching and learning. Service academies and professional military education have maintained a classic modernistic approach continuing the push for uniformity and brevity to solve problems that are more than likely predictable (Sookermany, 2017). While many civilian colleges and universities have taken on a constructivist approach, professional military and service academy education have struggled to progress to a more post-modernistic educational style. This struggle between classic modernistic and post-modernistic style has led many civilian tutors to utilize a more direct approach which often ends with the tutor providing the answer to tutees instead of fostering an in-depth learning style. A number of authors have corroborated these sentiments (Chi, Siler, Jeong, Yamauchi, & Hausmann, 2001; Graesser & Person, 1994; Graesser, Person, & Magliano, 1995; King, 1997; Roscoe & Chi, 2007), and have posited a lack of Socratic questioning, minimal demands on students while questioning, lack of specificity in questioning, prompting for knowledge-telling rather than for knowledge-building, and ultimately PTs have been found to explain for the student rather than have the student do the explaining (Berghmans et al., 2013). Because these studies have all been conducted with civilian PTs, there have been no reports of these struggles with undergraduate service academy PTs.

While pessimistic outcomes point to potential problems which must be addressed during PT certification classes, Berghmans et al. (2013) took an optimistic approach to their research, finding that the PTs within the study took extra steps to ensure that further explanation occurred, due to the specific class which required “complex reasoning” (p. 717) and further elaboration. While this may be of particular interest to future researchers in regard to instructional offerings, it may be moot at a service academy due to the lack of in-depth learning that has been previously reported (Rones, 2015; Sookermany, 2017) and a strict adherence to the honor code policies at each institution (USAFA, 2018f; USCGA, 2018f; USMMA, 2018e; USMA, 2018f; USNA, 2018e).

Understanding the role that one has taken on can be aided by a “socializing agent” (Schlossberg, 2011, p. 161). It has been reported that tutees feel supported during PAL sessions, which creates a positive environment to learn in (Tamachi, Giles, Dornan, & Hill, 2018). Nisbet et al. (2014) pointed to the social support that PTs gain and provide their tutees. Within their study, researchers determined that tutors’ confidence increased due to the impact of the interactions that PTs had with their tutees. Within this program, PTs had to “improve time management and communication skills” (p. e19), which aided them in transitioning from the university to the workplace. As PTs recognized their tutees benefitted from the tutoring sessions led to PTs placing an emphasis on effective learning. This result caused PTs to improve skills they currently possessed, as well as to adopt other strategies in an effort to benefit the tutees. This was further substantiated by Goodlad (1998), who pointed to the responsibility of the learner for their own education, as well as the important role that a PT takes on when they focus on “other people’s education” (Colvin, 2007, p. 167). The idea of a socializing agent, however, may not

occur in a service academy setting, as the complication of chain of command and rank may confound this aspect of the PT role.

Interactions amongst PTs and tutees do not always go smoothly. Colvin (2007) pointed to misunderstandings which occurred due to poor communication skills as well as the perceived roles that PTs can be viewed as having by the tutee. Madaio, Cassell, and Ogen (2018) reported that PTs may have difficulty providing feedback to peers that they are familiar with. PTs are valued by academic support staffs because of the social group they fall into. Peers are typically more influential than advisors and instructors in higher education (Colvin, 2007; Duch, Groh, & Allen, 2001), leading to the potential benefits that PTs can have when leading a tutoring session. This can also have a negative effect, however, when taking into consideration the motivations of the tutee.

Tutees seeking help from a PT may be doing so on a superficial level and foregoing the opportunity to learn on a deeper level. Here lies the problem of socialization within the tutoring relationship, with the responsibility of the PT to maintain a professional role and pursue a strategy to motivate the tutee (McWilliams, 2012). This was substantiated by Clarence (2016), who wrote:

The more knowledgeable and experienced tutors are, the less of an issue this may be, but nonetheless student tutors may not be fully able to break down difficult concepts, unpack and explain dense knowledge clearly, and create relevant learning activities that help students engage with their learning in meaningful and context-relevant ways. (p. 42)

Within the academy setting, the motivations of a student to improve can only be speculated as this has not been previously studied, however, service academies readily

state that students who are at the top of their class will have first choice in branch and post. Underperforming students may not have the luxury of choosing where they go or what they do in their service (USAFA, 2018e; USCGA, 2018e; USMA, 2018e; USMMA, 2018e; USNA, 2018e). Further, the idea of rank within the peer tutoring session has not been previously studied but could lend credence to the claims that PTs have presented themselves as an authoritarian instead of as peer mentor when leading tutoring sessions (Clarence, 2016).

The many challenges that are posed within tutoring sessions mandates that academic support administrators focus on peer tutoring training sessions. Scenario-based training has helped PTs lead effective tutoring sessions with students who seek help and has led to an increase in confidence. “In order to maximize peer tutors’ potential to work effectively to be a voice for students in conversation with lecturers, as well as facilitators and guides for students in their learning, context-specific, ongoing support, training and development opportunities are necessary” (Clarence, 2016, p. 51). Weissbach and Pflueger (2018) also reported that “interdisciplinary tutor training can improve the feedback of peer writing tutors” (p. 206) in an effort to improve writing support, also by increasing the self-assurance of PTs researchers have suggested that PTs might be able to further develop critical thinking in struggling students which may lead to academic achievement and graduation (Arendale & Hane, 2014). This is the cornerstone of one “know[ing] the ropes” (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 57; Schlossberg et al., 1989, p. 16) and should be witnessed in PTs that are within the *moving-through* portion of the transition theory (Anderson et al., 2012). There is a lack of research concerning how undergraduate armed force PTs interact with their peers in an effort to facilitate their academic learning,

yet I aimed to address these issues by lending a voice to those that have served as an undergraduate service academy PT.

### **Peer Tutor Outcomes**

The experience of being a PT must come to an end at some point as undergraduate students working as PTs will ultimately need to move on to the workforce or transition back to student life as a former PT. The experience of working with struggling students and the strategies learned to enhance learning yield outcomes which the person will take with them upon moving out of the role of PT. Researchers have provided insight regarding the lasting benefits of peer tutoring as they relate to student performance and employee performance as PTs “improve their content mastery as well as their perceptions of the respective field” (Batz et al., 2015, p. 10). These benefits can be considered as part of the *moving-out* phase (Anderson et al., 2012), as students who have chosen to cease being a PT are more likely to recognize the advantages and disadvantages that this role has in their life.

While there is no existing research regarding service academy students participating as PTs, there have been a number of studies from civilian higher educational settings that have discussed the outcomes from the experience of being a PT. Returning to the role of student from the role of PT has been reported to help with developing cognitive thinking as PTs have spent significant time crafting quality questions for their tutees (Agius & Stabile, 2018). The ability to enhance cognitive thinking skills has aided former PTs in the professional workplace as well as other academic classes (Lin & Lin, 2016). Further, aiding one’s peers with reflecting on errors made during academic

learning and explaining such errors helps one to create in-depth knowledge of the subject matter (Roscoe & Chi, 2007).

Professionalism has been reported to be developed through the role of peer tutoring. Harrison (2018) found that professionalism helped him with key teaching experience, while Clarke, Burgess, Menezes, and Mellis (2015) reported that “the benefits of students acting as peer tutors have been widely reported, and include metacognitive gains, increased student responsibility, and development of professionalism skills” (p. 743). Colvin (2007) explained:

In addition, tutors must continually manage the way they are viewed by others and establish, on an ongoing basis, their credibility and usefulness to students.

Finally, power and resistance occur not in a vacuum but through continual negotiation and in the reciprocity of the relationship. (p. 178)

Nisbet et al. (2014) also reported benefits that PTs exhibited as a result of working as a PT which included an increase in communication skills, confidence, and time management skills. The abilities to maintain relationships, forge bonds with colleagues, manage time specific tasks, and have confidence are integral components to an effective team and a productive employee. Employers attempt to create effective workplaces and rely on their employees to work efficiently which entails each of the outcomes previously stated (Kouzes & Posner, 2012).

As previously mentioned, DeFeo and Caparas (2014) conducted research much like this study, relying on a phenomenological design to reveal what the experiences that tutors underwent and what they learned. While the researchers performed this study at a civilian university comprised of undergraduate and graduate students, it was a level one

CRLA tutoring program that the participants worked in. Of note, another large similarity in DeFeo and Caparas were the defined phases of tutoring experiences which included students feeling that being a tutor was a solution to a problem that they had, however, they did not have any expectations when starting the experience. These thoughts would be considered by Anderson et al. (2012) as the initial transition into a new experience, what is considered *moving in*. Within this stage, students move from viewing the opportunity of being a PT as a way to find a job and gain experience (DeFeo & Caparas, 2014). Students then transition into the *moving-through* phase (Anderson et al., 2012) when tutors began to “develop respect for tutoring” and “seek additional responsibilities” (DeFeo & Caparas, 2014, p. 149). Seeking added tasks within the field of tutoring led to the start of the *moving-out* phase (Anderson et al., 2012), as tutors recognized that there was little benefit in continuing on as a tutor, citing “poor compensation,” a “lack of professional legitimacy,” and “limited stability” (DeFeo & Caparas, 2014, p. 149). These factors led to each of them leaving the field of tutoring to pursue other endeavors. While these participants included both graduate and undergraduate students, all engaged in tutoring students of the same social group (i.e., college students), which is the very definition of peer tutoring that Topping (1996) offered.

DeFeo and Caparas (2014) provided excellent insight into the movement from becoming a tutor to leaving the field, which falls in line with the transition theory (Anderson et al., 2012; Schlossberg, 1981). These authors went further, however, and provided specific outcomes that tutors took with them into the professional workplace. While “all left the writing center field,” as none of the tutors could see a future as a professional tutor, “all identified professional applications and made direct connections

between their tutoring experiences and their later work” (DeFeo & Caparas, 2014, p. 154). The ability for tutors to adopt constructivist theories helped those who tutored English majors in that they easily transitioned into the teaching profession at more than one level.

Within the same study, those that focused on their own personal development stated that they became better writers and developed personal behaviors that enabled growth in the professional setting. One participant went on to say, “I think it has made me more patient” (DeFeo & Caparas, 2014, p. 156), while another reported an increase in self-confidence, explaining, “At first I felt as though I would have nothing to offer the students. However...I learned that I knew more than I thought I did and I gain [sic] confidence in myself” (p. 156). These former tutors recognized the importance of their role in the tutor-tutee relationship and were able to take with them important lessons learned from leading these sessions. While a lack of professional stability and compensation led to each participant leaving the field of tutoring, they reflected back on the positivity of the role and how they all benefitted from being a tutor, “only in retrospect did they notice its value” (DeFeo & Caparas, 2014, p. 157). While DeFeo and Caparas only studied one higher educational tutoring program, they did provide a platform for those who had engaged as a PT to have their voices heard. This allows others, who seek to follow in their footsteps, with the ability to understand what they can expect should they choose to continue to transition into the role of becoming a PT, as well as to understand what they may learn from the process of being a PT.

## Summary

In summary, specific challenges have been documented by students learning within the armed forces, including time constraints due to multiple mandatory tasks (Reitsma, 2009). Each academy has specific programs focused on student and leader development which focus on PD. Further, peer tutoring and academic assistance programs have been established by civilian colleges and universities throughout the United States in order to promote academic excellence and are currently provided at each federal service academy. These academic programs continue to be utilized at service academies in an effort to facilitate the learning of future officers. Students at service academies may opt to become a PT; therefore, previous literature findings are helpful in annotating what to expect when transitioning into the role of a PT. Undergraduate PTs at federal service academies have not yet been provided a platform to be heard; prior to this study, there was no literature available which might that provide context to the transition of moving into, through, and out of the role of a PT in the service academy system. Through this study, I endeavored to identify recommendations that will be useful to administrators at federal service academies, as well as to provide other undergraduate armed forces students the opportunity to learn from those who have served as a PT by utilizing the transition theory as the guiding framework.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODS**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of undergraduate students who served as PTs at federal service academies. The purpose of Chapter Three is to present the procedures, research design, and analysis for this transcendental phenomenological study. I will provide a comprehensive explanation regarding each step that I took to conduct this study in order to ensure that future studies could replicate these procedures and ensure the trustworthiness of the study. Chapter Three contains several subsections, including the design of the study, research questions, setting/site, participants, procedures for approval to conduct this study as well as to gather data, my role within this study, data collection methods, how the data were analyzed, establishing trustworthiness, and ethical considerations.

### **Design**

I applied a transcendental phenomenological approach in this qualitative study to describe the experiences of undergraduate students who served as PTs at federal service academies. “Qualitative research in general, and phenomenology in particular, is concerned with describing and interpreting human phenomena from the perspective of those who have experienced them” (Milacci, 2003, p. 2). Due to the pursuit of the descriptions of experiences that undergraduate service academy students had throughout their time as a PT, the qualitative research approach was appropriate (Creswell, 2013). Within the qualitative umbrella, I chose the phenomenology design, which is considered to be “the systematic attempt to uncover and describe the structures . . . of lived experience” (Van Manen, 1997, p. 10). Phenomenologists have agreed that this type

method is suitable when attempting to gain a thick, rich description of any human phenomenon (Heidegger, 1962; Husserl, 1931; Milacci, 2003; Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1997). Further, in order to fully understand these students' experiences throughout their journey as a PT in a strict environment, I relied on the textural and structural descriptions found through a comprehensive data analysis which was achieved only by utilizing a phenomenological research design (Moustakas, 1994). Because this was the first time that former PTs provided their descriptions of their experiences, and I had knowledge and biases relating to service academies, an *epoche* was required, which I accomplished through reflexive journaling. This effort was concentrated so as to avoid my own thoughts and opinions in order to provide the descriptive nature of the phenomenon. The transcendental phenomenological design is ideal when describing rather than interpreting (Franz, 2016), and is most useful when researchers ask participants "describe things in themselves, to permit what is before one to enter consciousness and be understood in its meanings and essences" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 27).

### **Research Questions**

I developed the following research questions to guide this study:

#### **Central Research Question**

How do undergraduate students describe their peer tutoring experiences in federal service academies?

#### **Subquestion 1**

What were participants' expectations for being a PT prior to the start of this experience?

**Subquestion 2**

In what ways were participant expectations met or not met during the peer tutoring experience?

**Subquestion 3**

What expected and unexpected outcomes were realized by participants during this experience?

**Subquestion 4**

How do participants describe the short-lived and enduring influences of their peer tutoring experience?

**Setting**

The setting for this study was three U.S. service academies in the eastern United States. Each setting is located on government property and has restricted access with armed guards. Over the course of six months, I asked for volunteer participants at these academies. Participants were undergraduate students who were on a regimented schedule and needed to ask for permission to participate in the study, simply to inform their chain of command regarding their personal whereabouts. Students were also in uniform, dressed just as their peers were dressed in the uniform of the day. These three settings were selected as they are three of the five commissioning academies that are fully funded by United States taxpayers and each institution requires that students serve in the armed forces for a term no less than five years. In order to effectively prepare students for their respective branches, these academies rely on a chain of command as well as rank; therefore, information flows from the top down, as each member of a lower rank must follow orders from a commanding officer or provide information when requested.

Each academy has a student body population between 900 and 5,000 students, who all receive a tuition-free education. Each academy has a student body which is roughly 17-35% female and 25-38% minority (Petersons, 2018a; 2018b; 2018c; 2018d; 2018e) which closely aligned to the demographic numbers found in the U.S. armed forces (U.S. Department of Defense, 2015). Further, potential students were between the ages of 17 and 25<sup>1</sup>, not be married or pregnant, demonstrate excellent physical fitness, good moral character, and if applying to the U.S. Military, Naval, Air Force, or Coast Guard “not be legally responsible for support of any children” (USMA, 2018c). The U.S. Merchant Marine Academy made no stipulation regarding supporting children when applying. In addition, federal service academies require that incoming students complete a physical fitness assessment and be of good moral character<sup>2</sup>. Each service academy had an international student body as the Code of Federal Regulations permits the appointment of Midshipmen/Cadets from nations other than the United States (USAFA, 2018d; USCGA, 2018d; USMMA, 2018c; USMA, 2018d; USNA, 2018c).<sup>3</sup>

The concept of good moral character is not only important when applying to these institutions but is continued to be stressed during their undergraduate studies. This was an effort to enhance each potential officer’s leadership upon graduating from their institution. Good moral character is stressed each and every day at these academies and is upheld by each institutions’ own honor code that focuses on a zero-tolerance policy for

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<sup>1</sup> Each academy requires that students be no less than 17 years of age, however service academies vary regarding the maximum age one can be to enter a specific academy (22-25). These ages must occur on or before July 1<sup>st</sup> of the entrance year (USAFA, 2018c; USCGA, 2018c, USMMA, 2018b; USMA, 2018c; USNA, 2018b).

<sup>2</sup> Some academies have listed moral conduct on their admissions website, others have devoted this information on a separate webpage.

<sup>3</sup> There are 60 international students enrolled each year at USAFA, USMA, and USNA, while there are 36 and 30 at the USCGA and USMMA respectively.

lying, cheating, or stealing of any kind. Each potential officer is required to uphold their own institutions honor code and be willing to turn in those that do not stand by the very same code.<sup>4</sup> Students uphold these codes by swearing to abide by them; therefore, any violations of the code results in a hearing. The consequences from their actions could range to any number of varying penalties including, but not limited to, demerits in their current standing (USMMA, 2018e), probation, or expulsion from the academy (USAFA, 2018f).

Of note regarding the five federal service academies is the strict style of education where a chain of command is employed. Service academy students are accustomed to a chain of command and rank (Wilson et al., 2013); therefore, when decisions or orders are made, which often come from officials above the midshipmen/cadet level, they are followed. Conforming to the organization is a key component to the student body at each of the five institutions and could have played a factor into this study. The ability to opine about one's experiences in an environment that stresses conformity may have been difficult when asked about personal experiences. I was careful to create an environment in which the participants felt comfortable enough to elaborate and describe their personal experiences regarding the entire PT process.

Peer tutoring programs have been shown to be effective at increasing student persistence (Colver & Fry, 2016). This is particularly interesting as each academy in the current study boasts a rigorous academic program and offers a peer tutoring program. A typical PT program consists of a director who is tasked with providing support for

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<sup>4</sup> Each institution has an honor code that pertains to their own academy. While each are slightly different, they all include a zero-tolerance policy regarding not only the acts of lying, cheating, or stealing, but also the act of not reporting a violation if a student witnesses one (USAFA, 2018f; USCGA, 2018f; USMMA, 2018e; USMA, 2018f; USNA, 2018e).

volunteers selecting to be a PT. When embarking on this decision, students becoming a PT attended PD sessions that provided content pertaining to the role of a PT. Further information regarding the PT programs at each institution were found through discussions with PT directors at each academy in an effort to identify similarities and differences amongst the academy PT programs. While PT programs exist at a number of colleges and universities, descriptions regarding undergraduate PT experiences at federal service academies have not been reported. Thus, the service academy setting was a prudent choice for the current investigation.

### **Participants**

In order to ensure that volunteer participants could purposefully inform me about the central phenomenon, a purposeful sampling method was used (Creswell, 2013). The sampling types for this study included meeting the criteria of being a PT for greater than one semester, and a purposeful intensity of three to four participants per academy, with maximum variation, including minorities (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). This yielded roughly 15 total participants, which is in line with Polkinghorne's (1989) guidance of five to 25 participants when collecting data from individuals who experienced a phenomenon. While the total number of participants could have been as large as 20 participants, the goal was to interview participants at each service academy in order to gain contributions from all branches of the armed forces and to gain thematic saturation of the experience. Once I was unable to find new themes, data saturation was reached, and interviews ceased (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015; Polkinghorne, 2005). The sampling pool at each site was between 40 and 90 students as each program director stated that their PT population varies from year to year, as PTs move out of the PT experience. The selection

criteria were undergraduate PTs that have had experience which lasted at least two semesters as these students are still enrolled at their respective institution. The ideal volunteer population is approximately 15 to 20% female and 30 to 35% minority, as this aligns with the demographic numbers of the U.S. armed forces (U.S. Department of Defense, 2015); therefore, the participants for this study included men and women from the five federal service academies who were in their second, third, or fourth year of higher education. These students were at universities that had majors which spanned the entire civil and military academic spectrum, and are primarily from the United States; however, each institution had an international population as well. These international students did not commission into the U.S. armed forces; rather, their home nations commissioned them directly into their branch.

Participants were selected based on information reported on a voluntary questionnaire created using Google forms (Appendix E). Directions to fill out the survey were sent to each PT program director along with a description of the study. In order to fully participate, volunteers needed to complete all stages of the proposed research plan: journaling, one-on-one interview, and focus group interview. Further, academic major as well as desired branch was requested as students leave the role of PT due to a time constraint as reported by one PT Director at a site. Prior service was requested; this is a statistic that each institution maintains, which I used to ensure maximum variation by including those who have prior service.

### **Procedures**

Of primary consideration is obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) conditional approval through Liberty University. Once conditional approval was granted,

I sought to obtain permission to conduct research at each of the federal service academies. Once granted approval at each site, I then submitted approval letters to the IRB office at Liberty University for final approval. After receiving full approval from Liberty University (Appendix A), I then obtained site specific approval from three of the five federal service academies as required by Liberty University (Appendices B, C, and D). Upon being granted full approval, I opened the demographic survey online through Google forms. I requested that each PT Director email their former PT population at their academy with a link for former PTs to read about the study. This was done through a recruitment letter (Appendix F) which had a link for those participants to click on and fill out a demographic questionnaire. Once 20 surveys were submitted from each institution, the link was closed to that institution, and priority was given to those with the most amount of PT experience who helped fulfill the sampling goal of maximum variation yielding an average of five volunteer participants from each academy. I identified the participants and provided that list to the PT Director in order to obtain the email addresses of those volunteering to participate in the study. Identified participants were emailed a welcome letter which included an attached informed consent form (Appendices G, H, and I). Consent forms were printed, signed, and returned to myself prior to the one-on-one interview. Participants also received the purpose of the study including the procedures that were used including the data collection process, how I protected the participants' identities, known risks and benefits from participating in the study, a consent form, and a copy of the IRB approval letter (Creswell, 2013). Along with protecting the confidentiality of the volunteer participants, their institutions were also given a pseudonym. The institutions were given a name resembling the phonetic

alphabet used throughout the armed forces, while participants were given a name based on the first letter of their last name. All pseudonyms were stored separately from the rest of the data on a list that will be kept in a locked drawer.

Descriptive demographic data obtained through the survey process were only used quantitatively as a means for describing the participants in the study via graph. Data were obtained through participant journaling, one-on-one interviews, and focus group interviews. All data collection was performed electronically with audio recordings taken from both interview sessions, which were transcribed by a professional transcription service. Electronic journals were provided to participants approximately 30 days from the first interview, and were collected one week after the final interview. All data were stored on my personal computer, which was password-protected. Further, all data were backed up using Acronis True Image software (Creswell, 2013).

### **The Researcher's Role**

“Phenomenology is the study of the world as it appears to individuals when they lay aside their prevailing understandings of those phenomena and revisit their immediate experience of the phenomena” (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p. 495). The role of the researcher in a qualitative study is to describe the phenomena in a natural state; in order to do this, the researcher must take on the role of the human instrument (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A good description of the human instrument is as follows:

One fully adaptive to the indeterminate situation that will be encountered. The human instrument builds upon his or her *tacit* knowledge as much as if not more than upon propositional knowledge and uses methods that are appropriate to

humanly implemented inquiry: interviews, observations, document analysis, unobtrusive clues, and the like. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 187)

By utilizing the defined data collection methods and by listening and re-listening to the voices and tones of the participants, I became the human instrument and helped provide a synthesized description of the experiences that service academy PTs undergo. While Lincoln and Guba also discussed the trustworthiness of the human instrument and the imperfections that humans have when conducting research. This is addressed later in this dissertation; however, understanding that humans err is the first step to conducting a transcendental phenomenological study.

In order to do this, bracketing (Creswell, 2013) one's prejudgments as well as personal background must be clarified through a process also known as *epoche* (Milacci, 2003; Moustakas, 1994). In doing so, I ensured that only what participants' descriptions provided and what they deemed as meaningful content related to their role as an undergraduate PT at a federal service institution entered the study. While this study was conducted, I was on sabbatical from one of the service academies. My primary role there was as an instructor, as well as an executive officer within one of the pillars of the academy. During this sabbatical and prior to it, I did not work with or instruct any of the voluntary participants, and I ensured that at no point any of the participants were beholden to me in any way.

During my sabbatical I continued to report my progress to my superiors. Because of my affiliation with one of the academies, I thought I may feel a bias towards it because I was unfamiliar with the other academies and how they operated on a day-to-day basis. Qualitative research relies on an active voice; therefore, I aimed to practice reflexivity

often, and be as transparent as possible, in order to ensure that participants' voices were heard (Patton, 2015). I reported all of my prejudgments and biases through memoing and reflexive journaling (Appendix J).

Each federal service academy relies on an honor code. My personal beliefs about the honor code may have been an issue. Berghmans et al. (2013) reported that PTs were inclined to provide answers to tutees, which is contrary to the honor code. I ensured that I reported my own thoughts and opinions regarding any honor code issues through reflexive journaling.

I have always been a civilian, and at no point have I ever served in the armed forces; however, my personal belief in the value of the armed forces and those who serve to protect our freedoms may have caused a bias. Being the human instrument, I used reflexivity to silence my own voice, as well as to ensure that all data is accurate through the use of member checking. While "member checking is a process in which the researcher asks one or more participants in the study to check the accuracy of the account" (Creswell, 2015, p. 259), it also aided in ensuring that participants' voices were not changed in any way.

### **Data Collection**

A transcendental phenomenological study was conducted to describe the experiences of undergraduate students who served as PTs at federal service academies. Upon approval from IRB at each service academy and from Liberty University, I embarked on the data collection. I endeavored to collect data at each setting from three to four voluntary participants with previous experience as a PT at their specific site. Data were obtained using three different methods: journaling, one-on-one interviews, and

focus group interviews. This triangulated effort helped me to validate the themes that I generated, which adds trustworthiness to this study (Creswell, 2013).

### **Demographic Questionnaire**

A demographic questionnaire (Appendix E) was provided to the interested former PTs for the sole purpose of finding a variety of students. The goal of this questionnaire was to identify three to four participants from each academy that represent the current armed forces demographics who participated as a PT for greater than one semester. As of 2015, 15.5% of the armed forces were female, while 31.3% were considered minority (U.S. Department of Defense, 2015), therefore, this study aimed to find three to four females and four to five minority students to ensure maximum variation (Patton, 2015). Through this questionnaire, I also sought to gain information regarding age, class year, academic major, prior service, a ranking of how well the student would be able to reflect upon their experiences as an undergraduate PT, and a short description of their time spent as a PT.

I was interested in the acts of selfless service that the armed forces promote. While the benefits of peer tutoring have been discussed, how this occurs was of interest when using the transition theory, specifically the *moving-in* phase (Anderson et al., 2012), as service academy students may deem the role of a PT as a way to enhance personal attributes not previously found in the literature. I aimed to gain as much insight as possible regarding this specific question pertaining to years of prior service that the student may have had prior to enrolling at the service academy.

## **Journaling**

According to methodology researchers, “A valuable source of information in qualitative research can be documents” (Creswell, 2015, p. 221). Requesting that participants keep a journal helped students remember their personal experiences which occurred during the time spent as a former PT. Further, this enhanced the interview process and provided valuable information regarding their experiences as an undergraduate PT at a federal service academy.

Participants kept a journal for seven days prior to their first interview. I emailed each participant a daily reminder regarding their peer tutoring experience and their upcoming interview. This journal was kept by them on their laptop and was emailed to me after the focus group interviews occurred. In order to accomplish this, I emailed each participant daily requesting one paragraph regarding the following prompts:

1. What factors helped you decide to become a PT?
2. What do you remember most about the process of becoming a PT?
3. What strategies or techniques do you remember from your training that you favored while performing your duty as a PT?
4. What challenges do you remember from your time as a PT?
5. What made you feel that you were confident in your abilities as a PT and why?
6. Please describe the lasting impression you have from your time spent as a PT.
7. If another student were contemplating the idea of becoming a PT at your service academy, what would you say to them and why?

The first three prompts were designed to get the participants to reflect back on the time they began to transition into the role of an undergraduate PT. The fourth and fifth prompts intended to have participants focus on the moving-through phase of being an undergraduate PT, and the final two prompts were focused attempts at remembering the time spent moving out of the role of being an undergraduate PT as well as the lasting impression it had on the student participant.

These prompts helped to facilitate the interview process as well as to compare the audio-recorded interview to what was reported in the journal. Journals were collected via email after the focus group interviews occurred, in order to provide as much time to record thoughts, opinions, and experiences. Personal type written journals were optimal because “online data collection helps create a nonthreatening and comfortable environment, and provides greater ease for participants discussing sensitive issues” (Nicholas et al., 2010).

### **Interviews**

“Qualitative interviews let us see that which is not ordinarily on view and examine that which is often looked at but seldom seen” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. xv). Husserl (1931) identified “noeses” as related to the mind and the spirit of a human being and how humans arrive at the meaning of perceptions, feelings, and memories, thus, the “noeses” refers to personal meanings (Moustakas, 1994). Voluntary participants provided personal meanings and descriptions from the experiences that each PT underwent through open-ended, in-depth, semi-structured one-on-one interviews.

Before conducting interviews for data collection, I performed a pilot study in order to determine whether the open-ended questions would yield depth when

respondents answered (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Prior to, and shortly after the interview, I took memos on any thoughts and concerns in order to practice reflexivity. Interviews were audio-recorded and used to construct themes amongst the sampling pool. All recordings were transcribed by a professional transcriptionist and later deconstructed for significant meanings during data analysis.

During the structured interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2012), I focused on three distinct phases of the undergraduate PT role at a federal service academy. This resembled the moving-in, moving-through, and moving-out phases of the transition theory (Anderson et al., 2012); however, these questions were all focused around the central research question: How do undergraduate students describe their peer tutoring experiences in federal service academies? The interview questions focused on the moving-in phase (Anderson et al., 2012) inquired why the students felt the need to pursue a role in peer tutoring, and their experiences transitioning from undergraduate service academy student to an undergraduate service academy student/PT. The questions focused on the moving-through phase (Anderson et al., 2012) explored the transition from novice to what participants described as being experienced PT. Through these questions, I also attempted to gain insight into ongoing benefits and challenges faced while being a PT. Questions related to the moving-out phase focused on the outcomes, both expected and unexpected, that the participants experienced from serving as a PT in this culture.

The following is the formal, structured interview guide with in-depth questions. These questions were adapted as this process evolved from research plan to data collection, however, the original questions and format were as follows:

1. Hello, my name is Drew Van Dam, and before we start I'd like to thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. As you are aware, I am attempting to learn the experiences of undergraduate PTs in a federal service academy setting and am thoroughly interested in what you have to say.
2. To start, would you mind introducing yourself? Where did you grow up, what are your interests, and what are your current challenges?
3. What drew you to attend this academy?
4. What challenges, concerns, or reservations did you have when choosing to join the armed forces and attending this academy?
5. Please describe your experiences with volunteering your time prior to attending this institution.
6. What made you decide that you wanted to participate in this study?

The following questions related to the experiences of moving in to the role of a PT:

7. Please describe the experience that led you to choose to be a PT. How did you learn of the program, what were your initial thoughts of PTs, and what led you to embark on that process?
8. Please describe the process you took to choose to be a PT after learning of the program? What experiences arose during the formal application process, including during interviews?
9. Upon hearing the decision that you had been accepted to be a PT, what were your initial thoughts?
10. Please describe the experience of meeting the chain of command tasked with leading the peer tutoring program. What were your initial impressions of

administrators involved in this program? How did their roles influence your choice to continue toward being a PT?

11. Please describe what your thoughts were of the role you were about to take on. What expectations did you have? What benefits did you think you would gain by being a PT?

The following questions related to the moving-through phase of being a PT:

12. Please describe your impression of the PD you received once you were accepted. How did these PD sessions aid in decreasing apprehension or increasing your desire to work with your peers?
13. What challenges did you experience with your peers while in the role of PT?
14. What challenges did you experience as a student while being a PT?
15. Please describe the experience you had when you understood the role of a PT and the strategies used to become comfortable as a PT. How did the techniques instructed during PD sessions facilitate your specific tutoring method?
16. Please describe how well you performed in this role, or if you feel that you were unsuccessful, please describe why.
17. How did you help facilitate the learning of your peers?

The following questions related to the moving-out phase:

18. Why did you stop being a PT?
19. How would you describe your time spent as a PT? Was it an overall positive experience or negative, and why?
20. How has being a PT helped you as a student at the academy?

21. Please describe the benefits received from being a PT as they relate to the role you hope to fulfill in the armed forces.
22. What experiences as a PT do you remember the most?
23. What would you tell other students thinking about being a PT in this culture?
24. What experiences would you like to add that we have not discussed today?
25. As you know, there will be a focus group interview in the near future. Are you still available to participate in that?
26. May I have your cell number to contact you on the day of the focus group?

Question two is a knowledge question and can be proved due to the factual information provided (Patton, 2015). Questions three through six were an effort to establish trust with the participant in order to facilitate responsive interviewing (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). These were opinion and value questions which were designed to explore how the participant thought (Patton, 2015). Chickering and Schlossberg (2002) discussed the “4 S system” as a way to understand of a person’s situation, and include the following: (a) “the situation at the time of the transition” (p. 45), (b) the supports that people have to rely on with a transition, (c) who the person is (i.e., self) that is going through the transition and how optimistic they are, and (d) a person’s coping strategy. Using the lens of the transition theory (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002; Schlossberg, 1981), I crafted questions in alignment with the “4 S system” (Schlossberg, 1987); therefore, Questions through nine and 11 were designed to probe the situation, while Question ten specifically focuses on the support system that each participant relied on. Questions 12 through 18 focused on the person as well as their coping strategy. Questions 19 through 24 were designed to focus on the final stage of the transition and

how the situation evolved, as well as how the person changed, and potential new strategies that the person employed to cope with new experiences. Questions 25 and 26 are final questions, through which I sought further information, if needed.

### **Focus Groups**

Focus groups “bring together a group of individuals, representative of the population whose ideas are of interest” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 30). While the focus group was an interview with a group of people, there was the opportunity for participants to “hear each other’s responses and to make additional comments beyond their own original responses as they hear what other people have to say” (Patton, 2015, p. 475), as well as to confirm results from the preliminary analysis. The focus groups were conducted in a face to face setting with no less than three participants. The following are a list of questions that each focus group received:

1. What motivated each of you to choose to become a PT?
2. What advice would you give those thinking about becoming a PT?
3. Please describe the trials and tribulations that came with being a PT in this environment (service academy setting).
4. Please describe the highlight of your time as a PT and why you still remember that?
5. Please describe the moment that you felt most comfortable in the role of PT and what made you feel comfortable at that time?
6. Being a PT has provided you with a number of experiences to draw from and use while at the academy as a student. What has influenced you the most as you remain here at the academy and what do you think will stay with you into

your career as an officer in the armed forces?

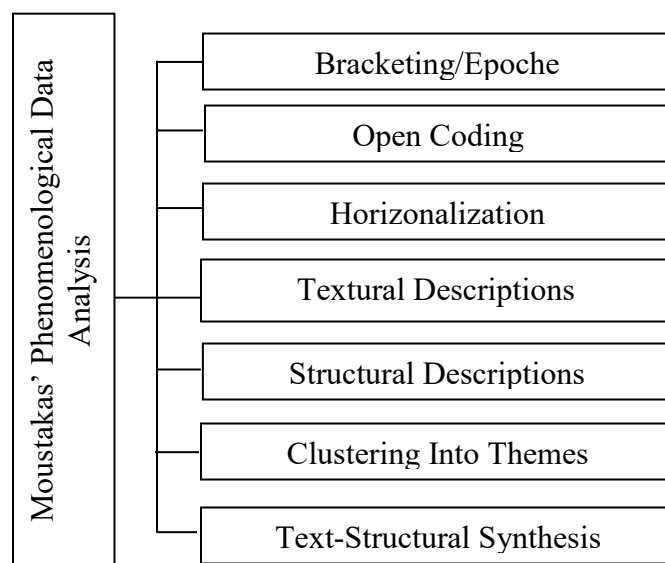
7. What advice would you give those thinking about leaving the role of being a PT?
8. What experiences would each of you like to discuss that we have not had a chance to?
9. I thank you for your time, I know you've devoted a lot of personal time to this and I sincerely appreciate it.

Question one was an effort to establish responsive interviewing and establish trust (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Along with Question seven and eight, these were opinions and values questions designed to explore how the participants thought (Patton, 2015). Questions two through five were an opportunity for participants to provide information regarding each of the three phases of transition, as well as to provide the factors relied on to cope with the transition (Schlossberg, 1987). Questions six and seven were open-ended questions specifically designed to capture opinions regarding the moving out phase (Schlossberg, 1981). These questions were designed for obtaining additional information previously not thought of by the former PTs at each site and could be fruitful in gaining clarity regarding participant responses particularly to the themes generated as well as to shedding light on the central research question and the four subquestions (Patton, 2015).

### **Data Analysis**

In this qualitative study, I applied a transcendental phenomenological approach to describe the experiences of undergraduate students who served as PTs at federal service academies, therefore, the data analysis relied on the methodology of Moustakas (1994). All data collected and processed was done so in order to follow Moustakas's

phenomenological reduction process. In order to accomplish this, I obtained IRB approval and then gained consent from participants to contact them and include them in the study. Once participants were identified, I provided participants with instructions to keep a one-week daily journal. This daily journal included a daily prompt to annotate anything the participants could remember regarding their experiences as an undergraduate PT at their federal service institution. This step was critical not only to help participants remember their experiences as a PT, but to also provide me with additional pieces of information from each participant. At this time the reduction process began. The phenomenological reduction process used to analyze the data can best be seen by utilizing Moustakas's seven step process (see Figure 2).



*Figure 2.* Phenomenological data analysis steps (Moustakas, 1994).

### **Bracketing/Epoche**

The epoche process is closely related to bracketing (Creswell, 2013), and eliminated any prejudgments that I had. This ensured that my own beliefs were lessened in order to examine the phenomenon without bias. In order for this process to occur, I

first needed to understand the importance of epoche, where “everyday understandings, judgements, and knowings are set aside” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33). This allowed me to reflect on the phenomenon and allow it to be examined, and understood (Milacci, 2003; Moustakas, 1994). This step included placing an emphasis on the research and focusing solely on the participants’ thoughts and opinions regarding their experiences. These statements, or data, were then placed in brackets ensuring that everything else unrelated to the research questions is removed (Moustakas, 1994). The process consisted of memoing all thoughts, concerns, perceptions, and biases in a reflexive journal (Appendix J) to ensure that “only my own perception, my own acts of consciousness ... remain(s) as pointers to knowledge, meaning, and truth” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 88). Reporting one’s own knowledge about a situation is known as “transcendental phenomenological reduction” (p. 91), which Schmitt (1968) described as being “‘Transcendental’ because it uncovers the ego for which everything has meaning; ‘Phenomenological’ because the world is transformed into mere phenomena; and ‘Reduction’ in that it leads us back to our own experience of the way things are” (p. 30).

### **Open Coding**

Upon bracketing personal presuppositions, I then analyzed and coded the data in an effort to find significant statements which formed themes (Creswell, 2013). This helped to create a level playing field for each data point. Open coding aids researchers in the process of analyzing the data as “significant statements, meaning units, textural and structural description, and description of the essence (Creswell, 2013, p. 105) are all accounted for. I accomplished this by audio-recording all of the participant interviews. Each interview was transcribed by a professional transcription service. This process

occurred again with the focus groups, which occurred after all one-on-one interviews took place at the academy. Afterwards, journals were printed and collected, which was when horizontalizing all of the data began. This process was aided by using ATLAS.ti qualitative data analysis software, which allowed me to begin to understand relationships amongst the data codes and build the themes which could be transformed into a visual representation of how the theme arose (Creswell, 2013), which was far easier than by doing this without computer software (see Table 1). A code is “often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 3).

### **Horizontalization**

Moustakas (1994) referred to the process of “horizontalization” (p. 95), where every statement is regarded as equal. This step was important to note in this transcendental phenomenology as I interpreted the consciousness of the individuals who experienced the phenomenon. Horizontalizing ensures that every piece of data is given equal value; therefore, irrelevant data were removed, which left only the “textural meanings and invariant constituents of the central phenomenon” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 180). According to Moustakas, this stage is considered to be where horizons are found and moves to clustering the horizons into themes.

### **Clustering into Themes**

All transcribed notes from the interviews, focus groups, and journals were entered into ATLAS.ti before being coded and horizontalized, which aided in triangulating the data (Patton, 2015). All irrelevant data not pertaining to the research questions were removed. All remaining data pertinent to the research questions were clustered into

themes (Moustakas, 1994). The textural descriptions were then revealed after themes were found. At this time, the essence of the phenomenon experience began to come into scope. In order to do this, I made sure to relate all themes to the research questions that I posed, which I posted on my wall in my work space to remind me of where I needed to keep my focus (Milacci, 2003). This also helped with jotting down thoughts regarding specific codes when I was away from my computer. If I had a thought or idea while I was focused on something else, I could run into the work space and quickly write something down on these sheets, which helped immensely. After I removed all repetitive data, I was able to find the textural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994).

### **Textural Descriptions**

Textural descriptions of the PT role at a service academy was present to a degree. This stage was the most difficult as descriptions varied from participant to participant. This stage involved a great deal of time reading and re-reading statements and codes as well as listening to each interview a number of times. Engaging in the reduction process a number of times with each piece of data collected helped provide the descriptions, or the “what” (Creswell, 2013, p. 80) of the role that a PT experienced. This “le[d] to deep layers of meaning” (Moustakas, 1994, p.96).

### **Structural Descriptions**

At this point, I used “imaginative variation” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 98) to vary possible meanings of the descriptions from varying perspectives in order to gain a sense of the “how” (Creswell, 2013, p. 80) of the experience of the role of an undergraduate PT in a federal service academy setting. From these possible meanings came structural descriptions, which occurred due to the efforts stated previously regarding my notes and

interviews. The daily type-written journals were cross-referenced throughout the process and were crucial to identifying the structural descriptions of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). The purpose of this was to find structural qualities from the textural meanings that the participant described. These structural qualities provided structural themes, which I integrated into “the universal structural description of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 181) in order to explain the process that undergraduate PTs experienced at federal service academies.

### **Text-Structural Synthesis**

This process built up to the final step in conducting phenomenological research, the intuitive integration phase. During this phase, I used all textural and structural descriptions to craft a unified statement of the essence of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole (Moustakas, 1994, p. 100). It was here that I needed to be intuitive and thoughtful when incorporating textural and structural descriptions in order to build a synthesis of the significant participants’ understandings in order to form the essence of what it is like to transition through the experience of being an undergraduate PT at a federal service academy (Moustakas, 1994).

### **Trustworthiness**

The integrity of the researcher and the findings obtained through the voices of the participants depended upon “careful attention to establishing trustworthiness” (Patton, 2015, p. 685). I ensured that trustworthiness was evident by establishing credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability in the following ways.

## **Credibility**

Credibility refers to the “activities increasing the probability that credible findings will be produced” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301). To establish credibility, I bracketed out my prejudgments in an effort to eliminate “suppositions and the raising of knowledge above every possible doubt” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26). This was accomplished through ongoing, reflexive detailing of my personal judgements and biases. Bracketing involved locating key statements that speak to the phenomenon, which led to the interpretation of these meanings and phrases, which then led to the inspection of the meanings, which built the statement of the phenomenon (Patton, 2015). Data were also triangulated through the collection of multiple sources of information (Patton, 2015).

“Prolonged engagement” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 304) with the setting and participants was also important in order to provide “depth” to the study. By spending a lengthy amount of time getting to know participants, respective PT programs, and from understanding how the federal service academies operate, I was better able to sift out misinformation that did not add to the study (Creswell, 2013).

## **Dependability and Confirmability**

Dependability focuses on “the process of the inquiry and the inquirer’s responsibility for ensuring that the process was logical, traceable, and documented” (Patton, 2015, p. 685). To ensure dependability, I documented all steps and followed a logical progression, including requesting that participants keep a journal prior to the one-on-one interviews, then conducting the interviews, followed by group interviews (Patton, 2015). This information remained available for all inquiries and audits for an independent third party to verify that all pieces of information led to the final dissertation

(Schwandt, 2015). I conducted peer debriefing and utilize a peer in the field of peer tutoring. This was performed at my own institution, and this process helped provide context to the data as well as provide a new way to analyze the data (Schwandt, 2015).

Confirmability is “concerned with establishing the fact that the data and interpretations of an inquiry are not merely figments of the inquirer’s imagination” (Patton, 2015, p. 685). In order to link interpretations to the data provided, all audio recordings were kept on file and were transcribed using an audio transcription service. “Member-checking” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314) included participant review of all transcriptions prior to writing Chapter Four and by providing participants a copy of the results so that they could read their words in context. Member checking was also accomplished by providing a copy of Chapter Four to the PT directors at each participating academy. Further, bracketing through reflexive journaling was performed. I provide my personal memos taken during the research process and have included them in the final dissertation within Appendix J (Patton, 2015). The dates chosen from the reflexive journals were the first dates that I spent on-site at each service academy.

### **Transferability**

Transferability “deals with the issue of generalization in terms of case-to-case transfer” (Patton, 2015, p. 685) and “the responsibility of the original investigator ends in providing sufficient descriptive data” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 298) in order to help future researchers conduct similar studies and reach similar conclusions. This specifically deals with the ability to recreate this study in the future using the same parameters. In order to ensure transferability, all definitions and procedures were clearly defined and annotated so as to ensure future researchers can apply the same or similar

parameters to conduct future studies (Patton, 2015; Schwandt, 2015). While recreating this study outside of a federal service academy may prove to be difficult, similarities could be drawn to ROTC programs, other military academies, or towards civilian institutions with veterans serving as a PTs.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Prior to any data being collected, IRB approval was obtained. Ethical considerations were addressed in scientific research, which started with obtaining approval through the IRB at each service academy as well as at Liberty University. Once approval was granted, I needed to ascertain who the volunteer population was. These demographic data were obtained from online questionnaires which sought maximum variation in order to meet the set criterion for entering the study. All information obtained from participants through online questionnaires were kept in a secured location. To maintain confidentiality of the volunteer participants, the names of their institutions were also changed. The following names were used to identify each academy: Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, Delta, Echo. Student names were changed using a name that matches the first letter of their last name—for example, Drew Van Dam would become “Victor.” While the desired number of participants was three to four per site, this meant that there may only be 10 to 16 (Polkinghorne, 1989) used as data collection was going to cease once saturation was achieved (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015; Polkinghorne, 2005). I was fortunate enough to recruit 15 participants from a total of three service academies, which helped to achieve data saturation.

Informed consent and research design forms were sent to identified participants, these clearly indicated the steps of the research process and informed them of the

potential to drop out of the study if they decided to. This aided in the IRB portion of not causing the participants any harm (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). All participants were treated as equal, with no preference given to any specific participant (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). All information obtained was kept on a password-protected computer and backed up using Acronis True Image software (Creswell, 2013).

Members of the armed forces are not permitted to receive an award for participating in a voluntary study; therefore, volunteers were not rewarded for their efforts within the study. Volunteers finished their portion of the study after they reviewed their own words and verified the accuracy of their words. I collected data during a sabbatical in which I was not teaching, which removed the potential for my students to be participating in the study. Further, at no time did any participant become beholden to myself during the study nor will be in the foreseeable future.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of undergraduate students who served as PTs at federal service academies. In this chapter, I provided details on transcendental phenomenology, and presented the procedures, research design, and analysis for this study. Further, I provided a comprehensive explanation regarding each step that I took to conduct this study, including participant selection, procedures for collecting data, and data analysis. Within Chapter Three, I addressed issues pertaining to trustworthiness, as well as ethical considerations, and how I dealt with these in order to protect the participants involved in the study.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

### Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of undergraduate students who served as peer tutors at federal service academies. In Chapter Four, I will first introduce the undergraduate students who agreed to describe their experiences of being a PT while at a federal service academy. To protect the identity of participants, I used pseudonyms that are reflective of participants' demographics but that still protect their anonymity. I will present the results of the data analysis process in the form of themes and as direct answers to the research questions that are the focus of this study. Themes were generated from the theoretical framework relying on the use of Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory; therefore, the findings are presented in the manner of moving into, through, and out of the role of a PT. One central research question and four subquestions directed the process of data reduction, which led to the discovery of recurring themes.

After analyzing the data from each method of data collection, I determined that data saturation was achieved when similar emerging themes were occurring from each participant's descriptions. Throughout the interview process, I journaled all of my thoughts and personal opinions, which enabled me to set aside my own prejudgments regarding the participants, the settings, and preconceived notions regarding federal service academies (Appendix K). Results are provided through the textural descriptions, structural descriptions, as well as a text-structural synthesis of participant experiences following Moustakas's (1994) method of phenomenological data reduction. I will

conclude Chapter Four with a summary of the themes discovered as addressed through the research questions.

### **Participants**

This study was conducted by relying on the qualitative data provided by 15 volunteer participants who experienced the role of being a PT at three federal service academies. Participants were contacted with the help of each participating academy's PT Director. PT Directors compiled lists with the names of former PTs currently enrolled at their academy. I emailed each student the recruitment email (Appendix F) and provided a link to the demographic survey. After reviewing completed surveys, I contacted interested volunteers who met the specific criteria. All of the participants had experienced the PT role for at least two semesters and had served in various roles for their particular branches they chose within their service. Five participants attend Alpha Academy, eight participants attend Bravo Academy, and two participants attend Charlie Academy. Only three Charlie Academy students responded to the request for participants. Of the three, two were entered into the study and the third student qualified but was not on campus due to being an exchange student. Of the 15 individuals, only two considered themselves Latino or Hispanic (13 chose non-Hispanic White), although seven females met the set criteria; therefore, the goal of interviewing participants which met Department of Defense (DoD) demographics was achieved. All participants were current undergraduate students who had transitioned out of the PT role at their service academy at the time of this study. Only one student no longer participates at all with her respective PT program, while all others have taken on a leadership role overseeing younger PTs.

In order to maintain confidentiality, all participants were given a pseudonym which complied with IRB requirements. Pseudonyms were based on the first letter of their last name and correspond to their respective institution. The only exception to this is Zadie and Zelda, who came from the same academy, as I did not account for the possibility of having to participants that had a last name beginning with the letter Z. Participants provided descriptions of their experiences and are referred to as Ben, Chester, Cecilia, Eamon, Fiona, Fredrick, Holly, Laura, Oliva, Patrick, Paxson, Peter, Wesley, Zadie, and Zelda. Each description includes the participants' experience and thoughts regarding volunteering their time.

### **Ben**

At the time of this study, Ben had served as a PT for three semesters in both calculus and information technology. Ben was drawn to the PT role due to already helping others around him in areas he was succeeding in. Ben was particularly interested in developing his leadership skills not only through the PT program where he transitioned into, but also through the Glee Club that he participates in, as well as pursuing extra responsibilities to hone his leadership skills. He is from Topeka, Kansas; however, his parents both served in the military. His mother served in the Army and has since transitioned to the Air Force National Guard in Kansas. Ben's step-father is also in the Army's National Guard in Kansas. He enjoys the military lifestyle, as that is what he has grown up in and is comfortable with. On his thoughts about responsibility, volunteering, and being a selfless, Ben stated:

I got started very early as a [fourth year student] because I realized that I was already doing a lot of the tutoring work with my roommates who were struggling

in IT and calculus, which I was doing pretty well at. I got A pluses in both of those classes, so I realized, I [was] succeeding in this class and my friends aren't, so I want to help them. Then it kind of just became natural, I'm already racking up all these tutoring hours, I might as well help other people that aren't just in my room and, you know, try to get more involved in the actual program. Instead of just doing it on my own. You know, hold me accountable for something.

### **Cecilia**

Cecilia is unique because she was the only student in this study who transferred from a civilian college to a service academy and has experience as being a PT in both settings. Cecilia has transitioned out of the PT role into a PT leadership role as she enjoyed her time with the program. Cecilia became a PT because she was looking for a path to express the selfless service that she grew accustomed to while she was in her teenage years. Cecilia stated that she enjoys seeking out opportunities to lead and to “call the shots” when volunteering. She felt that the service academy setting was ideal, and that the role of a PT was a natural fit. This is evident through her sentiments:

I've always been a big volunteer. I had well over 200 community service hours in high school. I did Relay for Life. Bunches of stuff, and, my school was really big into it so, I've always done a lot of that. But I've also been really big with sports so my sports teams did a lot of like community service and stuff as well. So, I just really enjoyed that and I also like being a leader, and being able to call the shots with volunteering which was nice. Because you get to like focus your efforts places. Right now actually one of my jobs is planning, outreaches and

stuff so it's like, it's really good to get back to that but it's hard to pinpoint which one you want to do because you only have so much time and resources so.

### **Chester**

Chester was an Informational Technology major from the northwest United States. He was a PT for four semesters tutoring primarily mathematics. A member of a military family, Chester felt that his best opportunity for a good education would be through the federal service academies. A self-described introvert, Chester explained that he is fond of volunteering and has enjoyed the times that he has done so, saying:

Before I came here, I did a lot of volunteering. I was involved in a lot of organizations and clubs, and did a lot of community service and things like that with them. I was involved in Youth in Government, so I did a lot of state related things in Florida. [I also was in the] Boy Scouts, definitely did a lot of volunteering with them. [Some] other things like, theater and I even volunteered my time teaching, as well, for a few years before I came here. I was working with a company called Tech Play Zone and they would teach middle school and elementary, mostly technology related things. [For example], making mobile apps or designing websites, even some 3D printing.

### **Eamon**

Eamon is from a military town, which is also close to a military base. Further, his family has held many roles within the military. Although these two facets are comprised of more than one branch of the military, Eamon's desire to attend his specific academy was rooted out of his life experiences. Eamon, who had been a PT for three semesters, described why volunteering was important to him, saying:

Volunteer work has always kind of been an important thing to me. And so, throughout my middle school and high school years, I did a lot of volunteering through Boy Scout and National Honor Society. I did a little bit of volunteering time in hospitals, too. You know, in my interest in medicine. And so, I would say there wasn't anything in particular that I volunteered consistently at, but I just did things here and there. You know, like service projects, you know cleaning up parks and that sort of thing. And so I was just kind of raised in a way where, community service and doing things for other people are good things and you should try to take some time to do that.

### **Fiona**

Fiona was interesting because I interviewed her at the Bravo Academy; however, Fiona was a semester exchange student from Charlie Academy. Her decision to leave the PT role was due directly to her choice to participate in the exchange program. Fiona's experiences were intriguing because they seemed to relate back to her respective academy and the differences she noticed between the Charlie and Bravo Academies. Fiona stated, "So we're a quarter of the size of Bravo, so, it's really small." This difference carried over to other aspects between the two academies, as Fiona explained:

The thing that differs is funding, I've noticed from being here [at Bravo], we [Charlie] don't have nearly as many perks as [Bravo does] at all. There's a huge culture difference here for women because there's about, I think 20% women here, at [Charlie] there's 40% per class, so, there's a really big difference [in] culture with women. [Also,] the small size of the institution, there's only 265 kids in my grade [at Charlie].

Fiona participated as a PT for two semesters in English and History. She did not have as many volunteering experiences as the other participants, although she did discuss her time at a soup kitchen. Rather, the decision to become a PT was based more on the opportunity to meet new people. She described her feelings towards the reasoning on why she chose to become a PT as follows:

So what led me to decide to be a peer tutor is that you could meet new people. Since you can't become a peer tutor unless you're an upperclassman at the [Charlie Academy], it was a good way for me to bridge the gap with the lower class in a way that wouldn't be in any way [considered fraternization].

### **Fredrick**

At the time of this study, Fredrick was focusing on his electrical engineering and cyber security project. His passion for developing a “smart power grid” was evident as he went into great detail describing this project. A native of the northwest United States, Fredrick reported that he had been a PT for three semesters, but was unique in his general lack of previous volunteer experience in comparison to the other participants:

I didn't volunteer as much as a lot of people. I know [a certain] number of people were in [the] Boy Scouts, right, and volunteered all the time for that? I wasn't really a part of any organization like that. I was in some youth groups and so I'd volunteered for some of their projects over the summers, or for like a weekend or something. I really liked being part of the YMCA youth programs growing up. So I'd done some volunteering, and I'd also tutored sometimes. I helped for a semester in high school, [where] I tutored in a special [education] class, to help the teachers out, because they needed more people in the room to help [with] one-

on-one interactions. But I would say that, in terms of volunteer activity, I wasn't one of the, the more active people.

### **Holly**

Holly, a student at the Charlie Academy caught my attention due to her memory she shared via the demographic survey. Holly described a strategy that she used that aided in her facilitating the learning of her tutee as follows:

One of my most vivid memories is when one of the [tutees] I was tutoring started laughing at me because I began to explain chemistry concepts to her in terms of baseball. She thought I was crazy when I started but told me that she will never forget [the] Lewis diagrams because she will think of my baseball game every time she needs to draw one.

Holly had been a PT for two semesters focusing on tutoring Chemistry because it was what she felt she was weakest in. In addition to Chemistry, Holly had actually been a PT in five other subjects, including American Politics, Calculus, History, Statics, and Writing. Holly shared the distinction of being one of two college athletes—Paxson being the other—as she also participated in soccer during the fall semester. On volunteering her time, Holly found that a previous experience at the writing center at her academy led her to become a tutor, saying:

I really enjoyed my experiences in the writing center. The mentor that I would go to for all of my papers, I would leave there with thousands of ideas, and then I would have to go and explode them onto a paper because she wasn't necessarily giving me ideas, but she was facilitating the conversation in such a way that really connected with me, that I was able to think of all these things on my own. I

thought that was a really awesome skill, it just really helped me. Being able to take my paper from something that was okay to having all these ideas and having a clear vision for how I wanted the final product, I was like, “Wow, like there should be writing tutors here.” That could be an awesome experience for an actual like student writer to be able to give another younger or different class student writer. So when they actually opened it up and said, “Hey, we're gonna have writing tutors this year,” I kind of became like the point person for the program.

While Holly has moved out of the PT role for all classes, she remained a leader in the writing center and has made attempts at improving the PT program at her academy. She stated that she actively enjoys helping students learn in her company because she enjoys the process.

### **Laura**

Laura’s willingness to expand on her thoughts and opinions were second to only one other participant in the study concerning to the amount of time spent in the interview. Laura is an engineering major who had spent two semesters as a PT and is unique as she tutored Chemistry instead of classes within her major. Although Laura was more relaxed during the interview than others, her willingness to help others came out more so than most. Laura participated in volunteer projects through two volunteer groups while in high school and described the lasting impression it has on her as she continues with Camp Hope still, saying:

The biggest thing I did was with my church, it was called Camp Hope. It was a big volunteer project to do, a lot of fundraising and stuff for seasons throughout

the year. Basically, what it is, is you spend a weekend in Frostburg, Maryland, at the university, you stay in the dorms there. We spent the week fixing people's homes, they're living in pretty rough conditions, you know? Western Maryland is [a] pretty economically deprived area. One year we scraped off the paint from a house and repainted it, and just did a bunch of like cleaning up in the yard. [It] was just this huge mess. Another one was we actually broke down and (we) completely rebuilt a lady's front porch. She [was] pretty overweight, [she] literally could not leave her house because the steps were so steep on her house. So we built her new steps and that was actually amazing when she came out, she just like started bawling, and saying, "Oh, this is so amazing." Yeah, that was a really great experience. And then I actually got to participate again last summer. Like this past summer, with Camp Hope, even though I'm not in high school anymore. I was able [to as] a young adult leader. So that was last summer, that's something that I did that was a big thing. Other than that, another volunteering thing I did was up at Gettysburg. My family like loves Gettysburg, the history and all that. Especially my dad, he's a history nerd. He basically found me a job volunteering because it wasn't paid and working at a museum there along the main street and working at cash registers and stuff there.

Although Laura continues as a PT leader, she has found many other groups at her academy to act in a selfless manner, saying:

In my free time I do a lot of volunteering stuff. That's a lot of fun and, you know, the [academy] makes that really easy to do. There's so many opportunities for that. I consider [the PT program] as volunteering, and then other big things are

[academy specific group], that in general has projects from doing beach clean ups, to working with elderly people. Working with homeless people, doing food drives, stuff like that. There's so many different things, it's one of the biggest clubs [at the academy]. I've [a] pretty small role, but it's a lot of fun. I'm a project leader for, an assisted living home, and, I've just organized groups of people to go up and we help out the folks there, [and] different events, so it's a lot of fun.

### **Olivia**

Easily the most memorable interview, Olivia presented as both tired and nonchalant. Olivia reported that she had been a PT for three semesters; she caught my eye as a potential participant because of her virtual writing statement regarding helping a student who had missed significant time. During the interviews, I asked each participant, “Why did you want to participate in this study?” Her response was indicative of her presence and apathy towards this study: “It was kind [of] by accident, I filled out the form, because I thought that it would be nice, and it wouldn't take very long.” This response caught me completely off guard to which I responded by saying, “So you can opt out at any time? If you don't want to participate, you can get up and walk away, it's perfectly fine? If you want to, it-it's okay? You should, I don't want to force you, and believe me, it's no skin off my back if you want to go, it's okay.” Olivia replied, “I mean, I'm already here, so, I'm already here.”

This back and forth portion of the interview led to what became a fruitful interview. No longer did I feel that I needed to pull information from Olivia, Olivia gradually became relaxed and my notes indicated that she “shoots from the hip” and that it was a “good interview.” This was almost as though she became comfortable and

trusted me and that this was an easy task to help someone else quickly. This back and forth occurred shortly after her memories of volunteering in high school; however, her statements about volunteering in high school were indicative of how Oliva viewed her role as a selfless leader. Helping others when she is needed but without taking up too much time seems to work best for Olivia. She explained her sentiments regarding volunteering in high school as follows:

I did as necessary. I silently had an A+ tutoring program that I ended up basically using to get my NHS tutoring hours, but I went to my elementary school once a week and was helping fifth graders and stuff. [The NHS program] was kind of included, where the hours counted, and I just finished out the entire semester.

That was probably the biggest thing, honestly.

### **Patrick**

Patrick just arrived at our interview from traveling with a team from his academy to the northeast and was in full professional attire. Patrick was the only high school valedictorian in the study, and I only found this out much later on in the interview after I had already described him as being “extremely intelligent.” His major at the academy is focused in cyber warfare. Serving as a PT for two semesters, Patrick’s motivation to help others was two-fold: first, this provided Patrick with the opportunity to help others, but more importantly, it provided Patrick with the ability to show others what he was capable of. Proving himself seemed to arise during his time spent volunteering in high school, which is evident in his thoughts here:

[I was in the] Boys Scouts. I got Eagle Scout at 14, so [that’s pretty] young.

Most people wait till their 18th birthday. I was like, car fumes, perfumes. They

usually hit it in high school, let me do it before that. And so, I did it with my brother beforehand. And from 14 to 18, it was always a servant leadership role. And being the most senior scout, I was always expected to lead, to teach. It sort of helped develop [me], and so that's sort of developed this kind of mindset that [I am] able to help, to lead, and to develop other people who don't necessarily have the same skills and abilities that I do. I know that I'm gifted, I don't usually like saying it but I have things that I can help, and that I can put to the table. And so, whenever I came here, I was just like, how can I help. [Also], a lot of my sports time, I would help develop the [rookies] and so like one of my mentees just went to the nationals at the YMCA swimming championships. I did a lot of community service, did robotics teams, so we were tasked with making a project. One of our projects was help for scouts. And Kids4Seniors.com helped the scouts, where every Boy Scout goes out to the community and sort of does odd jobs for those who aren't able to accomplish them. Kids4Seniors is implementing, [or] putting kids with the elderly, just to add some joy. Also, I'm very active in my religious faith. I'm Catholic, so I volunteered at the soup kitchen, food drives, I was busy during high school, oh and Altar boy, that was me.

### **Paxson**

Paxson arrived for his interview roughly 20 minutes late and was racing into the room apologetically. As with all of the participants in the study, their time is crammed with activities to the point that it often becomes confusing for them. Paxson was no different, and the fact that this presented during the study was a confirmation of what participants expressed during interviews. Paxson's sentiments on the idea of time

management were illustrated in his statement, “Current challenges for me right now? Applying to grad school, and then time management, trying to get sleep while doing everything else.”

Paxson is one of two college athletes in the study, the other being Holly. In addition to his athletics, Paxson must also balance the requirements of being a student at the academy, training in the military realm as well as the academic realm. The fact that he spent four semesters as a PT and is transitioning into the role of a PT leader is proof of his sentiments above, yet he still chooses to help those that might need him. His attitude towards helping others and managing time evolved in high school, as he reported:

So in high school, I was involved with [the] Science Ambassadors. [Students] who were really interested in math and science, [would] get on a bus and go to three different schools. We would essentially just go in and spend an hour or two, an hour and a half, with the students who had [an] afterschool program, and they were all middle school students, so sixth, seventh, and eighth graders, and we would help them with math, science, or English, anything. So [I did] a lot [with] helping them, I remember distinctly, structuring an essay about Animal Farm. I remember teaching kids just algebra, some very basic physics problems when their teachers were trying to introduce some science concepts that they hadn't been exposed to. I actually learned some as I was trying to teach them theirs. That was a good experience. I also volunteered with Sky Church Camp, my sister helped run [that]. Essentially, [it was] just leading a group through a bunch of different activities for them to help build their faith during the summer. That was a week-long camp and I think I was there for four out of the five days, just

helping them through all the different activities. I also volunteered with a lot of 5ks because I was on the track team in high school, so whenever our team would enter a race, we would go as a group and volunteer for a 5k, or our team would host a 5k. Frequently I ended up doing miscellaneous tasks, either helping organize the food at the end or working wherever they needed another body to really fill-in and help volunteer. I'm sure I could go on for a lot longer but that's- that's what comes to mind right now.

### **Peter**

Peter was by far the most willing to provide information. Peter easily surpassed any other interview by more than ten minutes, and his 55-minute interview alone is a testament to his willingness to help others. At the time of this study, Peter had been a PT for more than four semesters and had more experience as a PT his service academy than any other participant from that academy. Peter noticed early on that he likes to help people. Peter was in a great number of volunteer activities, as he described:

I had tutored for at least, unofficially, for a pretty long time, it just started with me helping out other students in elementary school with homework and projects and things like that. I think then that was the time that I sort of began to realize that if you are able to teach something to other people then it means that you know it a lot better yourself. So that was something that it was a mindset that I transitioned into whenever I was learning things. I was, instead of just learning them to take tests or things like that, I was learning it so that I might be able to explain it to another person at some point. Then and I thought you get a stronger recollection of the knowledge in your head after that, so I continued to do that for a pretty long

time. As far as other volunteer work, throughout middle school and high school, I was involved in a couple different volunteer groups. We had a volunteering program at my school and every student had to log [a certain number of hours], I can't remember how many it was, but log hours of volunteer service before you graduated, which was a graduation requirement. [You had] to hit the minimum number of volunteer hours. There was a national honors society, I was a member, and did a lot of things with them. The, interact club we had, it was a volunteering-based club. There was this one group I was with, we volunteered at this museum, that was the birthplace a steel magnet in like the late 1800s. I can't remember his name, maybe Henry Clay Frick? He worked with Andrew Carnegie, so I worked there. I did tutoring on the side, both at school and sometimes after school. I volunteered with, the band, there was the Lions Club, and they had an outreach program with our school where they asked for volunteers, so I volunteered with them as well. And my swimming team and soccer teams at school also volunteered occasionally at different festivals and things like that.

### **Wesley**

Wesley wanted to lead people and thought that the Alpha Academy was the right place for him. As a PT for four semesters, Wesley began devoting his extra time in high school as many others did, through the National Honors Society. He described his leadership during his selfless service as follows:

I was the President of my National Honor Society. I was in Beta Club for that in middle school and high school. I have done community service, pretty much the

entire time [I was in] school. I set up a couple of projects myself, one through my church, some for the school. Various ones here and there, because you had to have a certain amount of community service hours to be in those organizations. Oh, [and I also] worked with Special Olympics, stuff like that.

### **Zadie**

Zadie served as a PT for four semesters working with tutees in a variety of classes. Zadie's volunteer service was not as robust as that of the other participants; however, it began in high school:

I did a lot of volunteer work, I went to a Catholic high school so it was mandatory. I did a lot of work with little kids, like holding cheerleading clinics for them. I was an assistant dance instructor for children. Stuff like that.

Zadie was most comfortable tutoring in psychology and American politics; however, she did spend a little time working with students in physics. Zadie's desire to help others was because she wanted to share her gift, saying:

I decided to be a PL100 peer tutor [because] it was something I was really good at. I got a five on the AP exam. So I figured, a lot of people were, struggling with it, [and I] saw no reason for them to struggle if I had an AP notebook with like all the answers.

### **Zelda**

Zelda is from a military family that finally settled in the northern part of the United States after multiple moves due to the impact that the military had on her family. Zelda chose the Bravo Academy due to her family history, saying:

Both [of] my parents attended here, but they actually never pushed me [to come here]. I have an older sister who's two years older, but they never ever pushed either of us to come here. Actually, what originally got me looking here is [that] I got recruited to play volleyball at the [Charlie] academy. I visited there and I didn't like it, and I was like, "You know what? I'm gonna visit Bravo just for fun." I wasn't recruited for any sport, I just showed up here and I just absolutely loved it. I was very used to the military lifestyle. So I think that kind of attracted me into it.

Zelda was a PT for two semesters and chose to become one due to her experience with computer science in high school. Zelda did not think of her volunteer time as anything extraordinary, and described it as such:

I did, National Honor Society. I volunteered with that a fair amount. I also, just helped local food banks, stuff like that. They usually had opportunities for us to sign up. I volunteered a lot with Relay for Life. I've got a cousin who passed away from Leukemia a few years back, so my family's very into a Relay for Life fundraising. Then I volunteered to work high school concessions a lot. My mom retired from military, so she just became like a PTA mom after that, so she always ran the high school concessions, and they always needed workers for like the JV and freshman football games and soccer games. She'd usually like drag me into those, and I'd just serve sodas and popcorn for those.

## **Results**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of undergraduate students who served as peer tutors at federal service

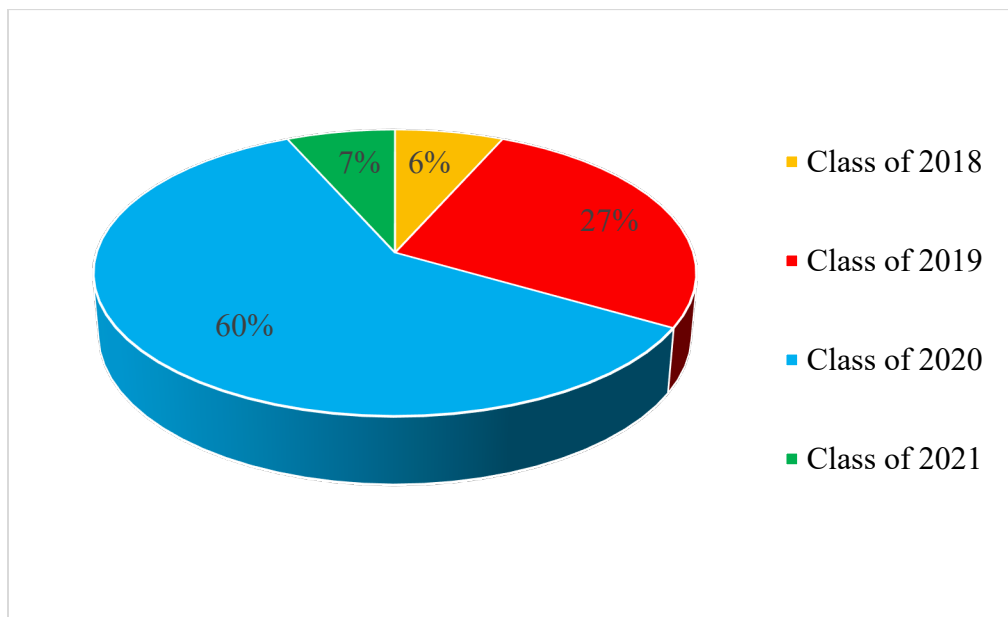
academies. The results provided below were compiled from the significant statements and commonalities that arose during the completion of the demographic survey, responses to the reflexive journal prompts, and the structured one-on-one and focus group interviews with the 15 undergraduate PTs. After listening to the interview recordings multiple times as well as reading the transcriptions on multiple occasions, I developed a list of significant statements. These statements were then coded and analyzed. Once I analyzed the coded statement, themes began to emerge. In an effort to prevent my own bias from entering the study, I kept a personal journal (Appendix K), which aided in the ability to truly reflect on participant voices. It was clear early on that there were going to be similar statements and reflections made regarding the experience of being a PT at a federal service academy, and my purpose was to allow their life experiences to lead the study. I was able to use a variety of sources to look at participant perceptions regarding their time spent as a PT and how they transitioned into, through, and out of the role of being a PT at a federal service academy. The various sources of data collection from a variety of experienced undergraduate students provided an interesting beginning for the coding process. The following includes the codes, themes, and significant statements as well as the research questions that I set out to address through this study.

### **Demographic Survey**

Before conducting the formal interviews, I contacted each participant through their respective PT Director. The academy PT Directors provided email addresses to potential participants. At this point, I emailed academy specific recruitment letters (Appendix F), which included a link to a demographic survey which allowed me to gather basic information about the participants, including their name, service academy,

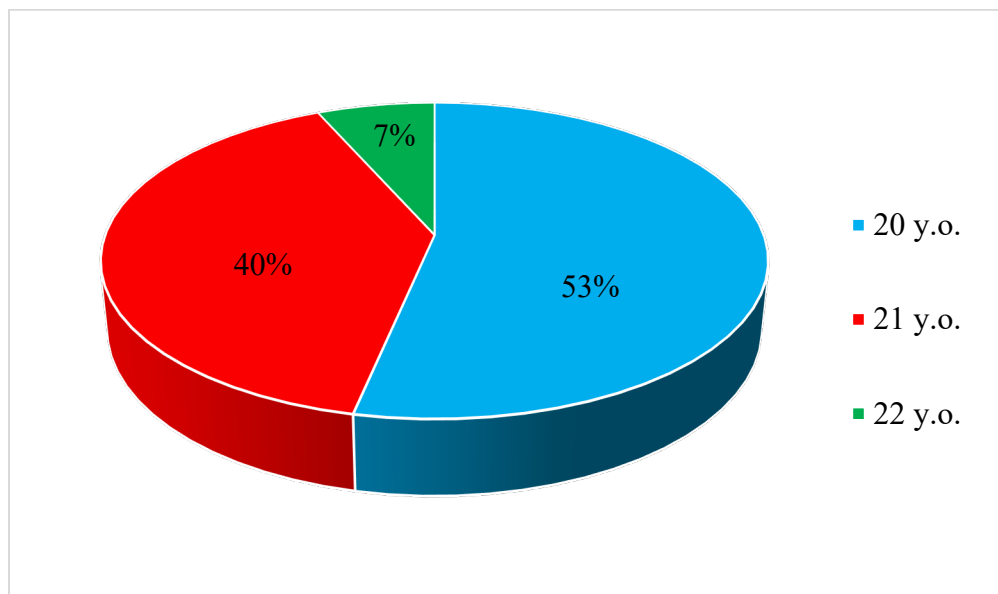
ethnicity, gender, class year, current age, years of prior service, PT experience, personal reflection scale, and a request for a personal memory from their time spent as a PT. All results from this survey were locked in a password-protected folder on my computer and will be destroyed after two years. Because this survey was created and conducted through Google Form, the responses are presented in four colorful figures.

Figures 3, 4, 5, and 6 contain pertinent demographics of the student participants who volunteered to be in the study. I made careful considerations and attempted to produce a credible, trustworthy representation of the participants (Milacci, 2003) to provide the best representation (Riessman, 1993) of their descriptive experiences which have been built from each meeting or communication that has taken place between the researcher and the respective participant. Figure 3 illustrates the number of students by class year.



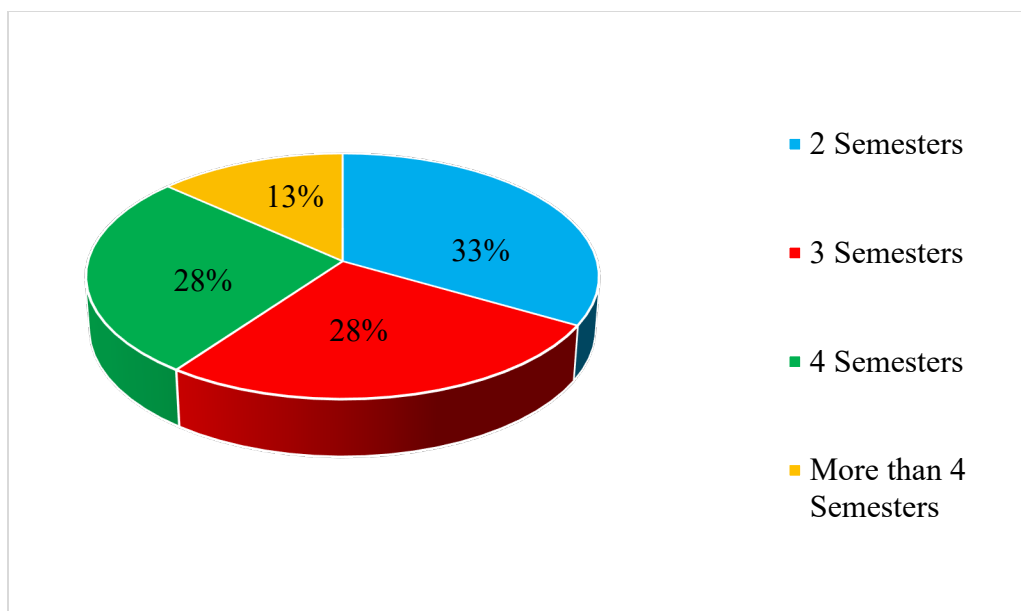
*Figure 3.* Participants by class year.

None of the students within the study had any prior service in the armed forces before entering their respective institutions. Figure 4 illustrates the age of the participants when volunteering for the study.



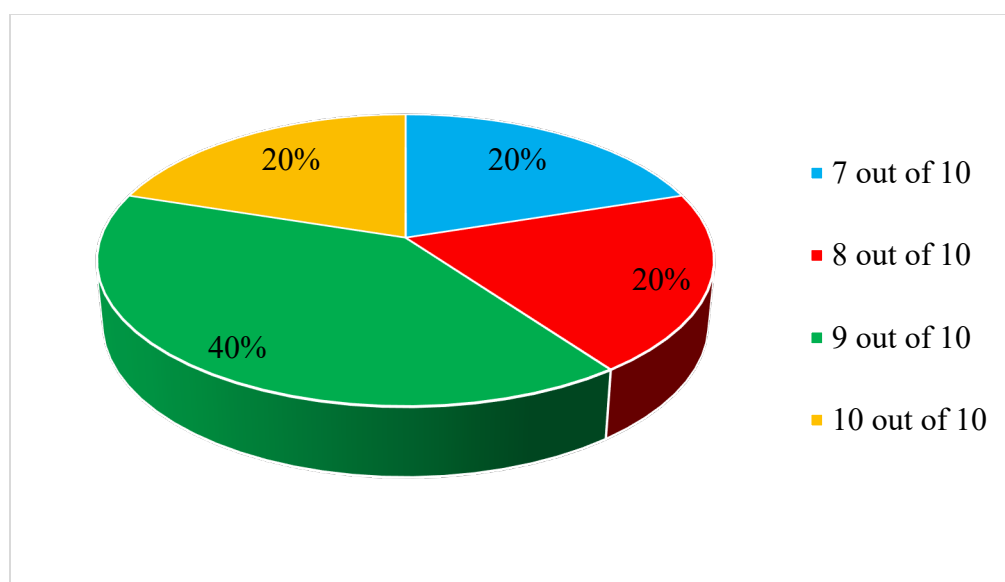
*Figure 4.* Number of participants by age.

With the various ages of students and numbers from different class years were all indicative of a variety of students, Figure 5 presents the students by the number of time spent as a PT. I selected students based upon the minimum requirements that the study required. Each student had been a PT for no less than two semesters.



*Figure 5.* Number of participants by PT experience.

Once students had been identified, they were asked to rank how they felt they would be able to reflect on their time as a PT. The scale was labeled in a Likert scale form, with one being least effect and ten being most effective. Anyone reporting less than a seven was removed from the study. These data are presented in Figure 6.



*Figure 6.* Scale of participants' perception of PT memory.

### **Reflexive Journal Prompts**

Once participants were identified, they were invited to join the study via a direct email. At this time, a meeting was scheduled at a mutually agreeable time and location. The academy specific informed consent form was emailed to the participant (Appendices G, H, and I) and the participant was provided the first journal prompt. For the following six days, I emailed participants with a new journal prompt. Participants were asked to write for no more than five minutes and were informed that one to two sentences would suffice. Four participants wrote more than one page worth of responses; however, the remaining participants provided one-page worth of data from the seven prompts. The reflexive journal questions can be viewed in an anonymous journal response in Appendix L. Journals were collected one week after the formal one-on-one interview took place. Upon collecting the journals, the responses were transferred to ATLAS.ti, where I coded each response. One participant only completed five of the seven prompts, all other participants completed them in their entirety. The overarching themes that resulted from the journal prompts were a willingness to pursue selfless service, and that the skills learned as a PT would help them as an officer in their respective branch.

### **Interviews**

The participants agreed to sit for a one-on-one interview. The length of the interviews ranged from 15 to 55 minutes. The interviews took place at a location that was comfortable and that maintained confidentiality. At the Alpha Academy, these interviews occurred at the main academic center, although at the Bravo Academy interviews took place at an office in the library. There were two students from the Charlie Academy, one of which was on an academic exchange program and was studying

at the Bravo Academy. This interview took place in an office within the physical development center at the Bravo Academy.

Interviews began by obtaining a signed academy specific informed consent. Participants all agreed to be audio-recorded and understood that their words and expressions would be available to them at any time. Recordings were obtained using a Philips VoiceTracer recording device. After the interviews, the audio files were uploaded to my laptop and stored in a password-protected file. Interviews were then downloaded to Rev.com for transcription purposes. Once I received the transcripts, I reviewed them while listening to the recordings to verify accuracy. All interviews are stored on my hard drive as well as an external drive which is locked in a file cabinet at my workplace. After reviewing the transcripts and the audio-files, I emailed each participant their respective interview transcription which is a member checking step to ensure accuracy. Participants each replied that their transcripts were accurate and stated that they did not want them changed.

During the interviews, my notepad remained available for quick items that caught my attention. Participants were provided a list of the questions, so they could follow along as well as refer to any portion of a specific question. In addition, I had a list and would check off the numbered question I had asked to ensure that I did not repeat or skip any questions. My main difficulty during the interviews was not showing approval or agreeing with what participants said as I did not want my sentiments to alter their own words or expressions.

Prior to the process of interviewing, I took notes regarding my own feelings as well as any thoughts that were going through my mind at that time. Afterwards, I

reflected back using the notes I had taken both before and during to see if I had any further thoughts to provide about my own bias towards the study, the specific academy, or the person I had just interviewed. My personal feelings towards the student participants as well as any opinions I had regarding specific academies were removed in order relay their thoughts regarding the essence of being a PT at these academies. Upon finishing my interviews, I highlighted key statements from each interview and coded significant items, which led to meaningful themes and subthemes in the data I collected. It was evident from the preliminary coding that I conducted that there were significant similarities amongst participants to the point that data saturation was achieved.

### **Focus Groups**

All students were asked to return after all interviews had taken place for a focus group interview. Focus group interviews took place in two locations, the first at Alpha Academy and then the second at Bravo Academy. Due to a lack of time, several members from all three academies were unable to attend a focus group; however, three of the five students at Alpha Academy did report, as well as five Bravo students and one Charlie student reported to the Bravo Academy focus group interview. I used these group interviews as a means of allowing participants the opportunity to hear what others described as well as to provide further information should they choose to. The focus group interviews were also used as a means to verify initial themes that had risen from the interviews conducted. This was to ensure that all pertinent information provided during the one-on-one interviews was discussed, as well as to provide students the opportunity to hear what others had provided. The focus group interviews lasted no more than 25 minutes and had a minimum of three students present.

Focus group interviews took place in the same location in which the one-on-one interviews took place. Because of this, confidentiality with regards to participating in the study could not be maintained. As with the formal interviews, I kept a notepad to jot down any thoughts I had in the moment. Focus group interviews were audio-recorded using a Philips VoiceTracer recording device. After each focus group interview, the audio files were uploaded to my laptop and stored in a password protected file. Focus group interviews were then downloaded to Rev.com for transcription purposes. Once I received these transcripts, I reviewed them while listening to the recordings to verify accuracy. These transcripts were also sent to participants to verify their accuracy, and all participants agreed that the transcripts were indeed accurate. Upon verifying the accuracy with participants, I entered the file into ATLAS.ti and coded significant statements, which aided in supporting meaningful themes already created in the data. After hearing these same sentiments, I was sure that the meaningful themes I had found were accurate. These recordings are also stored on my hard drive and on an external drive, which is stored in a locked cabinet.

### **Theme Development**

Themes were developed through the analysis of the data collected via the four methods of data collection. After all information was gathered and verified as accurate by the participants, I conducted an initial reading of all the material and coded as I went along. This effort was supported by listening to the audio-recordings at the same time. I had spent a great deal of time gathering data due to complications with each specific academy and my gate keepers. The entire length of traveling to academies, conducting interviews, having interviews transcribed, conducting focus group interviews, and going

through the member-checking process took three and a half months. I began to analyze the data by initially reading and listening to the interviews; however, I was tired and not thinking clearly about the information I possessed, and I needed a break. At this point, I chose to take a one-week hiatus from data analysis in order to clear my mind. This was a crucial step that actually benefitted my study because I was able to review and modify many pieces including the order with which the themes are presented. When I returned to the data, I began the data analyzation steps for a second time, again looking for significant statements which would lead to codes. It seemed that any response that was provided was a code and I knew I had to whittle it down. This is when the reflexive journal prompts began to really help me focus what participants were saying, which led to the creation of the four themes.

### **Phenomenological Descriptions**

Data analysis yielded four themes: (a) a need to continue selfless service; (b) embracing the PT role; (c) enhancing leadership skills; and (d) continuing the PT role as an officer. These themes were developed through the strength of the participants' voices as they provided significant statements which were coded, and an example of how significant statements were placed into codes is seen in Appendix M. As codes began to take shape, the themes began to illustrate the role of a PT at a federal service academy.

The textural description of what participants experienced through this activity can be summed up as a voluntary act to help their peers learn which comes with both expected and unexpected benefits. Students at federal service academies are typically mandated to lead in a military, academic, or physical task. All of the PTs in this study,

however, chose to become a PT because they wanted to help others succeed, not because they were ordered to do so.

Every participant left the role changed because of it, which led to the structural description of how participants described their experience. By selflessly giving time to help other students learn, PTs benefitted not only in improving their interpersonal skills, but found that these skills enhanced their leadership capabilities which they did not expect to gain when they transitioned into this role. Even though each experience is individual to the participant, and each individual faced situations that may not have been similar to their fellow participants, they each found common aspects within this role. As presented through the data analysis, common sentiments were provided that established themes that built towards individual development. By relying on personal strategies developed as they moved through this role, each PT learned what was effective in helping others and developed their professional skills as they transitioned out of this specific role.

Utilizing imaginative variation for possible meanings, structural qualities began to emerge for the themes that would ultimately be used to form the meaning and essence of being a PT at a federal service academy. As codes were created, themes began to emerge and narrow into the phenomenon I set out to explore. Relying on my research questions, I was careful to be sure to recognize themes that were important to participants. Within each theme are subthemes which help support the primary themes in the study. The open codes, frequencies, and the list of themes which emerged are included in Table 1.

Composite descriptions led to the synthesis of what the essence of the experience of being a PT at a federal service academy located in the Eastern United States is. The participant PTs experienced a transformational experience that developed them in ways

they believed would not occur without taking on this voluntary role. Each participant recognized that they transformed into a potential leader that will be effective as an officer, an officer that others will trust and follow because of the skills they know that they possess.

Table 1

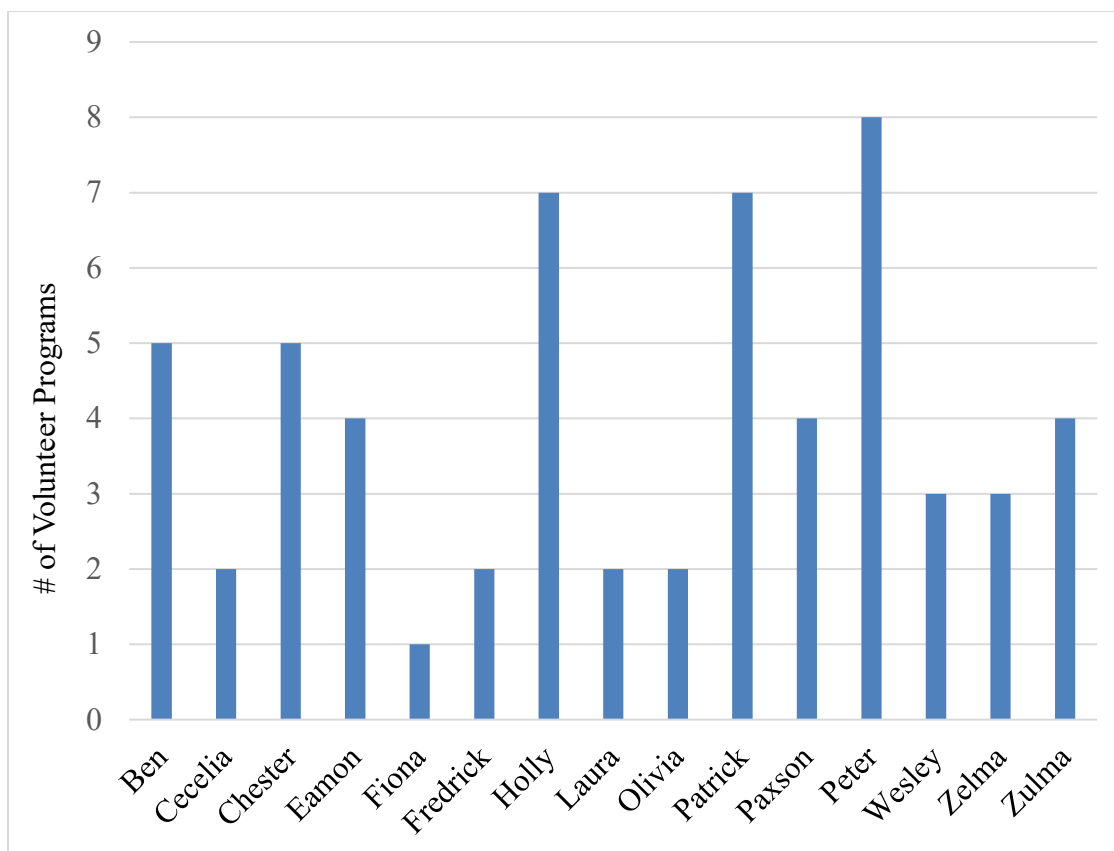
*Organization of Themes, Subthemes, and Enumerations*

Primary Themes	Number of Open-Code Enumerations in Sub-Themes	Sub-Themes
Continue Selfless Service	123	Joy of Helping Others
	87	Recognized Benefits from Helping Others
	26	Cooperate to Graduate
Embracing the PT Role	33	Strategies used to facilitate sessions
	36	Importance of teamwork as a PT
	54	Challenges of PT teamwork
	20	Teaching or Tutoring?
Enhancing Leadership Skills	43	Professionalism
	97	Importance of Learning & Professional Development
Continuing the PT Role as an Officer	40	Influences

The commonalities amongst the entire group included striking and helping PT directors in strengthening their respective PT programs, as well as identifying students with the potential desire to be a PT in this environment. The transition that participants described from embarking on their respective PT experiences led to the themes which I will present below.

### **Continue Selfless Service**

Through the first research question, I explored participants' expectations regarding the role they were about to take on when they chose to become a PT. Although each academy strives to develop selfless service amongst the student body within the military academy setting (USAFA, 2018a; USCGA, 2019; USMA, 2019a; USMMA, 2018f; USNA, 2019), the act of volunteering was nothing new for these students. As I described in Chapter Two, the "4 S system" enables one to describe the situation one finds oneself in. In this study, participants entered into a volunteer role where they are helping out their fellow peers. This decision to become a volunteer in a challenging environment is not new to this group. Out of the 15 participants, all but two—Fiona and Oliva—spoke fondly about their previous volunteering work while in high school. Students began offering their services in a variety of programs ranging from sports team activities to religious group outings. The following table reflects the number of organizations that each participant mentioned in response to their time volunteering before arriving on post at their respective academy (see Figure 7).



*Figure 7.* Selfless service activities by participants in high school.

As students described their desire to volunteer their gifts to their peers, as well as their time, the need to continue selfless service theme began to emerge and is supported by three subthemes: (a) the joy of helping others; (b) recognized benefits from helping others; and (c) cooperate to graduate.

**The joy of helping others.** The overwhelming sentiment that emerged from this study was helping others which was a benefit enjoyed by all. The act of helping others without regard for the rewards or benefits that may or may not be enjoyed by oneself is a defining act of what selfless service is; for this group, it outweighed the sacrifices that will be discussed. Peter alluded to his motivations during the focus group interview, saying, “I’d decided to join the PT program because I enjoy helping people learn. I enjoy

learning myself, so when other people are able to understand and learn then I just get enjoyment out of that.”

This was also viewed as being extremely vital to their role and helped with building self-efficacy as a PT. Olivia explained:

...actually [helping] people understand the material better. When I've seen students actually understand things, [as if] an almost visible light bulb goes off over their heads, and they leave knowing and understanding more than when they came in, I feel that I did my job well.

Holly corroborated this, saying:

I would say writing was probably my best [subject] because it's a process I really enjoy. I think that the “a-ha” moment in writing is my favorite because it's not necessarily an “a-ha” moment. It's a [moment where they] have all of these ideas and [they] want to communicate them, it's just helping with that. I think that's a really fun process, so that was probably my favorite and best execution.

The Center for Army Profession and Ethic (CAPE, 2018) published a video defining selfless service as the ability to “put the welfare of the Nation, the Army and your own subordinates before your own” (00:01 – 00:31). All of the participants referred to some aspect of selfless service as to why they became a PT, why they continued to be a PT, and how it helped them evolve into a student leader. Fredrick explained:

So I just started doing the tutoring sessions as a single tutor. I just was one of the people in the rooms, working one-on-one with people, and I just thought it was really rewarding, at that point. Not only just working with people in my company who were really grateful, but, just random people who, at the end of the day, said

that they were going to do a lot better because of me. And so, from then on, I just kept going with the process from there.

The reasons participants chose to volunteer and to help others were common. Chester stated, "I'm always happy to help people," while Zadie viewed the PT program as "a way to help people," and Ben reported that he "always tried to help people." While these are all sentiments of why they personally chose to become a PT, perhaps Fredrick said it best as he reflected back on his academy's own purpose:

Selfless service is something that we focus on. And I think that [the PT program] has been a huge help in that. Like I said, on the one hand, sometimes you've got to focus on yourself, but I think that a lot of people fall into that trap too easily here. Where they're so focused on themselves that they forget about being selfless. That's a lot, it's really de-motivating, to not be selfless, I think, here, because, if you lose sight of the larger picture of why we're here, [then] it doesn't make a lot of sense. So yeah, definitely being able to keep a focus on the larger picture was really beneficial. If I feel like that, if I can remember that I'm here to be selfless, then it helps me not be so sad about being here.

For these students, the choice to become a PT was an easy one, and one from which they expected little in return. The students reflected that they were prepared for their upcoming role as a PT, and perceived that they did not have any negative feelings towards taking on the role of helping others. Suggested by many, but stated best by Cecilia, the "my door is always open" approach existed because participants wanted to help others. The participants felt that they should use their gifts to help others. Patrick reported:

I know that I'm gifted. I don't usually like saying it but I have things that I can help, and that I can put to the table. So, whenever I came here, I was just like, how can I help?

Zadie explained, "I'd say that teaching is a great way to learn, and that if you excel at something, you should share it with others." Ben stated:

I was kind of expecting it to be pretty simple. You know, there's kind of a certain intelligence level you expect from [students], which mostly I found. But it was interesting because in high school I did tutoring, but it was always for people were struggling with school in general rather than just one particular subject. So coming in and having people, who study well, [and] want to succeed, the challenge for them [is] the gap. It's not that they're not smart, they just have a hard time connecting things or thinking about something in a way that makes sense to them. So I was very excited to come in and try to help people through that. And the benefits of that is just the teaching experience.

Olivia also corroborated this, stating, "Honestly if you're comfortable with something, and you have the time, then I think it is worth it to help other people because that's a strength that you have, that you can use to give back." The interesting aspect to this description is that Olivia has concisely stated that time is a factor when deciding to become a PT and selflessly devote the time to helping others. Frederick expressed a similar thought:

I started, unofficially being a peer tutor back at the beginning of [my first] year, because we were just coming out of [basic training], and I was okay at [it], but I wasn't the number one person, by any means. I knew, coming into the school

year, that the academic realm was my wheel house, and so that's where I could pull my weight and help other people, or [help those] who had helped me during the summer.

The ability to share their gifts was likely due to the fact that more than half of the participants reported being a tutor in high school through either the National Honor Society (NHS), a local technology company tutoring younger kids about the trade, or through a program within their school not affiliated with the NHS. By already having experienced the act of selfless service, each of these students had already experienced gratification from giving back, and wanted to continue to do so. Further, these students adopted strategies to manage their time effectively in order to help their academically struggling peers. Just as participants described their feelings regarding helping others, they also cited the potential benefits from being selfless.

**Recognized benefits from helping others.** Although most participants pointed to the fulfilment of helping others and sharing their gifts, depending on their academy they may have also chosen this role due to the possible benefits that were known prior to starting this role. Participants reported expected benefits from being selfless within this culture that do not exist at civilian schools. Positive branch reports, the ability to be excused from mandatory inspections, discounts for food, and a boost to their GPA due to receiving additional credits received from working as a PT are all credited as expected benefits that students mentioned. In addition, participants included unexpected benefits as they reflected on their experiences that helped support the need to continue their selfless service.

*Expected benefits.* Just as the choice to volunteer their time was recognized as an enjoyable endeavor for these students, the benefit of known rewards, while not a priority, did help ease the transition into being a PT. Seven of the 15 participants, those from Alpha and Charlie Academies, mentioned that they knew they would receive academic credit for this role, while the remaining students (i.e., those from Bravo Academy) had been informed that PTs had been given coupons to a restaurant on academy property. All participants also knew that this role would come with the opportunity to earn favorable reports from their chain of command. Wesley cited:

There was a bunch of incentives for being a tutor. [First,] I mean, I love helping people, so that was a nice gig. They would [also] give us, free gift cards to [places to eat on post]. The [PT Director] would write us [positive] CORs [corrective observational reports] that would go [to] our [chain of command], the one in charge of our [branch] grades. So they would get, a positive report of, “Hey, this person is taking time out of their schedule to go help the other classmates.” So there were always incentives to be a tutor. [However, there were] definitely a lot of guys [that] were there just because they wanted to help people out, the other incentives are nice to have, but it's not why were there.

In addition, Laura stated:

I just thought that'd be a good way to, A, spend my time helping others, it's just something I enjoyed doing, and then B, there's also a bonus credit that we got with the class. The bonus credit, which was, I don't want to say a blanket A, you had to do certain things, you had assignments and you had to take attendance and make sure you put that in, but, I mean, it's fairly hard to get a B. As long as you

did everything that [the PT director] asked you to do, you'd get an A. So a little GPA boost there is a good incentive for anyone else to be a [PT].

While participants reported that those benefits were nice, only three individuals in the study actually felt that it was personally a reason why anyone would become a PT: Fiona, Holly, and Patrick. Paxson encouraged others to become a PT as long as it were for the right reasons. When asked if he would recommend this role to another student, he elaborated:

I would ask them why they want to do it. I mean, I want to be sure that they're doing it for the right reasons. I would make sure that the course they're trying to teach aligns with their abilities to learn and teach, [and] so I [would] want to make sure that they're doing it in something that they're a strong student in. And I want to make sure that they genuinely care about helping other students. If you're just doing [this], you can get another credit for it, [which] seems pretty trivial [to me] but I could imagine people who'd do it just to put it on a resume or to get extra credit for something. It definitely looks good applying to grad school, to have volunteered and helped other people.

This contrasted with participants who attend Charlie Academy. Fiona explained by reporting how small her academy is, which led to her statement, “I would definitely say, I found it to be a lot more competitive at [Charlie than at Bravo].” This piece of information is a challenge for PTs at the Charlie Academy as they are actively helping peers who could potentially be in the same class year as they are, competing for the same position in their branch. Fiona explained, “One thing that I'm a huge proponent of is

competition, even though, yes, I want to get a good GPA because I want to be competitive for [a good position, which] I want to get.” Holly went further, saying:

I would honestly have to say that this program is difficult because you don't really have any organization or any structure, but it's also easy because it's all in what you make it. You could be a PT and you could just say, “Hey, I'm a PT, come find me if you need me,” and get credit for being a PT. Or you could actively seek out people who need help, it's really in what you make it. You could make it really awesome and actually help people, or you could take your credit for being smart enough to earn the nomination.

This seemingly posed a potential conflict of interest, yet for both Fiona and Holly, this negative aspect was not as important as the opportunity to help others or the potential for leadership opportunities down the road. For Holly, this moment was where she recognized that she would take on a leadership role to improve the program.

*Unexpected benefits.* Even though seven of the 15 students had reported spending time as a tutor in high school (i.e., Cecilia, Chester, Fredrick, Holly, Patrick Paxson, Peter), no participants reported that they expected anything to occur as a result of being a PT in this setting. Even though their specific descriptions of improved time management and being prepared helped them develop into what they would consider a successful PT, they did not understand at the time they volunteered that this would also benefit them as a student as they embarked on this journey. Focus group interviews confirmed what all 15 students reported during one-on-one interviews, that students experienced unexpected results from their time spent as a PT.

These benefits included improved cognitive thinking, time management, and enhanced interpersonal skills. Holly described the understanding that this role had, saying, “not only was I able to help [students], but it [also] helped me to learn because, not only am I forcing myself to learn the material, but I had to think about a different way to say it.” The opportunity to teach or lead others during their time as a struggling student afforded PTs the chances to become more competent as a student. Zelda expressed:

I think that if you're in the class as a [PT], I think the most helpful thing is making you understand the material better. Again, for me, I [tutored] math and IT, and it was really helpful when I was a [first year student], because I would do my own homework on my own and then I would go help someone else with theirs and I'd realize I made a mistake on mine. Or, reviewing the best way I think to learn is by teaching others. Because it really reiterates your own knowledge and makes sure you understand it forward and backwards.

Cecilia corroborated this during the focus group interview, saying, “The way you really know that you understand something is when you can fully explain it to someone else. You can answer their questions; the biggest thing would be that you gain more knowledge.”

Wesley, like others, felt that by “being able to teach the material makes it a lot easier to recall [it] than just learning [the] material in class.” Many participants expressed that by being a PT, they were able to enhance their own personal understanding. Peter stated that the role helped him “learn material for courses,” Eamon reported a “deeper knowledge,” and Chester confirmed this, saying, “When I was in the

classes, it helped [me] learn the material.” Fiona described the ownership she took on when establishing a trust with her tutees. Her thoughts regarded suggesting learning concepts to the point that she developed the confidence to go with her statements, as well as “knowing that the intellectual property you lay out is correct.”

In order to ensure that students understood the material, PTs needed to prepare. Taking the time to prepare study sessions led students to report enhanced time management skills. As reported, research has found that students have a lack of time when learning in the military service academy environment (Hornyak et al., 2000; Thain et al., 2008; Turner, 2004). As discussed, service academies have created strategies to help students with this specific challenge and in response have developed academic support services or even implemented a dedicated study day during the week (USAFA, 2009; USMA, 2019b; USNA, 2018f). Students participating in this study had not yet utilized these services or experienced the study day, and therefore only knew what it was like to be a PT while also going to class each day. When directly asked if she gained more in the realm from time management or preparation through this role, Holly replied, “I think it would be a little bit of both, probably more on the preparation side.” Laura was succinct when she wrote in her journal, “You learn valuable lessons in time management.” Zadie explained this further, citing that the role of a PT helped her because it helped with “time management, because [this was an] extra duty that I volunteered myself for. At first, I struggled with it, so time management wise, it helped a lot.” Olivia elaborated when asked if she had been successful or not:

After the first session, [which] did not go very well [because] I did not have my stuff together, [or] enough time to actually understand what was going on. After

that I dedicated, I mean ate dinner early and then [would] go over the homework problems, before the session just so that whenever they came in, [I'd be] familiar with the problems. You kind of brush off the cobwebs of the process of you [are] supposed to go through.

Just as Olivia had a trying experience that led to her improved time management skillset, so too did Paxson:

I think I've been able to grow from that, it's helped me in all aspects of my life to really understand the value of time and how you need to manage yourself when you have strings pulling you in all different directions... you have to optimize your process to get the most out of it, get the most benefit and perform as well as you want to in the aspects that you deem most important.

Participants stated that they enhanced their time management skills in an effort to become successful which provides support to the theme of selfless service which each student described they endeavored to continue providing. By improving their time management skills, they not only expressed success, but that they also began to become comfortable with their students. This comfort yielded improved interpersonal skills.

*Interpersonal skills.* The ability to gain confidence when helping their peers was an unexpected outcome for some. For Chester, the ability to develop during this experience into a person that is more comfortable with others was something that he wanted to do, but that he did not know would happen in this role. Chester's provided evidence towards this by saying:

I'm an introvert, so I'm not always good at talking to people. But, definitely through tutoring, [I] became more comfortable with trying to adapt how I tutored

to being more personal with people. It was definitely a priority for me. Tutoring helped that.

Patrick described a sense of improved confidence due to his deeper understanding:

Interpersonal skills and confidence that you build definitely help you as a student here because, if you're in a particular class where the discussion is Socratic, a lot of times if you're not confident, you can be sort of buried beneath the conversation of others. But if you're confident, you feel better about voicing your ideas even if they might be wrong, or someone might disagree with them. So, that sort of confidence that you build by being a tutor, and the competence that you build as well.

Zadie recognized that this experience yielded greater confidence and ultimately helped her become comfortable, explaining, "It builds confidence because you're able to get in front of your peers and command the subject."

The ability to help others understand or facilitate a tutee learning enabled students to break out of their personal comfort zone. Just as Chester described above, Zelda did the same when she reflected on her transformation, saying, "I've definitely broken out of my shell. I've gotten very confident in my abilities and my skills...I know I'm capable of a lot more." This transformation was due to the time spent as a PT; as Chester wrote, "the more I tutored people, the more I got used to it and got better." Peter stated, "That additional confidence helps you have a relationship with [your tutee] [because] they look at you as a figure who is able to give legitimate advice." During a focus group interview, Olivia stated, "When you put yourself in uncomfortable situations, or a challenging situation, you're always going to learn from it." The students learned that by being a PT

they were helping others; the benefits from this were expected, but the unexpected benefits are what they described as helping them continue their time in their respective PT programs. Regardless of the benefits experienced, by choosing to be a PT, each participant reported the respective challenges that they had to overcome at some point.

*Overcoming personal challenges.* Helping others was deemed to be a worthwhile endeavor for this population as many discussed the positives they received. This came at a cost, however, one that all recognized and mentioned in the sentiment of sacrificing one's time. Peter described his initial concerns as follows:

I think with being a tutor here at [Bravo] in particular, is the time commitment.

So, I was initially hesitant. Even though I wanted to be a tutor, because [of] how much time I would have to devote to doing certain things.

Eamon echoed this sentiment from his academy when asked about his schedule as a student:

Wednesdays were my busiest day academically. I had seven classes [laughs], back to back to back to back. There were some days that I was like, "I really have a lot of stuff to do," and you know, I didn't want to make that like long walk over to [that building]. But, I would say once I was there, I always enjoyed it.

The concept of time for PTs was an overwhelming sentiment, yet each chose to adapt and improve their time management skills in order to be a PT and maintain their own academic standing while in the role. As a college athlete and a PT in five subjects, Holly reported:

I would say I often struggled prioritizing. [They might] have a chemistry test tomorrow, but I also have this marine biology test tomorrow. So, yes, I want to

help them, and often times I did. Even then I put my studies second, which isn't necessarily a bad thing. It didn't backfire on me, thankfully. But like I knew the whole time that I was tutoring I [said], "I have to study for another couple hours after this is over." Then again, that can come down to the preparation, because often times they didn't hear that the chemistry test was the next day until the day before. It was definitely a struggle for me, not necessarily prioritizing, but like I guess putting my studies second, which could have like negatively impacted me if I did it too often.

Two individuals strayed from this initial concern. For Paxson, this was not necessarily a challenge, as he was already stretched pretty thin as a college athlete, just as Holly was; therefore, he looked at this as just another task, saying, "I don't think anything really changed when I was accepted other than I went in my agenda and wrote down every Monday at 19:00 or every Monday at 21:00." Similarly, Olivia simply stated, "It was just one more thing to do."

An additional challenge was discussed by two participants who mentioned they enjoyed tutoring a foreign exchange student. Each experience occurred at two different academies (i.e., Alpha and Bravo), but were very similar. Ben was candid in his response to this challenge as a PT, saying:

So, the big one, I think I wrote about this in a journal, was a guy last year. I was helping tutor for chemistry, because I was in chemistry at the time. Actually, it was freshman year then, he spoke English really well. It was just not enough to know some of those harder words. He was from Saudi Arabia, and he was fairly smart, but he just couldn't [get past] the language and all the terminology, there

was a lot of disconnect. So, I had to go back to almost the first lesson, and kind of reteach them how those things [and] connect it to the big issues later on. This was right before the term end exam so, that was very challenging. It took I think four hours being in there with just us. We got through it and I think he came out of it feeling better. I don't know how he did on that test, but he seemed to feel better about it after.

Eamon was more expressive about how he felt afterwards, saying:

Last year, I had one regular [tutee who] was actually an Egyptian exchange student, and he's here on a four-year program, and he's going to graduate from this school. He really, struggled with chemistry, and he my personal project last year. He's in my company too, so all year, you know, I was just consistently helping this guy out with his chemistry homework. It was really, really challenging, you know? Because there was a big language barrier. Not only is he having to try to learn chemistry, which is hard enough anyway. But, he was having to learn it in his second language, which is tough, on anyone. I can't even imagine tough it must have been, oh and he also had one of the harder professors here, too. So, it was just like this multi-factorial thing that kind of made it tough. And all year I [would] take about 30 to 45 minutes a night to just kind of go over what he learned that day to make sure that I had him understanding.

Although there were minimal specific challenges that all participants pointed out—namely, a lack of time, they all felt that this sacrifice was worth the effort to help others. The aspect of helping others where they could, became a sentiment many agreed upon during the focus group and helps to support how unexpected benefits were learned.

**Cooperate to graduate.** Of extreme interest was the aspect of teamwork at all three academies. The concept of teamwork fits within the need to continue selfless service, as well as under the theme of embracing the PT role. This is due to the fact that the PTs studied remarked on several strategies used to reach students, as well as how by helping others, the group was improved. It is due to the latter benefit that I will discuss aspects of teamwork here.

As students provided their thoughts during the data collection process, they shared a number of thoughts regarding the importance of selfless service, the need to help others academically and that by doing both they would enhance their leadership potential. An unexpected sentiment was expressed by students at Alpha and Bravo academies, however, to the point that it became a subtheme. The idea that students could rely on others to help each other accomplish tasks was known by Bravo students Cecilia, Peter, Wesley, and Zaidie as “cooperate to graduate.” This simple sentence was mentioned more than a handful of times, including Zelda’s thoughts:

It's really nice being a [student here] and knowing that there's other people there that are willing to help you. In my company like I said, I built a lot of trust between me and my company mates, they could trust me to help them. Even [if] it was inconvenient for me at times, but, that's like part of being a [student here], you put others before yourself. I'm a mostly an A student, and if I were to spend 30 minutes helping someone else that's less than I spend on my own homework, or like studying for my test, but it's [the] difference between them getting a D and a B on a test, versus me getting [an] A versus an A minus. I can take that hit, they

probably can't. That's worth it to me to help those other people and continue doing that type of stuff.

Holly did not express the “cooperate to graduate” sentiment that Zelda did, she did provide a similar description of her selflessness:

If it came between me helping someone or possibly studying, I would give up the hour to help someone that I knew needed to pass a test. Because maybe I won't get that 90% that I wanted, but I know that I'll still pass the following day [even] if I get an hour less of studying. But that person might not pass, and that could be that one grade that pushes them over the edge, especially as a fourth class.

Laura's explanation provides how the group benefits from her selfless act. This was evidenced when Laura provided the following in regards to telling others to join as a PT:

I just think it's rewarding and helpful, not only for yourself but for others. If you can take the time out of your day to help others, it's not only making them better, but making you better, it's benefiting both sides, it's a win-win and everyone's learning. Whether it's chemistry or not, for me, I'm still learning how to be a better teacher or leader, or person, you know?

Teamwork is often thought of as a group of individuals working towards a common goal; in this respect, students decided to become PTs recognize that they are capable and can help others. They deemed that they were able to share their gift and help a group of people because it would bring them joy. This is an important understanding that PTs likely learned during high school; however, as a student in this environment, they brought this sentiment with them into the role of being a PT. Instead of going

through their academic career alone, they chose to be a part of an organization, in the form of a team in which the members help each other out.

The effort to put personal motivation aside, as well as receive any previously discussed potential benefits, each PT desired to do what was best for the individuals who were struggling. This is the ultimate aspect of “cooperate to graduate.” Many students recognized they could not succeed without the help of others, and therefore the concept of teamwork was key component to the success that many PTs described, at each academy. Although Fiona describes the Charlie Academy as being “more competitive,” the same strategies did apply when it came to the subtheme of teamwork that PTs relied on when conducting sessions.

With this potential came the sacrifice of giving their time away. This was a significant challenge due to the numerous of mandatory tasks that I previously discussed within Chapter Two, which come with being a student at a federal service academy. As these benefits were recognized, even though time was a factor, efforts were made by students to continue their selfless service as a PT.

### **Embracing the PT Role**

For these participants, the will to help others is clearly evident; however, they seemed to understand that if they were ineffective, then they may lose out on this opportunity. Great leaders understand that different people respond to different cues or strategies. For some, a harsh tone may inspire them to work harder, whereas others may respond to a softer approach. Participants seemed to grasp this concept, which was evident in the drawing that Patrick provided during the interview where he was attempting to provide me with clarity on how felt there was a “responsibility to them to

help them” explaining that there are “different ways of thinking... cyber is just a little bit of an adjustment over from these different ways of thinking” which can be seen in in the interview journal notes I took when I met with him (Appendix K). Further, all students described a variety of strategies they used during their time spent as a PT to help tutees. As Chester explained:

Some of the techniques that I learned was getting to know the tutee better, being able to adapt to how they learned, because how they learned is probably not the same way I learned. Everyone's different, especially with something like, for example, IT. There are people who are very logical about going about it and then, there are people who just are more [unorthodox]. But, it's just two very different ways [to] learn. So, usually, if I did something like that, I'd have a group of people together and, I'd draw upon other people in the group, and ask them to explain it [which] both helped them, and it helped the other people in the room who might learn similar[ly] to how they did.

While the PD sessions helped with both one-on-one and group tutoring sessions in a manner that provided a deeper understanding of the content, which proved to help them in their own studies, they also described a necessity to be able to reach the tutee or tutees. In order to do this, there was a reliance on either their own personal background from tutoring in the past, or from specific PD sessions focused on reaching the tutee. Fourteen out of 15 PTs described an understanding that people learned different ways, or that people understand better using different techniques. This subtheme emerged as the PTs attempted to focus on teaching the material or finding gaps in understanding that perhaps they had once experienced. This focused attempt on working towards what the tutee

needed helped in facilitating the learning process and went towards building trust between the two parties yet still posed a significant challenge. Eamon stated:

When I ran my sessions, every student came in thinking about it in a different way and wanted something else out of the session. When you have ten or 20 people coming and each one of them have different expectations, it's really hard to please everyone.

Seeking their peers' personal interests was an endeavor that many PTs attempted due to trying to build rapport with their tutees. Zelda described:

It built a lot of trust between me and my [peers], they could trust me to help them. Even [when] it was inconvenient for me at times, but that's part of being a [student here], you put others before yourself.

The ability to understand what makes a tutee respond, or how this enables them to grasp a concept better was a key for each participant. Several PTs relied on each other to discuss what worked and did not work for them in PT sessions in order to enhance the program and help as many tutees as possible. Chester explained:

At first, working with other tutors around me, and seeing what they were doing helped me out. When I actually got hired and [went] to tutor meetings to plan these sessions, that also helped too because every course gets tutored differently. [There are] different expectations, so it's interesting drawing on the best of each. And that really helped, just seeing what ideas people were coming up with, like, when I was in charge of physics tutoring, we were in rooms that were dedicated to tutors teaching the whole block for that [upcoming exam], but someone came up with the idea of actually having a room for each block [of instruction], so people

could go to that room they wanted to be tutored in, in case they knew what they needed to work on. That [allowed] us to better adapt to the needs of our tutees. Zelda, who, after leaving the role of a PT, was asked to return and take on the role of leading current PTs, supported this sentiment:

[Being in charge of PTs,] I'll set up rooms [for those who] want to work on the multiple-choice section, [and I'll tell them to] go here, short answer goes there. If you're a slower learner, come here. If you think you kind of got it and just want to brush up, then I would separate the rooms for the skill level so that way people [are] getting the most out of the session. I'd [say,] "Hey you're good, just feel free to talk out." Or go to another classroom if we're working on multiple choice for a long time, feel free to switch classrooms and go to the other one. This study session is for you guys, go where you need to get help the most.

The knowledge gained from these experiences as leaders of those helping others, was derived from what worked as a PT. Finding what worked best for a population in order for that population to thrive, and specifically pinpointing what makes an individual work harder, helps when a leader has a variety of skills or strategies to rely on. As Holly stated, "In order to be a good leader, and a good officer, you need to know your people." Strategies that were important to the participants emerged as a subtheme that aided their work as a PT.

This often included encouraging tutees, such as Cecilia offering "you got this" to her tutees, or Wesley prodding his tutees with "work as much as they can. I got a lot more comfortable saying 'keep going.'" Patrick provided:

So, they had different priorities, and being able to say, ‘this is who I am. This is who these people are.’ How do you work with these people? How do you get them motivated? And so, that was being able to understand the [different personalities], that was one of the gifts that I was given in high school. I always try to keep that. Whether I'm a [third year student], a second [year], or even as a [senior], I'm still going to try and understand the little guy because the little guy is going to be the big guy. You just need to develop him to get to that point.

Outside of encouraging others, the challenge in determining what a person wants may prevent actually connecting with a tutee. Working with different personalities was brought up by a majority of students. During the focus group interview, the aspect of managing a PT session in a way that helps a tutee was introduced. Patrick explained, “You’re working with a bunch of Type A personalities, which sometimes can lead to tension,” to which Olivia responded:

Sometimes people, what they’re trying to get out of it [a PT session] isn’t necessarily what you’re trying to give them, and so, if they’re coming to just finish the homework and get the right answers, then obviously your...their expectations of what they want from you is going to be very different than if they’re trying to actually understand the homework.

Recognizing there were differences in personalities due to life experiences was something that Ben developed as he transitioned through the role of being a PT. He expanded by relating this aspect to what he will need to do as a future officer, saying:

You can see that people come from different backgrounds. Everybody has their own life, and their own things that have happened to them that makes them who

they are. Being able to push past the background stuff, [and realize] it doesn't matter who you were, it just matters who you are. Being very in the moment with people was, is probably a big thing [for me]. Because for tutoring, you show up to the session, people are there, people might not be there, and you might have a group of two or a group of 15. That's the time you have, and you're focused on just working. So, you just kind of push your way through, and you get what you need done. Then you can worry about the personal things after.

While recognizing that different personalities and expectations arose, so too did the understanding that how a PT learned was likely different than how their tutee learned. Ten of the participants mentioned different learning styles or thought processes during the interview process. Many described similar sentiments to Wesley's statement that "some people's thought processes are different." For example, Peter described:

Another big challenge was that everyone learns differently. It was really hard to figure out one go to way of explaining a certain concept that worked for everyone. I [still] haven't figured it out yet. It kind of devolved into, [almost] throwing darts...you don't know what will stick and so you try explaining the same thing different ways. Sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn't.

Similarly, Holly stated:

Having to figure out how somebody else understands material, because not everybody learns the same, which you don't really think about until you have to try and teach someone something. When you're sitting in class you don't really think that the person next to you doesn't understand, you might think it's easy, but for someone else it's not.

As these undergraduate students realized the learning differences of their tutees, they were forced to either remember or develop strategies in order to aid them when challenging situations arose. The participants described that they felt a need to help students for more than one meeting and that by developing strategies that the tutee could resonate with, PTs were ensuring that the tutee would return to a specific PT-led session. When tutees returned to specific PTs, the PTs described feeling successful. This led to a subtheme as their descriptions of attempting to reach people was very strong.

**Personal strategies used to facilitate learning.** Without a formal background in teaching, many PTs had to rely on their CRLA certification session to help them reach their peers. These efforts were described to develop a deeper understanding of the content yet helped create a comfortable environment that built trust. Holly described:

A big thing that we talked about in the [PD session] is that you close everything. If you were working on something, you close it and you put it away so that whoever you're tutoring knows that you're actually listening to them.

For three PTs who had a background in tutoring, which occurred prior to their time at the academy, the certification process was described as being “obvious.” This was evident when Zadie stated:

[It] was a little tedious because [it] was [a] three [or] four-hour long program but I think it was kind of all stuff that we already knew. You know, how to cheer someone, [or] how maybe explaining it to your friend and [giving] them the answer, they [won't] learn anything.

Paxson echoed this, saying:

I don't think the PD helped at all with apprehension. [When you are there,] you stand up in front of the class and they ask you a question, if you don't know how to answer, you feel stressed out. If you don't have the answer, or you don't have the solution process immediately click into your mind, you don't feel confident. And until you do, it's kind of nerve wracking...if you don't know, you're going to feel anxious.

Cecilia, who also had previous experience as a tutor during high school, backed these sentiments, saying, "I signed up, and went to the class, but the class really didn't too much. It was just a formal process I guess and, [then I] officially became, CRLA certified to become a peer tutor."

All other participants who went through the formal CRLA certification process found that certain strategies discussed were beneficial. Some PTs who had not previously tutored chose to collaborate with others in order to develop personal strategies that facilitated the learning of their tutees. Regardless of the means (i.e., experience, collaboration, or PD sessions), the strategies for teaching tutees mirrored some military techniques that students learned for conducting military operations. For example, Fredrick, Patrick, and Zelda all mentioned the "back brief," which is akin to an after action review, where upon review of a military action, commanders request a report of what occurred and how it could be improved upon in the future. Civilian tutors may not think that by using military terminology a PT could establish a level of comfort, but with this population, these terms are used as they are familiar and common amongst their academies. Fredrick wrote in his journal:

I remember that it was a lot of trial and error. There is a lot more that goes into teaching than people realize. Having patience is just the first step, though a hard one sometimes. Then, one has to be engaging so that the student actually hears what is being said.

- Make sure the student back briefs you on what he/she should have just learned.
- Quiz them.
- DON'T touch their pen/keyboard; make them write/type everything.

And then one has to develop intuitive ways to explain the subject material at hand, explanations which will only work for certain subjects and for certain students. These are just a few key items I remember having to learn the hard way.

The “back brief” was also evident in the following excerpt from Peter’s journal:

As a tutor, I always favored an approach that involved diving into the course material and seeing what roadblocks I ran into with individuals that I tutored as we progressed along. I usually employed a discussion/demonstration + back brief technique [which] I found is typically very effective. I was also very careful to tie concepts to each other and ensure the individual is able to back brief me on the concept interconnections. When I ran the individual through the material, I acted as a hands on “guide.” However, the moment that something comes along that I know the individual would have to work out themselves in the course or on a test, I gave them the opportunity to talk through what they would do and then carefully prodded them along in the right directions with pieces of advice or corrections.

Zelda stressed this as a method for ensuring understanding, which she explained was the difference between her style and that of an instructor:

I'm good at explaining things. I'm good at breaking it down for people. I think a lot of teachers here might just [ask] why don't you get it yet? [Because of this] people are kind of afraid to approach them to ask for clarification. For me I didn't just [ask them why], if I asked them, "Do you get it?" I didn't accept a head nod. I think I really made sure [they] did understand it. [I told them to] back brief me on this problem, [so] they thoroughly understood it. I think that's one thing that, as a PT, I was really good at, was making sure they really understood the material all the way through.

Although Holly did not specifically describe the "back-brief," she did mention a similar strategy. Instead of accepting that her students were nodding in approval, Holly explained, "Often times I would ask them to explain it back to me."

Other strategies were more personal to the PT or to the content they were tutoring in as they chose to relay ideas regarding what worked best in various situations. Paxson found that:

With engineering classes, it was all about solving problems. [Students] have problems for homework, in class they were learning how to solve problems. They'd learned the concepts and they then solved problems, and the way you could find out [their misunderstanding] is whether or not they understood the concepts...and then wherever you found the gaps, wherever you saw that they didn't understand something that's when you go and you address the [issues], for example, "Here's the door, what is a moment?" You pushed closer, you pushed

further, and you explained how it applied in three dimensions and how it applies with each certain structure. That was my strategy for all the courses just because we had homework assignments built to address the learning objectives and then you could identify which learning objectives weren't met by where their lack of proficiency was in the problem sets.

Holly chose to use her background in athletics to find avenues of understanding, saying, "If they could explain everything I had [discussed] in some sort of analogy to whatever, soccer, softball, whatever I compared it to, then at least they understood some of it."

Eamon attempted a different approach, one that could relate to the subtheme of the importance of teamwork; however, I included this here as this was a specific strategy that he mentioned as an effort to reach the people he was working with. Eamon stated:

What I tried to do at least, was to get them to help each other before I helped them. So [I tried to] put the "G" in [group study]. And so, how I tried to facilitate is I tried to put together groups of people who are working on the same assignment and see if they could help each other out before I went in and [helped them]. And that's really awesome because one of the things I learned as a [PT] is that you learn stuff a lot better yourself, if you're able to explain it to someone else. So, it kind of serves as like two-fold purpose of, the person who is doing the explaining kind of gets their understanding reinforced because they're having to physically explain it to someone else, and obviously the person who had the question in the first place, you know, gets some help on whatever they're working at. And so, there's kind of this just mutually beneficial dynamic. Then

I'd be there as the experienced leader who kind of is the person who has most of the answers at least, I could like unstick them when they got stuck.

Laura echoed this as she attends the Alpha Academy, saying, "Getting [a group] together, made my life easier, especially with big sessions [in] chemistry." These efforts helped her to establish trust, by creating a comfortable environment. By relying on these strategies, PTs were able to describe a second subtheme, the importance of team work as a PT.

**Importance of teamwork as a PT.** As discussed previously, the concept of teamwork has its own place under the umbrella of embracing the PT role. Creating teams in order to reach many tutees or to provide a stronger PT led group was discussed by several as a strategy to help others learn. In the first example, Eamon revisited his time spent with a foreign exchange student and how he needed to gather two other peers to help him:

I had a lot of help, there's two other chemistry [PTs] in my company. All three of us would take turns, all three of us were kind of invested in this one guy, you know, like we're going to get him to succeed here. I would say that was probably the experience I remember the most, because, he ended up doing really well second semester. First semester he barely scrapped by with a D, but, in the spring, he actually did really well, and so we were all very happy, and that was a big victory for all of us, you know? We were happy for him, that's what I remember the most.

Within the PT session model, getting multiple individuals together often brought about similar problems or similar strategies to address a problem. Olivia provided the following from Alpha Academy:

I know the last class that I tutored, half the time, most of the people were there not so much for me as much as to be around everyone else who [were] also trying to do the same things as them.

Patrick spoke about transitioning into and through the Alpha Academy PT program:

I walked into one of the classes right before a math quiz, people were helping each other study. I was so impressed, [which] that really [made me] want come here. There [are] people in your classes and your company [that] you get really close with. [By] creating a network of people that you know and trust, [you] are able to work together to solve a problem.

Delegating tasks is one leadership task. Placing individuals in specific situations that help them flourish, or that are also good for the group, is one aspect of teamwork. PTs who recognized they were unable to help a tutee themselves discussed the choice to find other PTs to help the tutee. Peter reported his experience with the idea that someone may be better than he is at explaining a concept or, that he may not match the personality of the tutee, explaining:

It was good to have other tutors around so that you could refer a person.

Sometimes, you had to refer someone to [another PT] because they might be an expert in some other subject, or they might be able to relate to this person better than you are.

Holly described a similar situation, saying, “as a PT if there was a chemistry subject that I knew that I hated, and I knew one of my friends was really good at chemistry, I [would say,] “You should go talk to her, she would be more than happy to help.””

When multiple resources are pulled together, and a welcomed result occurs which is mutually beneficial to all, the team succeeds. This is further corroborated by Zadie when she stated the following, “as my dad likes to say, ‘a rising tide lifts all boats.’ If you help others, you will not only help yourself but the organization as a whole.” Due to the competitive nature of all service academies, I predicted that the “cooperate to graduate” aspect would exist at each academy; however, upon speaking with Fiona, I now feel that once the population decreases at any of these academies, the aspect of competitiveness begins to occur. This was backed by one unexpected aspect of the teamwork theme which came from Charlie Academy, when Fiona commented on the idea of “cooperate to graduate.” Fiona was a bit uncomfortable when it came to cooperation, saying:

[It] does happen, but at the same time I'm wary of the word cooperate because that just makes me think of plagiarism. I would definitely say, I found it to be a lot more competitive at [the Charlie Academy], but at the same time, it's either you're in the top echelon and you're at each other's throats, but if you're not within that top percentage you can take on [that] mantra.

While the overarching concept of teamwork does exist for all but one of the service academy students interviewed, it seems to be applicable in multiple areas. Gathering people together to provide a selfless act, as well as a means that PTs use to enhance study sessions. When the population of an academy decreases, however, a

challenge occurs. The idea of teamwork, when applied to the academic realm, begins to get pushed aside, which leads to specific challenges that also emerged within the subtheme of PT teamwork.

**PT teamwork challenges.** Being a student at a service academy comes with a number of challenges previously discussed. When experiencing the role of being a PT, however, the students reported difficulties that arose when becoming comfortable with the task of being a PT. Students at each of the academies relied on PD sessions to either enhance the PT session or to ensure that PTs were staying accurate to the concepts discussed according to the course syllabi. In order for the later to occur, PTs at Bravo academy would have regular meetings to discuss the upcoming PT session. Wesley described his predicament as follows:

One challenge that I saw a lot [of], was tutors not having enough time to come out [to the] meeting[s]. This was difficult to overcome but we eventually came up with having a few tutors for one room of tutees and having them work questions on the board.

This solution allowed for student leadership, those organizing PT sessions, to feel secure in that within each room current topics that pertained to the class were being discussed. Although this was common at all three service academies, it did not mean that the PT in the room was personally comfortable. Olivia explained, “Whenever neither of us know what’s going on, it does not bode well for the most part honestly they helped each other, a lot too.”

The participants also discussed a second teamwork challenge, the aspect of multiple tutees not understanding the basic concepts. Chester remarked upon the

disappointment he had when he needed to create multiple groups in a session due to the fact that a portion of his group did not know the fundamentals of the subject, saying:

When they haven't actually done any preparation for [the session], they haven't been doing the readings. The only way to move them forward is to really teach them the material. Which, I don't see as being the point of tutoring. So, that was kind of a challenge sometimes, just figuring out how to work with people who didn't know the material.

This specific challenge led Chester to create groups of varying levels of understanding, which was also described by Zelda, who would modify her sessions in the moment.

Zelda would create groups just as Chester did; however, her description seemed to arise from a leadership viewpoint instead of a decision out of disappointment. For Zelda, her description of this experience was more towards an effort to ensure the tutees received what they came for, saying:

I [would] go over multiple-choice questions and I'd read [them] off. I [would] give them two minutes to answer and [ask], "Alright, did anybody not get that [answer]?" [When] nobody would raise their hand, [I'd say,] "Alright, be honest, who didn't actually get it?" Then I [would] get one or two people who raise their hand. [At which point, I'd ask,] "Do you want me to explain it?" [to which they would answer,] "Yeah, could you?" So, it's [almost as if] you [have to] force it out of them when they're confused. But even the people who understood it, it was good for them to get it reinforced. So, I guess someone who really didn't understand it, I'd move them over [to a different group]...I would separate the rooms by the skill level, that way people get the most out of the session.

Zelda later stated:

I would always tell people in my session, “Hey, if you're kind of getting this, feel free to walk out.” I don't want to be at there for two hours, helping people out because some were confused [and others weren't]. I'd take my time to really explain it. And I'd [say,] “Hey, you're good, feel free to walk out,” or “go to another classroom” if we've [been] working on multiple choice for a long time, “Feel free to switch classrooms and go to the other one. This study session is for you guys, go where you need to get help the most.”

Even though the concept of teamwork was prevalent amongst this population, individual challenges persisted. In spite of efforts taken, PTs still had some difficulty becoming comfortable moving through the role of being a PT. One specific example of this was Eamon's challenge with apprehension. He became comfortable by reflecting on the PD he received and the idea of splitting his session into two groups. Eamon had struggled early on, reporting, “No matter how much training you give someone, you know they're not really gonna get comfortable and settled into it until they actually start leading sessions on a regular basis participate in that program.” His anxiety decreased, however, when he decided to rely on the concept of teamwork in his own sessions, which he says was “helpful in easing some of that apprehension.” Eamon explained:

I adopted my peer tutoring method from the training that was given to me by [Alpha Academy PT] leadership here. Basically, you break up the classroom into two sections and have all the people who are kind of working on a common assignment work together in a general area. And [the PT] floats back and forth between the two groups. Which worked really well, and it was something that I

probably wouldn't come up with on my own. So that was taught to me and it was super effective.

Some PTs mentioned a different method of becoming comfortable. For them, understanding the material helped their confidence. Yet, relying on a group of PTs helped to reinforce that confidence. Wesley explained:

I was confident in my ability because I knew the material. What I was teaching was my bread and butter. I also never had to worry about my abilities because if I ever had a question I knew I could rely on the other tutors for help.

Holly differed slightly in her confidence building, in that she recognized that her confidence grew only when her tutees performed better with her. This is evident as Holly wrote in her journal:

After the first few sessions I realized that I was good at explaining complex subjects in simple, everyday examples. In being able to describe fundamental concepts and hearing the person being able to describe it back to me, I realized I found a good strategy and was more confident in my ability to help others.

While PTs developed several strategies to aid them in conducting their sessions, several considerations were also raised by students. By relying on various strategies, including teamwork, PTs were able to understand that they were establishing novice teaching skills, which is covered under the following subtheme of considerations.

**Teaching or tutoring?** When students chose to take on the role of being a PT, they acknowledged the fact that they would be facilitating the learning process of others. Students at the Alpha Academy were quick to acknowledge that when they were leading

a PT session, they were indeed leading and not teaching. Laura explained this while discussing the challenges of being a PT at Alpha, stating:

I taught on Sunday nights, well I didn't teach, I led a session. That was another thing, you're not teaching you're leading. So that's kind of another thing about it too...it's a semantic thing, but [the PT director] really tries to stress, you're not the teacher. They have teachers and they teach them. They should know this material, [but] I guess when you see the light bulb moment, you know, when they finally got something. You could say that's teaching. You're finally drilling in a concept and they finally learned it. I would say in that sense there was teaching going on.

PTs at Bravo and Charlie viewed the act of being a PT in a session slightly differently. Fiona from Charlie Academy, when describing her style of tutoring, alluded to her efforts in reaching her tutees:

Instead of making them feel small, [I] tried to bolster them and tell them, without sugar coating stuff. You could try to teach words [and] not criticize. So, I feel like that's [an] incredibly important role I hope to fulfill in the armed forces.

Chester pointed out the difference between teaching and tutoring. He did recognize that there is a level of teaching that does occur, saying:

Usually the way I liked to tutor someone was to have them work it out and to provide guidance along the way. But, if they didn't know anything about it, they couldn't exactly do that. The only way to move them forward was to really teach them the material.

The challenge of finding the gap in understanding was a prevalent issue when discussing aspects of tutoring and is often a challenge for many experienced instructors. This was similar amongst the PT participants who had never experienced formalized training in teaching outside of their CRLA certification or personal experience. The PT participants found this to be problematic. Chester touched on this when he spoke about finding the comfort level with the students he had worked with. Chester elaborated on how he personally evolved not only through the initial certification, but through his tenure as a PT when he helped tutees grasp the concepts discussed:

[I had to first] get used to knowing that I could help people, and then, getting used to actually doing that. That's a big thing about me, being comfortable with the people I tutored and that they were comfortable. So, trying and making sure that they were comfortable with everything that's going on.

Although PTs endeavored to be personable and find various strategies that helped their peers, many found the challenge of figuring out what worked best for individuals to be difficult. In this aspect of tutoring, the idea of working with others who may learn differently than they do was a common tool, which was brought up when discussing the importance of the PT role. Fredrick explained:

Some people you had to do a long, complicated analogy, and that's what was going to stick with them. [For others,] that was just weird and didn't make sense, so you just had to break it down, even further, to just explaining details.

He re-iterated a statement from earlier in the interview, citing:

Everyone's different, everyone learns differently. The more ways that [I could use] to explain it, the better I would understand it in the end [too]. So, it required

me to have better understanding of the material, [in order to] explain things in as many different ways as possible, [which] was very influential in developing my abilities.

This aspect of tutoring in this environment is a challenge as communication from superior officers arrives as an order and not as a request for an opinion. As Peter progressed through his role, he noticed that simply providing the answers was not going to work. For him, the PT role was much more than that as he reflected on this and his personal understanding on how to improve as a PT. Peter explained:

You have to learn, as a tutor, you can't do everything for the individual. The writing center here at [the academy], I think probably experiences this a lot where a student would come with a topic for an essay, or maybe an outline, but then expects the assistant to essentially write the essay for them. So, that's not your job. You don't do the problem for them, [rather,] you help provide examples. You help prod them along in the right direction, provide advice and corrections as they need it. So, that way it's them doing the problem, or writing the essay. And through that, they learn through that repetition. That's a big thing that you learn. Because if they don't do it and you do it, they're not really getting that [repetition] in.

Upon understanding that the role of a PT in this environment involved more than providing answers, all of the participants chose to remember their training or actively seek out a variety of strategies which helped them work with their tutees. Doing so facilitated the learning of others and aided in their own personal gratification as their

work was not in vain and in one case produced another PT, as Zadie reported during her explanation of the challenges that she experienced:

Especially [during my first] year, [the tutees] kind of took advantage of me and I didn't realize it until the end of the semester where I was always [very] willing to help people. And then I realized that people weren't willing to meet me half way and put in that extra effort [or] listen in class. But, there was also the flip side [in that] there's definitely people that were putting in the effort that made me feel like it was worth it. [For example,] there was one guy I remember, he used to come to me every other night for help because he had class first hour on day twos. I would help him every other night [because] he was [very] confused, but by the end of the semester, I was having him teach other people. So, it's definitely really rewarding as a PT in that case. Where you see someone get so confident in their abilities that they're able to then go and teach someone else. I think that made it worth it.

Cecilia pointed out that even when the group surpassed her own academic performance, she had to remain positive in that she helped them succeed:

There was this one test, I think I got an 85 and I was really upset because I did something stupid [on the test] and, you know, I got [a] poor grade. [The people I helped] were really excited because [they did well], even Ryan got an 87. And I was like, "How is this possible? How'd you do better than me on this test?" And then I was just thinking, "You taught them the material, so you knew it better than you thought you did." You know what I mean? So that was a really conflicting

[emotionally] time I guess. I don't know, that was a really good moment for Ryan and the rest, I'm really proud of them but, it was not a good moment for me.

Coming to terms with what did and did not work in tutoring sessions was an initial challenge; however, many of the PTs seemed to find their comfort zone in a relatively short period of time. Although this may have had a subpar outcome for the PT, overall, a common goal was achieved. Once PTs seemed to understand that the role of a PT was to facilitate the understanding of concepts tutees learned in class, they were able to progress. As this developed, students felt that their leadership skills would be improved which they described to be a long-lasting benefit from this experience. Many expressed that if they were unable to find mechanisms that worked, they would resort to passing a tutee off to another PT. In these instances, PTs adapted their own styles as they began to understand that they were transforming.

This transformation was what they all attributed as helping them with their leadership style. Each student had reported the importance of selfless service as a leader, in order to do so, they each volunteered to become a PT. Through this group, they were able to work on their leadership potential, and came to understand that by working together they could enhance their sessions or personal skills. Yet while they described these realizations through the experiences they endured, they also described a sense that these lessons would continue into their individual roles as a leader not only within their respective PT program, but also when they are tasked with leading others in the Armed Forces.

### **Enhancing Leadership Skills**

In their own respective way, each federal service academy attempts to find and develop leaders for tomorrow's armed forces. Because of this, I knew that when I talked to the students, the aspect of being a good officer was bound to emerge. Leadership development was the underlying tone that every student took upon being interviewed and was also evident from the moment I sat down with the first student and lasted until I had determined that data had been fully saturated. For Cecilia, becoming a PT afforded her the opportunity to continue her development:

I just really enjoyed [volunteering] and I also like being a leader and being able to call the shots with volunteering which was nice. Because you get to focus your efforts, so it's really good... [this] was just something that was satisfying.

This aspect goes directly to Schlossberg's (1987) second "S," self, describing who a person feels they are as well as how their optimism can deal with situations. As the students ventured further in their PT program, they reported some aspect of professional growth through the interactions they had with their peers, administrators, and PD sessions. Fredrick pointed this out:

I think the biggest reservation I had was I hadn't, up until I considered going here, really been in any leadership roles. They made me uncomfortable, I usually like to just be the guy who has good ideas, and not necessarily the guy in charge of people. So, I think that was definitely what made me nervous.

Peter described the professional atmosphere that these undergraduate students experienced when they took it upon themselves to help their peers and how one could personally develop in the program, saying:

I've always expected sort of a professional sort of air I guess that the tutors would take, and honestly, the tutors here are very, very professional. It's almost as if you're watching someone who's been a teacher for years. I guess the degree of professionalism was appealing as well because through that sort of environment, I improved my interpersonal skills, public speaking skills. I improved my own knowledge of the subject material, my ability to communicate improved greatly. And in that, I guess particularly communicating ideas and concepts that other people might not initially understand. And you also learn to be flexible and adaptable in relation to that.

As Peter alluded to the professionalism of his specific program, he hinted about some of the traits of what he felt made a good leader. His efforts to include personal knowledge, communicating with others, and being flexible as well as being adaptable are all benefits that could enhance a leaders' ability to help others follow. Further, the confidence to understand one's own limitations, develop confidence with the material or the act of tutoring, enhance public-speaking abilities, and understand how to prepare and manage time are all aspects of interpersonal skills that the students cited during data collection. This led to the first subtheme of enhanced interpersonal skills.

**Professionalism.** The acquisition of social skills is inherently important to a future officer in the armed forces. Laura responded in her journal regarding the lessons she learned from her time as a PT, "You learn valuable lessons in time management, self-sacrifice [on a small scale], teaching others concepts, and just working and getting along with others which are all valuable lessons for the military." Students choosing to become a PT are afforded the opportunity to develop these skills and mature into a person that can

help others. As the students, in their own words, referred to personal benefits that helped them transition into what they feel is a leader, they all found the common benefit of leadership development which would, upon graduating, afford them the ability to use their skills in front of enlisted personnel. Other students reported aspects of professionalism that began to emerge through this role including, improved communication, delegating, building relationships, personal reflection, relying on experiences, and following up with others. This is evident from Chester, who stated, “This has helped me, [it’s] just given me experiences to draw off of.” In addition, Wesley stated:

As an officer, whenever I graduate, I'm going to be leading [people]. And whenever I lead [them], I'm going to have to give them my intent. And also, explain why I need them to do a lot of different things. So, if the mission itself, or the orders that we received are convoluted and I understand them, [I’ll] need to explain what is going on to, to my subordinates, I think that [I’ll have] the ability to break down that information and explain it. The why of it to people so that they understand it's going to be very beneficial. The confidence that you get from repeated exposure to speaking in front of groups of people and to individuals from a position where you're supposed to be the authority on the subject, I think also will help a lot.

Fiona’s experiences in regard to future leadership were focused on the benefits of interacting with others. This participant cited:

We are [a] very, very small service. So, it was a better long-term investment for me to get to know a kid through peer tutoring so that I can help them in the future.

So that one day when I'm on a [branch transport vehicle] and he's my [branch specific position], and maybe I'm a [higher branch specific position], we have already created a relationship. So, overall [it's been] positive because [I'm] creating more relationships.

Laura found that her time spent as a PT helped with cultivating professional relationships saying and practicing her leadership skills:

I'm a generally bubbly, happy, outgoing person. I had to catch myself a few times [for example], maybe I should be correcting them on this, instead of talking to them having a nice conversation while they're doing something wrong? There are things like that, but in the long run, helping out subordinates is a good way to practice leadership... I'm trying to help them, I don't want them to be scared.

Aside from the experiences of being around others in order to help them, the participants described a sense of understanding that as a leader they may not have all the answers, but they know who can help in certain situations. Ben pointed out, "I think that people who are tutors think [that] they don't need tutoring. I know I was that way. Just having that presence of self to not, you know, get a big head." This is similar to Peter, who described understanding his own limitations and referring his tutees to other tutors or academic resources help, saying, "Sometimes you don't, as an individual, have all the answers." Laura specified, "Sometimes I had to say 'you know, I don't know exactly the answer to that, but you can look it up on Google or you can look in your textbook or maybe just ask your teacher in class tomorrow.'" Wesley learned this lesson through the CRLA certification saying, "that class gave a good understanding of how I can teach and when I don't know the answer, where to go to find the answer." Not having the answer

proved costly for Paxson, who, when discussing his personal challenges, became visibly uncomfortable by blushing, moving in his chair, and fidgeting with his hands. He stated, “I became another student working on the problem in the room.” For Paxson, the recognition that being prepared would help came at a costly moment:

I didn't enjoy [it,] particularly because it made me feel incompetent, like I was a bad teacher, or I wasn't doing my job. But I remember that the most because of how uncomfortable I felt, and the emotions, it's not an experience that I particularly enjoyed.

Holly cited her initial uneasiness of tutoring due to being under prepared with the subject, as well as learning to understand professionalism as an upperclassman, as a reason for why she enhanced her personal sessions, saying:

I would say that I slowly learned because my first peer tutoring session [with] chemistry was really not well-executed. I went in there not really knowing what they knew, [or] what they didn't know, because I didn't really know them yet either. [Due to] it being a week or so into school. Not really knowing how I could interact with the fourth class because I just became a third class a fourth class, so how do I interact as a third class? So that was kind of like something that I had to learn over time.

As both PTs learned a difficult lesson, they learned that the ability to understand one's limitations affords a person the opportunity to work on those limitations.

Others seeking to improve in this area look to the potential that PT programs have for each service academy. Patrick described working with the material and relaying concepts to his tutees as a leadership development opportunity:

You get the opportunity of leadership. You get the opportunity to speak [in front of people]. You get the opportunity to deal with material that you're going to forget. You get to interact [with] people who, you were at that point [too], and by interacting with them, you're still able to empathize and be understanding of what they are going through, and what you did go through, and how you should treat people.

Peter elaborated on this by discussing his own personal recognition of his improved social skills:

Confidence in front of soldiers. Interpersonal skills, being able to talk to lots of different people in different ways will definitely help with addressing a diverse group of soldiers because if, if you have a diverse group of soldiers, they're most certainly to all learn in different ways to communicate. Or at least understand things in different ways so that you will have to communicate with them using different techniques. Then, if you [are able to] on a one-on-one basis, interacting with soldiers as well, it helps you sort of adjust how it is you approach the development of that particular soldier.

As previously mentioned, students who chose to be a PT did so for a several reported reasons, however, with this choice came the benefit of teaching others. These students were keenly aware that they would benefit by delving into teaching important concepts to their peers, which they may not have received if they were only to focus on themselves. This instilled in them a sense of confidence when teaching, or leading, tutees both in one-on-one settings and in a group sessions. A second subtheme also emerged: the importance of PD and continued learning. This aspect was particularly important

because it bolstered students' interpersonal skills and provided the backbone to how they performed.

**Importance of learning and professional development (PD).** CRLA training sessions, as well as academic resource centers at each academy, helped the students develop these interpersonal skills as well as with their personal levels of confidence. For Olivia, the frustration was troublesome; however, by using the strategies she learned in PD sessions, she was able to grow. For her, the PD sessions and the feedback she received aided in her understanding that she was using the tools discussed and that it would help her as a leader:

That was kind of just like a learning process. I had to make sure that I checked on their learning before we ended, because sometimes, I can come off as short or aggressive. We did talk about that [during PD sessions] but [I thought] it wasn't relevant [because] a lot of things that were for studying history or something, and I was doing math, but somehow, and I didn't make the connection that in practice, things like waiting after asking a question, or re-directing a question in [a] sort of guiding them to the answer deal, both of those I do naturally. So that was more understanding that the professional development trainings, I suppose, were actually legitimate [because], eventually it will be expected that, especially as a senior [or] junior officer, [I will] lead the new junior officers [and help them learn] the ropes in figuring out what's going on. And, so starting that now in how to help them do that is good.

Although Ben reported that he was cognizant of the strategies used to enhance his sessions, he focused more on the aspect of becoming confident in through the validation he felt after attending his PD:

I have always tried to help people and felt like one of the biggest things people struggle with in learning is the form of presentation. I am a very hands-on learner and my brain makes connections that are very abstract to most people, so I had to find a way to express my ideas more logically. I did most of this learning in high school, so by the time I got [to the academy], I knew the process and wanted to help others develop their ideas as well. I have also found that I am more confident in my abilities when I am very interested in a particular topic, such as calculus and chemistry. The process of becoming CRLA certified also validated my confidence as a tutor, especially through the evaluated tutoring sessions.

A common aspect of building this confidence is the thought of how this would help each student during their careers once they graduated from their academies. Wesley expanded on this, saying:

...helping anyone learn. In any topic, anything, the techniques I learned during my certification class can work in trying to learn your military tactics. [For example], say you got one of your soldiers doing an online class at night and they need help, you can help them with that. For yourself, how to learn the options available to you. So yeah, just being able to be an all-around expert on this learning process.

Learning how different challenges can arise in both one-on-one sessions as well as in group sessions led PTs to use what they had: their own knowledge of the subject. The

fact that many were comfortable discussing particular academic concepts further helped them become a better PT. This was regarded as their strong point, as Fredrick stated, “the academic realm was my wheel house, that's where I could like pull my weight and help other people.”

For many, this understanding not only brought out personal confidence, but also enhanced the strategies each PT used. Zelda stated, “As a PT, I was really good at making sure they really understood the material all the way through.” For others, the role of being a PT was going to further their own understanding of the concepts. Fredrick mentioned:

Whenever [I tutored] in a subject that I enjoyed, which it usually was, because I was supposed to be good at it, it either helped me in the class, if I was currently in it, or it gave me refresher on a class that I hadn't necessarily taken for a while.

Chester supported this well when he said, “some of the classes I tutored in, I was actually in, and not only did that help me help others, but helped me learn the material as well.”

Service academy PTs who possess a strong knowledge base felt better when tutoring. Others, however, learned that they through this experience, they were also expanding their understanding about leading others, building a new base of knowledge that will be helpful as an officer. Fredrick explained that he has taken on an early leadership role outside of the formal PT program in his own company:

At this point, I'm more in the overseer job. So, I'm an academic officer for my company, which means that I'm in charge of making sure that everybody is in class, and on time, and [are] passing their classes. But, I think the job is a lot more than that. [I've] been expanding and trying to create a robust company

tutoring program. Some of the other companies have had that in the past, and ours has never been that good, for our company, so this year we're trying to make a pretty good solid, class of [first year students] to help tutor each other, and I think, if you can get [them] to bond like that, it'll just continue throughout their time.

This example is indicative of what many participants expected to learn from taking on the role of being a PT, yet most chose to focus on how this would help them down the road.

As Zelda explained:

Lots of people [will be] expecting you to lead them and to help them. And you need to be prepared. You need to know the answers and have those answers ready for them. I think that's gonna be a big thing, [when] I become [an officer], our company commanders [want to see] people [be] fair leading figures. They know that you have the answers for them, and then you know that they can approach you and ask you for help if they need it.

While all recognized the importance of leadership and developing as leaders, the participants appreciated the fact that teaching others will continue after their time at the academy. The role of being a PT provided them the ability to not only enhance their leadership style, but to also learn how to reach others in an effort to help their peers become stronger.

### **Continuing the PT Role as an Officer**

I previously discussed the benefits described from this experience in subsections within Chapter Four. The participants described specific short-term and long-term influences that led all participants to say they will carry with them as they leave their

respective academies and become officers within their respective branches. Helping their peers learn has been described by participants as a “joy” (Wesley) or they “enjoy/enjoyed” the act (Ben, Cecilia, Chester, Eamon, Fiona, Holly, Olivia, Patrick, Paxson, Zadie, and Zelda), and a reason that all will continue to do so as they move into the role of being an officer. This is evident, as Patrick stated that he would do so because he’ll need to train his “replacement,” while Olivia mentioned that she’ll be “leading the new junior officers in [learning] the ropes in figuring out what’s going on.” Fiona stated, “I would definitely say this is an enduring tool [because] I’m going to have to help [junior officers] when I become a Senior Officer.” Wesley viewed this experience as becoming “an all-around expert on this learning process” that he could help “anyone learn.” Peter found that being able to communicate “using different techniques” will help him “adjust how [I] will approach the development of a particular [enlisted person].” As participants recognized that this role would continue, even though they had left the program, they attributed that due to the short-lived and enduring influences described below.

**Influences.** As stated previously, the students participating in this study had transitioned out of the role of being a PT and were either no longer involved with their PT program or had transitioned into a leader within the PT program. Those who were not leading within the PT program opted to continue on by transitioning into the role of being a PT for their company, with one exception: Fiona. Fiona left the PT program in order to travel to the Bravo Academy to be an exchange student for one semester. Fiona was the sole participant who left the PT role for a reason other than taking on a leadership role but had a unique description to how her experiences have affected her as she didn’t

necessarily want to stop being a PT stating, “the whole idea of creating relationships and not wanting to lose the momentum of that.” Holly stated:

I think that the ability to form these professional relationships is extremely important, uh, especially coming into this year as a second classman you're that upperclassman that's supposed to facilitate those professional relationships.

Having the experience as a peer tutor as a third class helped me to understand that role better.

Even though Cecilia had a personal challenge previously discussed, she still described that she “like[s] to help teach other people. So that's helped me become a better person.” Others described a transformation as well. For example, Paxson stated:

I think I've been able to grow from this, it's helped me in all aspects of my life to really understand the value of time and how you need to manage yourself when you have strings pulling you in all different directions, to accomplish many different goals and you don't have the resources to accomplish all of them so you have to optimize your process to get the most out of it. [How to] get the most benefit and perform as well as you want to in the aspects that you deem most important.

Ben explained:

I think that being a tutor taught me a lot about working with people and developing a more open mind about how people learn in general. I also feel like it is one of the best ways to help out at the academy as a cadet, since we all want to help each other succeed and are given an opportunity to do so.

By volunteering to help others, the PTs stated they learned aspects that helped them immediately, but that they also felt that these benefits would be long lasting, helping them become a better officer. Peter stated, “The process itself eventually culminates, almost like (a) professional making sort of event,” and Zadio explained, “You're able to help people, and you're able to help yourself too.”

Each of the participants within the study are currently enrolled as students at their respective service academy; therefore, they cannot accurately comment on any possible enduring influences that they have experienced as it relates to a current profession. They each speculated, however, as to how this will arise in situations as an officer in their respective branch. Fiona described the aspect of building relationships throughout her interview, saying:

When it comes to being an officer there's a human side of it, so it's not all about the classic [things] like how great can your uniform look, [or if] you [are] proficient at everything. When it comes to being in any kind of officer role, it's a human connection.

The opportunity to help others learn was viewed by Patrick as:

...an opportunity to grow, to learn, to have sort of a leadership position and a mentoring position that I don't really get to have in the company. If you're interacting with the [fourth year students], you stand out, because most people want to keep that divide. Personally, I try to go with the motto [of] common respect.

Zelda described this experience as beneficial in terms of leading others in the future:

Having lots of people expecting you to like lead them and to help them. You need to be prepared, you need to like know the answers and have those answers ready for them. I think that's gonna be a big thing, once I become [an officer], people see you as [a] fair leading figure. They know that you have the answers for them. And then you know that they can approach you and ask you for help if they need it.

The students described benefits from this experience that occurred to experiences had by volunteering at each academy. These influences are viewed as a positive because each student felt that they had transformed into what they feel is a capable leader. This sentiment of becoming a professional through the development of interpersonal skills was only attributed to the initial thoughts of wanting to help others because they could. The joy that each person described from their experience carried them through the experience, requiring them to rely on strategies to continue the experience. It was only when they recognized that they needed to move on did they then reflect on how this would possibly benefit them in the long term, and because of that, they would continue on as an officer who will help others. Laura stated that this experience will help her by “just being a leader in general and helping.”

### **Research Question Responses**

The themes and subthemes provided helped when answering the research questions that helped to form the focus of this study. The central research question asked: How do undergraduate students describe their peer tutoring experiences in federal service academies? I chose this as my central research question because I endeavored to understand the experiences that these students have as it relates to the benefits received as

well as from the act of undertaking a voluntary position while at a federal service academy. My goal was to discover underlying intentions of purposefully taking on the additional challenge of a voluntary role, and to further hear participants' descriptions of how they transitioned into, through, and out of the role of being a PT in this environment. The overwhelming result when answering the central research question was that participants relayed their experiences in a positive manner and provided evidence of personal growth, the capacity to lead, and that each former PT will continue to utilize these experiences as an officer.

Upon analyzing the data, all four of the presented themes emerged without fail: (a) continue selfless service, (b) embracing the PT role, (c) enhancing leadership skills, and (d) continuing the PT role as an officer. Why PTs chose the role of being a PT, the strategies used in sessions, challenges faced, and the interpersonal skills gained were all prevalent within each of the participants' journal responses; however, the aspect of team work was again only raised from students who attend the Bravo Academy. Yet, when relayed to the students at Alpha and Charlie academies during focus group interviews, team work was supported. This subtheme of the importance of teamwork and helping one another—PTs and students alike—was loosely supported by all participants and only agreed upon when brought up in focus group interviews. Fiona, who had reservations in regard to cooperating with others because it could lead to “plagiarism,” recognized that the “cut-throat” attitude only occurs at the “top echelon” of her classmates, while the remainder of her class does tend to work together.

Although few students tutor similar subjects, each student reported similar statements that corroborated the findings which are found within the sections as an effort

to support these themes. The answer to the central research question is supported by the phenomenological findings linked to the four subquestions below.

**Subquestion 1.** Subquestion 1 asked: What were participants' expectations for being a PT prior to the start of this experience? In this study, the experiences of PTs at federal service academies described students' initial thoughts of what a PT was, as well as to hear participants' motivations to transition into the role of a PT in this.

Students attending Alpha and Charlie academies enjoy a boost to their GPA in the form of receiving one credit which is graded by their PT director. When discussed at the focus group interviews conducted at both Alpha and Bravo academies. Upon hearing of this benefit, Bravo Academy students were surprised. Wesley even replied, "I'll take that," while Zadie and Zelda both reported that benefit was "nice." Not a single student, however, reported that this, or any other reported benefit, was the initial reason why they chose to volunteer as a PT. Instead, those descriptions paled in comparison to their descriptions of the joy that every student expressed when helping a peer learn. Ben enjoyed the challenge that came with helping others learn, explaining, "I especially found that I enjoyed trying to find out how someone learned best so that I could make topics stick better." For Zelda, it was rewarding and pleasurable, citing, "It was a lot of fun, I enjoyed helping people and I did generally [feel] awesome."

These undergraduate students embraced the role of becoming a PT and found that they needed to succeed in this role in order to recognize the joys that came with helping others. This led students to rely on PD sessions with PT administrators or professors who covered pertinent content in order to be effective within PT sessions. For Fiona, the help

she gained from the English department was lengthy but worth it for her sessions, as well as for her own personal writing:

We had multiple sessions at the library where we met, and they gave us a bunch of tools to help kids. So, it was actually really good. I mean it took up a lot of time, but, I could even use the packets that they gave me for my own writing, which was really nice.

The participants welcomed the opportunity to help others with enthusiasm. The benefit of increased learning due to spending a greater time with the content in order to learn a variety of ways to explain the content was enjoyed by several. Ben found that his role as a PT helped him as a student because “it’s dedicated study time to one subject...you have to be so prepared for your study sessions that you have to know it before you can try to teach people.” Wesley agreed, stating:

When you have to teach the material, not only do you have multiple ways to describe the situation and analyze it, because some people’s thought processes are different, so you got to know multiple way...to help them out. Just being able to quickly recall that information when someone asks you a question, you don’t have time to go and flip back through the book to relearn it, then teach it, they need the answer as quickly as possible, so the memory recall got faster and better.

Cecilia, who has intimate knowledge in regard to the role of a PT at both a civilian college and at a federal service academy, stated during the focus group interview, “There is a difference between a PT at a normal university and at [Bravo Academy] because at normal school, people [say,] ‘I should be paying you.’ In here, it’s this whole different environment.” The short answer to the first subquestion was simple: they wanted to help

others because they could, they liked doing so, and they wanted to share their gifts with others that needed assistance. The expected and unexpected benefits experienced by participants were emphasized less than their descriptions regarding their efforts to help someone else.

**Subquestion 2.** Subquestion 2 asked: In what ways were participant expectations met or not met during the peer tutoring experience? This question was designed to hear participants describe the process of being a PT and recognizing the role that they were now involved in. The point at which the participants could describe that they “knew the ropes” (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 57) and recognized that they had “both assets and liabilities; resources and deficits” (p. 73) was considered to be when each PT understood their role, ultimately indicating that they had moved through the experience. Because PTs had experienced the entire path a person in this role could take from beginning to end, I expected all of them to be able to describe their lived experiences regarding the expectations of this experience.

Participant expectations were met due to the simplicity of their thinking upon starting the role of being a PT, they wanted to help others and they enjoyed their time doing so. The fact that PTs felt they were effective and able to help their peers understand concepts was related to the variety of strategies presented by each student. Finding different strategies which would help their peers learn was an effort to have tutees return to them so that they would continue to facilitate their learning, as well as to enjoy the experience of helping those same people.

Through their respective PT sessions, students used a “trial and error” approach to figure out not only what worked best in certain situations for the PT, but to also ensure

that they had “multiple ways to describe” concepts. The ability to rely a variety of strategies learned either from experience prior to arriving at their respective service academies, or through PD sessions and experiences tutoring on post, aided in decreasing apprehension and establishing trust. Very few PTs described feelings of anxiety or apprehension while in the role of being a PT. Only two participants—Olivia and Paxson—described negative feelings due to being underprepared. All PTs, however, stated that they were successful in helping others because students continued to return to them or reported back that they had succeeded in their next graded assignment.

**Subquestion 3.** Subquestion 3 inquired: What expected and unexpected outcomes were realized by participants during this experience? The expected outcome realized by all participants was the fact that they felt joy when helping other people. Two PTs stated that because of this they continued to pursue avenues to volunteer, as Laura stated, “The Alpha Academy makes that really easy to do. There's so many opportunities for that.” Additionally, Fiona stated, “It was really nice to... do something nice for, you know, something higher than the academy.” All participants viewed their time as a positive because of the selflessness they showed when helping others. Fredrick regarded his time as a PT as a factor in being selfless, saying, “Being able to keep a focus on the larger picture has been really beneficial.” Eamon also stated, “You get the unique opportunity to selflessly help other people with a tough subject.” Each participant knew that they would try to do whatever it took to help other people; therefore, the strategies used brought out several unexpected outcomes, including improved interpersonal skills, which they all felt would enhance their leadership skills, and valuing teamwork in order to achieve a goal.

Upon realizing that their leadership skills improved, each PT understood what a leader does in terms of putting people in the right position to succeed which is evident as many placed tutees with other PTs, created groups that addressed specific concerns, or recognized strengths in individual tutees that would help other struggling students as evident. Zelda stated, "I'd grab someone in my company who was in the classroom and [say], 'Hey, you've been to a lot of these, I know you understand this. Explain it to them.' I'd have them start explaining it to each other, because I think that they learn the best through helping each other." Only Cecilia stated they became slightly discouraged discussing the time when her tutee surpassed her own academic performance, that sentiment quickly subsided as she recognized what all other participants determined, that the benefit of working together in order to achieve a common goal benefitted both the PT and the tutee.

**Subquestion 4.** The final research question asked: How do participants describe the short-lived and enduring influences of their peer tutoring experience? I found that each participant developed aspects of what they felt make a good officer. Because students are still enrolled at the academies, the influences cannot accurately be defined as short-lived or enduring, however, participants deemed that the following factors have helped them immediately as well as will continue to help upon graduating. These factors include: (a) public speaking skills, (b) being flexible/adaptable, (c) displaying confidence, (d) understanding limitations, (e) effective time management, (f) patience, (g) sacrifice, (h) effective communication/ensuring understanding, (i) delegating tasks, (j) building relationships, (k) keeping one's ego in check, and (l) treating people with respect.

These influences from their time spent during the PT experience led to friends and peers relying upon them for help. These PTs are future officers who felt the need to be competent so that they would not lose the trust that they had gained from friends and peers. PTs described a belief that these short-lived influences will become enduring influences as they all want to become a leader within their respective branch. In order to do so, participants described the ability to reflect on the lessons learned as a PT. For example, Chester stated:

It's just given me experiences to draw off of. If I'm going to be teaching someone or helping someone, my time as a tutor is plenty of experience... I can look at and see, how has this worked for me in the past? What hasn't worked? How can I most efficiently do my job?

In addition, Paxson stated:

Speaking, explaining things, it's all critical. You need to be able to be confident and you need to be well prepared whenever you address your subordinates or superiors... It's just important to have preparation and to speak clearly when you're presenting in front of a group of people.

Finally, Holly explained:

Transitioning that into the [armed forces], having undergone these relationships where you had to first meet the person, whoever you were tutoring, and then not only get to know them as a person, but get to know how they learned. I think that's an extremely important skill to develop as an officer, because in order to be a good leader and a good officer you need to know your people. In order to be a good leader and a good officer, to be a master of your trade, whatever it may

be...you need to be able to explain, “This is the operation, and this is how I need you to go do it,” because often times the officers are not going to be the ones actually [doing] it. So, by learning how to explain the end goal in what you want to get done, it’s helped me to become a better officer, because I’ll be able to explain, “Okay, this is the problem. This is what we need to do to solve it. Do you understand that? Okay. Now you need to go do it.”

The participants noted that these lessons would help not only moving others on the path to success, but PTs would be able to reflect back on this experience and remember the tools they learned through in order to enhance their overall leadership abilities.

### **Summary**

In Chapter Four, I detailed the results obtained from the data collection and data analysis process. The participants described the lived experiences as a PT at a federal service academy. Through demographic surveys, journal responses, one-on-one interviews, as well as focus group interviews, the participants detailed their experiences in undergraduate federal service academies and expressed their enjoyment with the role of being a PT in this environment and how they transformed from this experience. Participants shared their memories of themselves as students, as PTs, and as student leaders, all building to what they hope to become upon graduating from their respective service academies, an officer serving the United States. Four themes emerged during the data reduction process: (a) continue selfless service, (b) embracing the PT role, (c) enhancing leadership skills and (d) continuing the PT role as an officer.

After reviewing the data, the central research question and four subquestions were answered with evidence provided from the data collection methods. Overall, the

descriptions of what participants experienced were that they wanted to help others learn, and that by doing so they received short term and long-lasting benefits. All of the participants spoke about some aspect of enjoyment they received, as well as how this role would help them serve their nation. Most notably, the participants perceived that the enhanced interpersonal skills that they obtained from this role would serve them well when they graduate.

The students each provided a unique way to help their peers learn. Some of these strategies were created from time spent previously as a tutor in high school, while those who had not previously tutored learned them from PD sessions with PT administrators or professors within the subject they were tutoring. Regardless of how these strategies were developed, the mantra of cooperate to graduate was expressed and welcomed by those who had not yet heard the saying. Just as one student cited that “a rising tide lifts all boats,” volunteer PTs share their gifts with their peers and selflessly help others improve.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of undergraduate students who served as PTs at federal service academies. In this chapter, I will present a review of research findings and contrast the findings in relationship to the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. I will then discuss the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications of the study, as well as the delimitations, limitations, and recommendations for future research. I will conclude the chapter with a final summary.

### **Summary of Findings**

The goal of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of undergraduate students who served as PTs at federal service academies. Using a variety of data collection methods, I was able to gather participants' descriptions of their lived experiences. The research questions that guided the study were used to obtain results, which I presented in the form of themes and compared in alignment with Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory.

In my search to answer research questions, I collected data using demographic surveys, participant journal responses to specified prompts, structured one-on-one interviews, and a structured focus group interview. Through these data collection methods, I strived to gather fruitful data which accurately describe the lived experiences of PTs at federal service academies located in eastern United States. All data were typed by participants or transcribed using a professional transcription service. All transcriptions were provided to participants as a member checking step. Through the

coding and data reduction steps outlined by Moustakas (1994), four primary themes emerged. These themes are: (a) continue selfless service; (b) embracing the PT role; (c) enhancing leadership skills; and (d) continuing the PT role as an officer.

I relied upon the emergent themes to answer the central research question and the four subquestions that were presented at the onset of this study. Participants' responses to structured interviews, demographic survey responses, as well as journal responses were directly related to their lived experiences as a PT in a challenging environment. Participants clearly expressed a desire to help their peers academically because they wanted to do so, and expected nothing in return. PTs described that they had transitioned through the PT process at their respective academies by embracing this role, which meant that they found ways to help others succeed and learn. By doing so, PTs described personal growth that they immediately benefitted from and feel as though they will use later in life as an officer. These themes provide insight into what participants experienced and how they moved into, through, and out of the role of being a PT in this environment. How participants describe this transition has never been researched before; the results not only shed light on what might be expected by those who decide to become a PT at a federal service academy, but will assist academic administrators in understanding the positive aspects of this role in a military educational environment.

I answered the central research question through three of the four themes presented. The first theme, continue selfless service, highlighted reasons why participants chose to become a PT. Even though students at federal service academies face difficult challenges in regard to military, academic, and physical tasks, they also struggle with time management when accomplishing those tasks. The choice to become a

PT is a voluntary one, a decision to help others while placing one's personal interests second. All participants described a need to help their peers to the point that they needed to learn how to manage their own schedule. PTs persisted because they genuinely liked how they felt when they were thanked by students who returned with stories of success, or experienced "a-ha" moments.

The second theme, embracing the PT role, related to how participants described the transition into becoming an experience PT, as well as how they described personal fulfillment in this role. When PTs described their how they became successful, they focused on how they needed to find strategies that helped their tutees. PTs described that they had to use what worked best for the particular learning styles of individual peers. While one strategy may have worked with a few tutees, other tutees required additional work. PTs persisted in not only seeking out strategies from PD sessions, but by also relying on fellow PTs to hear what may have worked for them. Although PTs recognized that they do not have a formal education in teaching pedagogy, they persisted in working towards facilitating the learning process all in an effort to help others because they enjoyed it.

The following theme, enhancing leadership skills, has ties to the aspects of how the PTs embraced their role. Personal strategies used to facilitate the learning process helped to enhance individual PT efficacy. The participants discussed that their tutees became more comfortable in both one-on-one and group tutoring sessions. As tutees continued to return to specific PTs, the individual PTs became more confident as leaders. The described benefits that PTs experienced included becoming a competent professional. This described competence was facilitated through the process of

continually attempting to learn in order to help their peers. By attending PD sessions, PTs learned not only how to help individual students, but to also lead individuals or a group of individuals in a realm that they may not be comfortable in. By establishing themselves as confident, competent PTs, they improved their personal leadership skills that they feel would be beneficial as an officer.

The final theme, continuing the PT role as an officer, highlights the personal attributes that participants described they gained from being a PT. Phenomenological research strives to obtain thick, rich descriptions of a lived experience from a number of participants. The participants included students at federal service academies who are focused on leading others in an effort to protect the United States. The descriptions of how this role would benefit each of them, in the future, as an officer, was described positively; they each postulated a scenario where they would be successful in helping those around them understand a task or situation that may arise. Because of these descriptions and these experiences, the PTs perceive that they are better suited to hold leadership positions.

The first research question was answered through the first theme, continue selfless service. As participants decided to become a PT, their expectations were minimal. As participants provided their respective reasons, I found myself smiling and enjoying the simplicity with how they decided to be a PT. They each described their previous experiences volunteering, and therefore, because they had helped others in the past they desired to continue to do so in this new, challenging environment. Fourteen of the 15 participants shared in-depth, personal stories of how they felt when helping others. Only Olivia felt that her volunteer time was nothing extraordinary, yet she also felt as all other

participants did—that as each of them embarked on their own PT journey, they expected nothing in return. These students were used to helping others, it is a factor into why they chose their educational path, at a military institution. Only two participants, Laura and Fiona, described potential expectations, in that they desired to meet other students that could be experienced from this role; no one described that they wanted to gain anything specific, other than supporting their peers.

Perhaps the simplest to answer, the second research question specifically asked about personal expectations and whether they were realized or not. Because participants never desired to gain anything personal from this experience other than to help their peers, I can say that participant expectations were not met. Students were unaware of the personal growth they were going to experience at the onset of their role; because of this, they were quick to point out how they had personally improved as a student, tutor, and leader because of this experience. It is because of this personal growth that the last two themes, enhancing leadership skills and continuing the PT role as an officer emerged. For these students, this was the best aspect of becoming a PT in this environment and is viewed as helping them be successful in the future.

The third research question also contributed to the final two themes. As participants described the simplicity with which they began their journey, they never expressed a desire to gain anything other than feeling good about helping others; therefore, expected outcomes were realized as 14 of the 15 participants characterized their time spent as a being meaningful to others and “enjoyable.” Through this experience, PTs reported enhanced confidence that participants experienced which was characterized as a leadership quality they would need in order for them to help their

tutees. PTs were confident with the material they were tutoring; however, many had never tutored a struggling classmate. As PTs continued to seek PD sessions or developed new personal tutoring strategies that facilitated the learning of their peers, they slowly became more confident in themselves. They described that their personal leadership skills were enhanced due to a transition they underwent (i.e., self) as they adapted to their setting within the PT role (i.e., situation). PTs were also quick to point out that this new-found confidence would help them in the future as an officer, and again, was useful in pointing to potential future situations that could possibly arise.

The final research question directly relates to the final theme of being a PT as an officer. Because participants, as of this time, are currently enrolled at their respective institutions, they do not know what it is like to actually be an officer in the armed forces. Each student, however, had undergone training at their respective academies that provided them with examples of what an officer is and how an officer does their duty. The perceptions of cadets within this study are that the transformations that they have undergone as a PT in this environment will aid them in the future as an officer. Additionally, participants described the lasting affect that this role has had on them in current leadership positions at their respective academies. Participants believed that the PT experience would help them help others as they mature professionally.

### **Discussion**

The discussion section is designed to link the relationship of the findings of this study to the empirical and theoretical literature that I reviewed in Chapter Two. The findings of this study provided new research to the existent literature and verified evidence from what is found in the literature. Further, through this study, I aimed to add

to the literature regarding Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory and how students cope with challenges in higher education. In this section, I will illustrate how the findings are linked to previous research as well as to the stages within the transition theory.

### **Moving In**

Moving into the role of being a PT at a service academy has been found to be similar to the civilian higher educational environment. Students in the civilian setting have reported little in the way of expectations when choosing to become a PT with the exception of the recognized potential for professional growth (DeFeo & Caparas, 2014). Students participating in this study reported that they had little to no expectations and rather simply wanted to give back to peers who were struggling academically. Although some participants reported that they could receive personal benefits in the way of positive military reports, a grade point average increase, or even discounts to on-post restaurants, all participants agreed that they became a PT to simply help others. Further, each student within this study either felt that they had a gift they could share with others or decided to help their peers because they had been helped in the past. This is an interesting view because the students within this study—regardless of why they chose to be a PT—recognized that they would be helping their peers academically, which corroborates Velasco and Stains's (2013) findings that students see themselves as “providers of academic help.”

Students within this study reported a similar issue presented by Collier (2015), who discussed civilian students and how they felt their schedule could be restrictive when attempting to be a peer mentor. Additionally, recognizing that service academy students have significant time constraints due to the mandatory tasks that are customary to this

setting and have been previously discussed (Hornyak et al., 2000; Thain et al., 2008; Turner, 2004), PTs within this study seemed to make the altruistic choice to selflessly give away their time to help others. Participants described the challenge of balancing their own academic, military, and physical schedules in order to accommodate their desire to help their peers. While only Holly and Paxson felt that the decrease in free time was nothing exceptional, the remaining 13 participants described that they needed to take steps to prepare their personal schedules in order to help their tutees.

### **Moving Through**

As students progressed through the role of being a PT, several factors arose which either contradicted or corroborated what scholars have found in the literature previously discussed. PTs participating in this study discussed the importance of finding what worked best for the person they were tutoring. Although Berghmans et al. (2013) reported “that PTs struggle to adopt facilitative and constructivist-oriented strategies” (p. 703), those participating in this study found ways to help facilitate tutee learning. Those attending Charlie Academy discussed meeting with faculty members in relevant classes in order to be prepared, students at Alpha and Bravo academies discussed PD sessions with PT administrators, as well as their fellow PT peers to hear what worked and what did not when helping tutees. Although PT administrators were not interviewed and therefore the ability of PTs to develop constructive learning strategies cannot be confirmed, student PTs described personal strategies that they deemed were constructive in the learning process and that those strategies enhanced their self-efficacy as their tutees returned to them with stories of academic success.

A number of authors have reported that civilian PTs struggle with Socratic questioning, placing demands on tutees while questioning, lack of specificity when providing questions, failing to let tutees explain, and enhancing knowledge-building (Chi et al., 2001; Graesser & Person, 1994; Graesser et al., 1995; King, 1997; Roscoe & Chi, 2007). Undergraduate federal service PTs did not express any challenges associated with aiding the learning process. All Bravo Academy students recognized that they were not professional instructors; however, they expressed similar sentiments to students at Alpha and Charlie academies, in that they desired to develop personal strategies that not only engaged their tutee, but also helped the tutee learn. As mentioned previously, PT administrators were not included in this study, and PT performance was therefore not graded nor was tutee cognitive learning examined; however, all PTs described being successful as a tutor over the time they spent in the role.

PTs also corroborated research regarding how they could improve. Participants' descriptions of wanting to help, and therefore, attending PD sessions was critical to becoming, what they described as, a meaningful PT. Clarence (2016) reported, "In order to maximize peer tutors' potential to work effectively to be a voice for students in conversation with lecturers, as well as facilitators and guides for students in their learning, context-specific, ongoing support, training and development opportunities are necessary" (p. 51). As Clarence recommended, the current PT administrators did hold CRLA certification classes and on-going PD sessions all throughout the PT experience. Twelve of the 15 PTs found these sessions to be helpful to their PT effectiveness and aided in building confidence; only Cecilia, Paxson, and Zadia found these sessions to be "redundant" and "obvious."

As described, Cecilia's time at a civilian higher educational institution and in a federal service academy provide a clear picture as to what she viewed as being different between the two settings. Just as all participants described, Cecilia felt that she will continue to teach as an officer; however, this is contrary to research findings presented by DeFeo and Caparas (2014), in which the tutors reported "poor compensation" and a lack of professional legitimacy" (p. 149). Cecilia was not alone in describing this as all participants pointed to specific situations that they believe would occur and how they would be able to rely on their PT experiences to continue to facilitate the learning experience in the armed forces. The very notion that each of these participants will continue to pursue teaching aspects as a leader in the armed forces is unique to this study as there are no previous studies that discuss the differences between civilian and service academy PTs.

This study had several aspects that corroborated previous research. Clarence (2016) suggested that increased experience with tutoring and continued education would enhance tutoring sessions. PTs substantiated this when reporting their challenges early on. As PTs transitioned into the anticipated role of being a PT, Laura and Fiona reported that the aspect of meeting other people was not only a reason to begin this role, but also aided their sessions by helping them establish a welcoming environment. Schlossberg (2011) described the role of a "socializing agent" which is a person who "helps [others] learn in an informal environment" (p.161). Thusly, for Laura and Fiona, this was something they were expecting, and likely created on their own. Ben, Cecilia, Olivia, Paxson, Patrick, and Wesley did not report aspects of relationship building, but rather provided peer support in the way of encouragement and understanding, which they felt

was attributed to the experiences they learned during their time as a PT instead of the PD sessions. This is similar to what Schlossberg (2011) considered to be a “socializing agent” (p. 161), in that PTs provide their tutees with an environment that supports their needs, and corroborates recent research (Tamachi et al., 2018).

The ability to enhance their tutoring sessions as a “socializing agent” (Schlossberg, 2011, p. 161) was not the only factor that developed through the experience of being a PT in this environment. Additional factors have been reported by civilian PTs that are considered beneficial to being a PT. These factors include, content mastery (Batz et al., 2015), enhanced cognitive thinking (Agius & Stabile, 2018; Lin & Lin, 2016), ability to give feedback (Madaio et al., 2018) in-depth knowledge of the subject matter (Roscoe & Chi, 2007), as well as enhanced professionalism (Clarke et al., 2015; Colvin, 2007; DeFeo & Caparas, 2014; Nisbet et al., 2014). Students within this study validated previous research of enhancing professional qualities through the development of interpersonal skills, improved Socratic thinking, improved understanding through constant reviews, all of which they perceived would help them as an officer. Every individual reported some professional growth and development of interpersonal skills they used when working with their tutees. The improved skills are traits that each PT deemed a benefit as they each reported a scenario in which, as an officer, they would be required to rely on to lead others.

Within this study, students either developed their own tutoring strategies from years of volunteering experience as a tutor prior to attending their service academy, or they adopted strategies discussed within PD sessions. Berghmans et al. (2013) found that tutors are challenged to provide answers instead of facilitating the learning process.

Fiona was most candid regarding this aspect of the PT experience, citing “plagiarism” as a major concern at Charlie Academy. As I previously discussed, Berghmans et al. (2013) brought forth the idea that “that PTs struggle to adopt facilitative and constructivist-oriented strategies” (p. 703), yet within that same 2012 study, the PTs attempted to ensure that further explanation occurred, by using “complex reasoning” (p. 717) and elaboration. This optimistic approach was seen within my study as each and every student reported at least one strategy to facilitate the learning process of their tutee or tutees. When the PTs within this study were challenged to simply give answers, each of them reported that they were not there to do so, and rather began developing ways to help students learn the subject. This development is similar to findings that students leaned on their PD sessions to recall what was suggested where PTs began to “develop respect for tutoring” (DeFeo & Caparas, 2014, p. 149).

### **Moving Out**

As students began to move on to a new role, such as moving out of the PT role and onto a leader within the PT program, or becoming an exchange student at a different academy, they each reflected on their time spent as a PT. Immediate thoughts provided differed from what is presented in the literature. DeFeo and Caparas (2014) reported that civilian PTs often cited “poor compensation,” a “lack of professional legitimacy,” and “limited stability” (p. 149) as reasons they choose to move out of the PT experience. Within the service academy structure, however, the PTs reflected on their time in only a positive manner citing enhanced interpersonal skills and the joy of helping others as reasons why they all feel they would continue on as a PT when they become officers as they believed they would need to help others learn on the job. These sentiments differ

from previous research with one exception; DeFeo and Caparas (2014) reported that “all [participants] identified professional applications and made direct connections between their tutoring experiences and their later work” (p. 154). Students in this study are exactly the same in this respect. Just as civilian students found skills they would later use, so too will service academy students, as both populations reported experiences which either have helped—or will help—them when situations arise in their respective job settings, regardless of whether they are related to the military or not.

### **Implications**

In Chapter Two, I provided several concepts through the literature review which were both present and not present during data collection. Through the data reduction, the following themes emerged: (a) the need to continue selfless service, (b) embracing the PT role, (c) enhancing leadership skills, and (d) continuing the PT role as an officer. Undergraduate student PTs answered questions regarding these themes through journals, structure one-on-one interviews, and focus group interviews. In the following sections, I will discuss the relationship between the four themes found within the study and the literature review provided in Chapter Two.

### **Theoretical Implications**

Through this study, I expanded upon the literature regarding the transition theory by providing a voice for armed forces students serving as PTs as they move in, move through, and move out of being a PT in the described setting (Schlossberg, 1981). Transition theory has been linked to how individuals take on new roles within their personal surroundings, such as being a PT in a college or university (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002). I aimed to enhance the literature on transition theory, specifically to

undergraduate PTs at the federal service academies and how they move into, through, and out of this role. The theoretical implications of this study hold importance for those who desire to conduct research in regard to higher education, peer tutoring, learning at federal service academies, student experiences in a military environment as well as with transitions. Schlossberg's (1987) "4 S system" within the transition theory is the mechanism by which a person copes with a transition and includes a person's situation, one's self, their supports, and the strategies used to cope with the transition (Schlossberg, 2011). This study and its findings substantiate Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory in that students who undergo anticipated events will experience a transition that participants described as transformational. Specifically, the self-described growth was a result from coping to this new endeavor and was attributed to the lived experiences which were in response to taking on this voluntary role to help fellow students.

I began this study because I endeavored to better understand how undergraduate students, who were PTs at federal service academies, transitioned through the role of being a PT in this environment. The findings from this study demonstrated that students who served as a PT transition and transform due to the role they play within the peer-assisted learning platform and how they rely on the "4 S system" (Schlossberg, 1987). The self-described personal growth was the key suggestion as to why each participant felt they will be successful in the future. The lasting impression that this experience has had on each student has been described as positive as each of them described how this will enhance their leadership abilities, which goes specifically towards Schlossberg's (1981; 2011) transition theory. The data revealed 10 subthemes that help to inform the primary themes, but that also shed light on how each of the aspects of the "4 S system"

(Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002, p. 45) can help PTs cope as they transition through the experience they will endure. Further, the situation that each individual found themselves in, what each person brought with them into the role (i.e., self), what supports each person found, and the strategies they all used helped each person as they moved into, through, and out of the role of being a PT at a federal service academy.

**Situation.** As students transitioned into the role of being a PT, they began to understand that even though they were comfortable with the academic material, they were less comfortable helping their peers understand what they knew. As each participant described their situation, they mentioned either previous tutoring experience or a lack of it. Regardless of personal experiences, only one participant, Cecilia, had ever truly been a PT at a college or university; therefore, 14 of the 15 mentioned being uneasy in one way or another. Paxson provided evidence of this when he stated:

You show up in front of the class and they ask you a question, you don't know how to answer, and you feel stressed out. If you don't have the answer, or you don't have a solution process immediately click into your mind, you don't feel confident. And until you do, it's kind of nerve wracking.

As participants began to take stock of their situation, they began to rely on the training or PD sessions that 12 of the 15 participants mentioned were beneficial to facilitating with their sessions. Laura reported this when she said, “[The] vast majority of the training is very high-level overview of how to be a peer tutor.” Even though each participants’ respective situation remained the same, by continually trying to improve through learning, or through teamwork, they adapted to these situations deemed that they had worked well within the situation.

**Supports.** As students recognized their situations, they realized that they were not alone as they moved through this transition. PTs recognized that they had fellow PTs they could talk to and discuss with when developing plans to tutor. Some utilized faculty members within the subjects they were tutoring, while others relied on suggestions from PD sessions or PT administrators. All were bolstered by the feedback they received from either fellow PTs during preparation and group tutoring sessions, or from the tutees they had been working with. All participants, with the exception of Olivia, positively described their experiences when a tutee returned after performing well on a test or paper. Fourteen of the 15 were consistent and poignant as they relied on this feedback to understand that they had performed well as a PT. Fiona provided a clear description of this when she stated:

[When my tutees] came out of the final exam and told me they felt super confident, which made me feel pretty good. When they come back and tell me they got an A, it feels good, like I performed well.

As PTs became more experienced as a PT, their situations became easier to function in. PTs began to understand how to lead tutoring sessions, and ultimately knew who to go to when they needed additional support. By transforming into an experienced PT (i.e., self), through the reliance on their personal supports, they were transforming within their personal situations.

**Strategies.** In response to situations they were faced with, students developed personal tutoring strategies to enhance tutoring sessions as they moved through this experience. By also relying on recent tutoring experiences, PD sessions with PT administrators, or professors, they were able to create positive learning environments that

helped their tutees. By recognizing that they could rely on the PD sessions as well as their own knowledge of the subject they were tutoring, they grew into a person that developed trust. Holly supported this as follows:

I started studying in a group and I became the person that would write everything on the board and start explaining things...so learning how to learn the material and then say it to someone and try and explain it to them definitely helped me to be a better peer tutor.

By relying on other PTs, or the notion that students with similar problems or learning styles could be grouped together, they were coming to terms with the idea of teamwork. As students mentioned, “cooperate to graduate” was a mantra already instilled by their respective student bodies to some degree. By relying on these strategies, their situations (i.e., helping others) remained enjoyable, and facilitated a professional growth (i.e., self) that they feel will help them after graduating.

**Self.** The participants cited that they embarked on this journey because they wanted to help others. Whether they felt it was because they struggled in other aspects of student life (i.e., military or physically), because they had been helped by a PT before, or because they wanted to share their gifts with others, they each wanted to selflessly give of themselves in order to help others. The theme of continued selfless service was an anticipated event for each PT as each had mentioned their volunteer work prior to attending a service academy. Because each of these students had volunteered and each had succeeded with the course material in the past, they each had little expectations from the role they were about to move into. They had begun the PT experience as a student at a federal service academy, and as they moved through the experience, they began to

transform themselves. Each student challenged themselves to overcome personal obstacles in order to help their peers. Because of this, PTs felt as though they had learned to become more professional. Each of the participants developed a variety of interpersonal skills that they felt they would need later in life, when they were leading other. As Eamon stated:

I'm a big proponent of [the PT program] and I'm always telling people it's an awesome experience and it's something you should do. I would say, not only do you get the unique opportunity to like selflessly help other people with a tough subject, you also get personal benefits of the fact that it will make you a better office in the long run, which I think is super beneficial no matter how you look at it.

As PTs moved out of the role, their personal descriptions of how they viewed themselves were vastly different when compared to how they began this experience. Due to the strategies used to cope through this transition, the students described a transformation. It is in this arena that researchers will benefit from this study when using the transition theory (Schlossberg, 1981) as it relates to students transitioning through the experience of learning at a federal service academy, as well as becoming a PT in a difficult learning environment.

### **Empirical Implications**

When embarking on a journey to become an officer in the military, one must begin to develop a sense of leadership. Each academy within this study strives to create leaders of character, one way to begin to address leadership capabilities is through the role of becoming a PT. While there have been studies that have focused their efforts

regarding the outcomes experienced by PTs, there has been no research to date that has focused on federal service academy PTs. This study provides descriptions from participants living in a difficult learning environment who have taken on a voluntary role to help their peers. In doing so, they have transformed themselves into what they deem as capable leaders who will use these techniques in the future. The results of this study regarding their experiences will add to the literature focused on leadership.

The results of this study are beneficial to higher educational professionals in the federal service academy setting as these findings provide substance to validate the need to provide academic support, not only for students who struggle with academics, but also to provide a tool for those looking to develop interpersonal skills such as communication, confidence, and time management skills. Colleges and universities strive to prepare all students in order for those students to earn a degree and perform a task within society. The act of tutoring in federal service academies had not yet been found in the literature. Academic support services are designed to help academically struggling students by providing a service to students through a peer guidance model. How this affects those learning in federal service academies has yet to be studied; therefore, the results from this study regarding PT experiences hold empirical value to academic support administrators.

In addition to those mentioned, peer-assisted learning researchers can benefit from this study. The findings of this study support PT programs and provide descriptions of how this role benefits the PT. Even though this study did not quantify performance of tutees or tutors, it did provide evidence on how peers can help one another by facilitating the learning process. Often participants described their attempts to see what worked or what did not work when helping tutees learn new or difficult material. Previous scholars

have reported challenges with civilian PT programs and a lack of in-depth understanding with new material. The current participants made no mention of how tutees were challenged; instead, participants described the need to find what a tutee would respond to in order to stimulate the learning process. Peer-assisted learning researchers will benefit from this study as it adds to the body of literature which supports peer-assisted learning, as well as provides evidence as to how the transition theory (Schlossberg, 1981) can be applied to student learning and student activities.

The results of this study will also benefit researchers seeking to study activities that enhance leadership qualities and self-efficacy within the military, as each of the participants within this study provided thoughts of how this will enhance their future role. Participants provided ample evidence that current students who have volunteered their time as a PT are resilient and are eager to help others succeed. Participants continued to describe personal growth which they believed will help them in the professional world. The attributes of improved communication, time management skills, and the importance of teamwork have all been deemed as qualities of good employees and effective leaders. Participants in this study described how they would not only be able to lead more effectively due to their experience as a PT, but how they would also continue to improve their respective units upon becoming an officer.

### **Practical Implications**

The findings within this study have practical implications as well for service academy administrators, the United States Armed Forces, and future federal service academy and ROTC students. The results are also valuable to administrators and tactical officers tasked with the holistic growth of students as they mature from student to officer

over the course of four years. Students attending these academies thrive in one or more of the pillars established by each academy. The academic, physical, and military growth of each student at federal service academy is of utmost priority when cultivating an officer who can lead others. The results from this study provide evidence that students who choose to become PTs transform from novice PT to an experienced PT, all while transforming into what they deem as a capable student leader, and potential effective officer in the armed forces. Due to this critical aspect found within the current study, service academy administrators and tactical officers can utilize the PT role as a tool to help current and future students develop leadership skills they may lack.

Each service academy provides a robust academic support service program. Academic support administrators are tasked with providing tools for struggling students in an effort to facilitate the learning process and ultimately improve the academic development of all students on at each academy. Peer-assisted learning is one such method that has helped struggling students; however, there has been no such literature regarding how the role of a PT can benefit the PT at federal service academies. Academic support administrators meet annually to discuss best practices procedures. These same administrators will benefit from this research as they can use this study to provide evidence of the benefits described as a PT. Academic support administrators can also use these results to recruit potential PTs. As students felt a need to volunteer their time, they began to understand how teamwork can create an overall positive environment. Students entering the role of a PT embark on an experience with minimal expectations, however, the efforts PTs put into their time as a tutor is extraordinary as they are competing against the very peers they are helping. The PT programs at each federal

service academy can be relied upon to instill selfless service, personal growth, and enhanced leadership qualities. Finding potential tutors is somewhat difficult, but if academic support administrators provide evidence to the benefits that potential PTs will gain, they may be more likely to see an increase in the PT population.

For the United States Armed Forces, the results of this study provide a glimpse into how voluntary programs can enhance leadership capabilities. At each of these academies, administrators are beholden to the United States taxpayers and are expected to produce professional officers that defend our nations' interests. Students attending these academies are challenged on a daily basis in order to improve their capabilities as an officer. The voluntary role these participants chose to take on as a PT not only helped them to develop personal skills that they deem an officer should have, but also put them into situations that they felt uneasy or uncertain. This required PTs to develop strategies which aided in providing a positive learning environment, as well as ultimately improving their immediate surroundings.

For future students wishing to join a federal service academy, the decision to learn at a federal service academy or join an ROTC program is noble. Many students recognize that an education at a federal service academy comes with a cost, participating in the armed forces to protect their country as an officer. Often, potential students see only the dangers of attending these institutions; however, the results from this study provide evidence that the nature of these institutions is to learn and to help one another succeed. Students enrolled at these academies are challenged every day, and are therefore able to meet challenges that their civilian peers may not be able comprehend. Attending a federal service academy means that a person chooses to start their higher

educational academic career in basic training. During this time, they become acclimatized to the military structure. Upon leaving basic training students move directly into a competitive learning environment, while also continuing to physically train for military requirements. This study provides evidence of systems in place, including PT programs, that are designed to help fellow students, and in doing so, achieve personal academic growth.

To engage in the learning process while knowing that you will be defending the interests of the United States is a tremendous choice that many civilians appreciate. For these federal service students, the results provide descriptions of what to expect as they transition through the experience of being a PT. Their experience may provide them with similar opportunities to enhance their leadership potential. In this respect, future students would be wise to consider becoming a PT in a military environment.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

Delimitations are purposeful decisions that a researcher makes to limit or define the boundaries of the study. Because I sought a rich description of the experiences gained from being a PT at a service academy, the choice to include students who had served as a PT for two or more semesters was made. This choice negated several responses in the demographic survey which could have yielded potential problems that arise from becoming a PT in this environment; however, I wanted an accurate description of the total experience which was deemed to encompass at least one year of work as a PT.

A second delimitation was that I chose to rely solely on the experiences of federal service academy students. The PT world is largely defined and opined by civilian

students. A study of service academy students had never been done before; therefore, I delimited the study to armed forces students only.

A third delimitation that I placed on the study was to use a transcendental phenomenological approach instead of creating a case study. A case study would have been acceptable; however, the opportunity to gather information from multiple sites and programs was exciting and a choice that I wanted to maintain. By including multiple sites, I felt that this could interest a greater population of potential PTs as well as PT directors, instead of only focusing on one branch of the federal service academy educational system. The choice to use a transcendental phenomenological approach was made to provide an accurate description of the essence of the role a PT is at a federal service academy. This was done so without the interpretation from myself, and solely taken from the participants' views. A case study would not accomplish this endeavor.

A final delimitation was to abide by the DoD demographics. This decision meant that I had to find a certain number of minorities, including gender, to volunteer in the study. Thirteen of the 15 reported as being non-Hispanic White, and a total of nine participants were classified as a gender or ethnic minority. This percentage is greater than the reported DoD demographics; the choice to abide by them was created on purpose. This decision also meant that several potential participants could have been excluded; however, those excluded were done so due to other being on exchange overseas or at other service academies that did not approve the study.

Limitations are potential weaknesses of the study that cannot be controlled. This study has several limitations, the first is age. This study sought to hear the descriptions of undergraduate students who had served as a PT at federal service academies. Because of

this, the population was defined as 18- to 25-year-old students, as the federal service academy system precludes individuals from entering who are younger than 18 years or older than 25 years.

The second limitation found in this study was that I did not include participants from all of the federal service academies. As previously mentioned, there are five service academies in total, three of which fall under the DoD, two fall under the Department of Homeland Security. Although I invited all five service academies to participate, one military academy decided to opt out of the study entirely, and therefore, no attempt was made to file an IRB application with that academy. One homeland security academy failed to respond to any communication attempt and therefore no attempt to file an IRB application was made to that academy. I chose to reach out to the PT directors for each academy in an effort to gain assistance. If the directors were interested in the study, then an IRB application was filed. Upon gaining approval from the IRB at the service academy, I then requested the list of former PTs to invite them to volunteer for the study. Two service academies declined to participate (Delta and Echo), while three accepted (Alpha, Bravo, and Charlie). Upon receiving the acceptance from the IRB, I began contacting the PT directors at Alpha, Bravo, and Charlie academies.

A third limitation to this study was the failure to reach the goal of three to four students per academy. Alpha and Bravo had at least five students from each academy; however, Charlie Academy only had two students that were able to participate. Further, only three students from Charlie Academy completed the demographic survey.

A final limitation to this study was that all participants, except Fiona, moved on to a leadership role within their respective PT program. This limitation was required

because removing this factor would have removed all students from the study. These students enjoyed their time in the program to the point that each of them decided to stay with it as a student leader. Although it would have been fascinating to hear of students who had recognized that their time in the program was over and no longer wanted to play a role in their respective program, this opportunity was never afforded to me, and is therefore absent from the study.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The phenomenon studied here is the experiences of undergraduate PTs at federal service academies. In consideration of the study findings, limitations, and the delimitations placed on this study, there are multiple recommendations and directions for future research. I found that, without exception, students choosing to become a PT in these environments do so as an act of selfless service and willingness to help others in need of academic support. Future researchers would be wise to include the Air Force and Merchant Marine Academies, as well as ROTC programs, in an effort to find whether this is similar amongst the remaining service academies or civilian schools with officer programs.

The act of devoting ones' time to helping others was considered by me as a selfless personal choice. As students described, there had been known benefits from becoming a PT, and while participants recognized that the benefits were not the sole reason as to why each student chose to become a PT, these benefits did help in personal gain. The personal motivation that each student described stemmed from an intrinsic desire to help others. Future researchers would benefit from specifically focusing on what motivates students to become PTs in higher education within the federal service

academy setting, at institutions with ROTC programs, as well as at civilian colleges and universities.

Future researchers should also consider voluntary service at federal service academies. In these environments, students are required to perform branch specific training, remain physically fit, and achieve academic success with the goal of graduating and serving their country. Students enrolled in these schools have limited time to themselves. The choice to use that extra time performing voluntary work is fascinating, and a qualitative study of these students and perhaps those programs is highly recommended.

PT programs typically find their students through a quantitative approach in that students who earn high academic marks on tests or in classes are asked to interview for a PT position. Some civilian schools then perform interviews where they rank potential PTs in a variety of categories. Some schools require recommendations from faculty members as to who is a good candidate to be a PT or require tutees and faculty members to complete Likert scale feedback forms. Each of these steps could be manipulated to perform a quantitative study. Two of the three academies represented in this study have loose ties to that approach, but they have both used a unique approach that suits their needs.

Throughout my time with the three academies, I found some differences in how they operate their PT programs. Alpha Academy opted for the approach of quantifying the tutors; this included monitoring, utilizing signed contracts holding tutors to visiting with professors, surprise visits from the chain of command while tutoring, and ranking of tutors by tutees. In contrast, Bravo Academy seemed to have more of a student-led force

when dealing with their PT population, much like the military system of command. Charlie Academy seemed to adopt the approach that PD sessions were left to the professors within the academic pillar instead of also including PT program administrator led PD sessions. These styles would make for an interesting quantitative study in relation to selecting potential PTs, especially because these documents are already housed at each academy.

Another area of interest was the role of self-efficacy. A quantitative study could easily be created relying on Bandura's self-efficacy theory. While PTs are not professional tutors, each person within the study mentioned some facet of learning facilitation. Some were more confident at times than others, some were apprehensive at the beginning, yet all felt confident as their time ended. Each stated that they had done a good job and that they had positive experiences. The self-efficacy of PTs at service academies is a study that should be created in order to help PT directors determine whether or not their program is effective in helping tutees, as well as if they are developing their tutors. There are several tools to gauge self-efficacy, and while the number of participants needed to create a valid study is much greater in a quantitative study, I believe it could easily be done especially with the capabilities that the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) has.

Of particular note were gender differences. I chose to not focus on these differences based on gender due to statements that were extremely similar amongst all 15 participants. The role of gender in the act of tutoring, or how it affects the relationship between the tutor and tutee, was not specifically addressed. Further, how gender differences effect the tutoring session in a military environment was never discussed.

Future researchers would greatly benefit by conducting a study specifically designed with this in mind.

Finally, there is a great deal of peer tutoring research focused on the benefits of PT programs in civilian schools, both higher education and secondary education. The service academies, however, rely on student leaders to serve as oversight to their programs. Future investigators could aim to find high school PT leaders and attempt to find descriptions of their experiences in that role. Although this seems to fit best as a case study, it would be interesting to see the impression when viewed through the lens of a phenomenologist.

### **Summary**

PTs provide a service under the peer-assisted learning umbrella. Through this act, they receive the benefit of helping their peers by helping them with study material that they find challenging. Through this experience, PTs at federal service academies reported several unexpected benefits that currently help them and are believed to help them as they transition into the armed forces as an officer. Previous researchers have indicated that PTs may understand the difficulties within academic subjects that their peers have, as well as that PTs can discern as to why specific issues presented during the learning process arose (Arendale, 2015; Brown et al., 2014; Cantinotti et al., 2017; Clarence, 2016; Moust & Schmidt, 1994; Topping, 2001, 2005). Yet, the civilian PT population has often left the role of being a PT due to reports that it is not financially beneficial or that PTs could not see themselves teaching in the future, citing “poor compensation,” a “lack of professional legitimacy,” and “limited stability” (DeFeo & Caparas, 2014, p. 149). Within the service academy framework, PTs enjoyed their time

as a PT because they voluntarily opted to help those who needed it. Due to the service academy environment, which pushes students to lead, PTs found that they were able to develop skills that would, in turn, enhance their leadership abilities. The importance of developing into a good officer cannot be overstated as every PT in this study recognized the benefits they developed by being a PT. Essentially, each PT understood that the role of being a PT was over, yet long after these students graduate from their respective academies, they will continue to help those around them learn, and will enjoy doing so.

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**APPENDIX A: IRB LU CONDITIONAL APPROVAL**

August 15, 2018

Drew J. Van Dam, Jr.

IRB Approval 3398.081518: Describing the Experiences of Peer Tutors: A Phenomenological Study of Undergraduate Military Students at Federal Service Academies

Dear Drew J. Van Dam, Jr.,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,



**G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP**  
*Administrative Chair of Institutional Research*  
**The Graduate School**

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**APPENDIX B: USMA APPROVAL EMAIL**

Tue 9/18, 9:07 AM

Van Dam, Drew;

Eller, James (Doctor of Education);

IRB, IRB

Good Morning Drew,

This email is to inform you that your request to include the United States Coast Guard Academy (USCGA) as a study site has been approved. Thank you for submitting documentation of permission from the USCGA for our review and documentation.

Thank you for complying with the IRB's requirements for making changes to your approved study. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions.

We wish you well as you continue with your research.

Best,

**G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP**  
*Administrative Chair of Institutional Research*  
**The Graduate School**

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**APPENDIX C: IRB USCGA APPROVAL EMAIL**

Tue 9/18, 9:07 AM

Van Dam, Drew;

Eller, James (Doctor of Education);

IRB, IRB

Good Morning Drew,

This email is to inform you that your request to include the United States Coast Guard Academy (USCGA) as a study site has been approved. Thank you for submitting documentation of permission from the USCGA for our review and documentation.

Thank you for complying with the IRB's requirements for making changes to your approved study. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions.

We wish you well as you continue with your research.

Best,

**G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP**

*Administrative Chair of Institutional Research*

**The Graduate School**

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**APPENDIX D: IRB USNA APPROVAL**

Tue 10/2, 8:25 AM

Van Dam, Drew;

Eller, James (Doctor of Education);

IRB, IRB

Good Morning Drew,

This email is to inform you that your request to include the United States Naval Academy (USNA) as a study site has been approved. Thank you for submitting documentation of permission from the USNA for our review and documentation.

Thank you for complying with the IRB's requirements for making changes to your approved study. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions.

We wish you well as you continue with your research.

Best,

**G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP**

*Administrative Chair of Institutional Research*

**The Graduate School**

**LIBERTY**  
**UNIVERSITY**

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This questionnaire will be taken and collected online via Google forms. Specific demographic information will be used to attempt to achieve maximum variation in relation to gender and race/ethnicity. Personal prior service is requested as the researcher hypothesizes that those with prior service may tend to serve as a PT longer than those that have not served. Also, this is a statistic that each institution maintains and will also be used to ensure maximum variation by including those who have prior service.

## APPENDIX F: RECRUITMENT E-MAIL INVITATION TO POTENTIAL CO-RESEARCHERS

9 July 2018

USMA Cadet  
United States Military Academy at West Point  
727 Brewerton Road  
West Point, NY 10996

Dear former Military Peer Tutor,

As a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree. The purpose of my research is to describe the experiences of undergraduate students who served as peer tutors (PT) at federal service academies, and I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

If you are between the ages of 18 and 25, attend a federal service academy, and you served as a PT for a period equal to or greater than one academic semester, you will be asked to do the following tasks:

- Complete the demographic survey at [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1c2YTVMQtY10ytKEDG0uHmCRk9Af\\_P6YbPQ0w9p9T9VM/](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1c2YTVMQtY10ytKEDG0uHmCRk9Af_P6YbPQ0w9p9T9VM/). I will then contact you regarding your inclusion in the study which includes the following steps.
- Complete and submit a one-week journal related to your experiences leading up to the choice to become a PT, your time moving into the role of a PT, your time spent as a PT, and the experiences moving out of the role of a PT. The journal will be collected at the focus group interview.
- Participate in a one-hour interview with the researcher. The interview will take place in a mutually agreed upon location in a face-to-face setting, and will include refreshments and homemade snacks. The interview will be audio and/or video recorded.
- Permit access to your PT records including your initial application and documents completed during your PT experience as a source of data for the study.
- Participate in a focus group with the researcher and other study participants. The focus group will take place in a face-to-face format the day after the one-on-one interview with the researcher, and will be conducted with the other participants at the same research site. The focus group will include refreshments as well as homemade snacks, and will also be audio recorded.

- Participate in the member-checking process to review the findings and conclusions reached by the researcher and to provide feedback on the accuracy of the information you provided.

It will take approximately two hours for you to complete the procedures listed. Your participation will be completely confidential as no personal identifying information will be collected.

A consent document will be provided to you at the time of the interview. The consent document contains additional information about my research, please sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the interview.

If you choose to participate, you will receive homemade snacks and refreshments. If you have any questions before signing the form, please contact me at [dvandam@liberty.edu](mailto:dvandam@liberty.edu) or (845) 522-9646.

Sincerely,  
Drew Van Dam  
Doctoral Candidate

## **APPENDIX G: USMA INFORMED CONSENT FORM CONSENT FORM**

The Experiences of a Peer Tutor (PT) at a Service Academy  
Drew J. Van Dam, Jr., Principal Investigator  
Liberty University  
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study regarding the experiences of a peer tutor (PT) at a service academy. You were selected as a possible participant because you served as a PT at the research site for a period equal to, or greater than, one academic semester. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Drew J. Van Dam, Jr., a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to describe the experiences of undergraduate students who serve as PTs at federal service academies in the East and Midwest United States.

**Procedures:** If you agree to be in this study, you are requested to do the following tasks:

1. Complete and submit a one-week journal related to your experiences leading up to the choice to become a PT, your time moving into the role of a PT, your time spent as a PT, and the experiences moving out of the role of a PT. The journal will be collected at the focus group interview.
2. Participate in a one-hour interview with the researcher. The interview will take place in a mutually agreed upon location in a face-to-face setting. The interview will be audio and/or video recorded.
3. Permit access to your PT records including your initial application and documents completed during your PT experience as a source of data for the study.
4. Participate in a focus group with the researcher and other study participants. The focus group will take place in a face-to-face format the day after the one-on-one interview with the researcher, and will be conducted with the other participants at the same research site. The focus group will be audio recorded.
5. Participate in the member-checking process to review the findings and conclusions reached by the researcher and to provide feedback on the accuracy of the information you provided.

### **Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:**

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

**Benefits:** Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. Benefits to society include:

- Helping describe benefits of being a PT at a service academy
- Providing a description of student experiences as PTs
- Participating in a qualitative research study

Additionally, findings from this study may be published and potentially prove beneficial to higher education administrators in military settings, potential military college students and their parents, and prospective employers of military college graduates.

**Compensation:**

By participating in this study, you will receive refreshments and homemade snacks.

**Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records, recordings, and associated transcripts will be stored securely in password-protected data files. Written and hard copy records will be kept in a secure file cabinet until such time that they are converted to electronic form and stored on a password-protected computer. All electronic files will be backed up using an online backup service. Access to data will be limited to the researcher and will not be used for purposes outside of this study without additional consent of research participants. Furthermore, participants will be assigned a pseudonym. I will conduct the interviews in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation. Assigned pseudonyms will be used in all written or electronic records and reports to protect participant identity. All pseudonyms will be kept on a list stored separately from the data in a locked drawer. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings. However, because focus groups require the involvement of other participants, I cannot assure participants that other members of the focus group will not share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

**Conflicts of Interest Disclosure:**

The researcher serves as an instructor at the United States Military Academy at West Point. To limit potential conflicts, the researcher will be on long-term training and will not be instructing during the research collection period. Further, no students will have been or will be in the same classroom as the researcher prior to or after this study has been conducted. This disclosure is made so that you can decide if this relationship will

affect your willingness to participate in this study. No action will be taken against an individual based on his or her decision to participate in this study.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University, United States Military Academy, United States Coast Guard Academy, United States Merchant Marine Academy, United States Naval Academy, or the principle investigator of this study. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time without affecting those relationships.

**How to Withdraw from Study:**

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please do so by emailing the principal investigator, Drew Van Dam at [dvandam@liberty.edu](mailto:dvandam@liberty.edu) or [drew.vandam@usma.edu](mailto:drew.vandam@usma.edu) or by calling 845-522-9646. Should you decide to withdraw from the study, any information or materials you provided will be excluded from data collection, analysis, and study findings. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

**Contacts and Questions:**

The researcher conducting this study is Drew Van Dam. You may ask any questions you have now about this study via e-mail to [dvandam@liberty.edu](mailto:dvandam@liberty.edu) or [drew.vandam@usma.edu](mailto:drew.vandam@usma.edu) or by calling (845) 522-9646. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact the researcher at the same e-mail address or telephone number. This study is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. James Eller, [jeller2@liberty.edu](mailto:jeller2@liberty.edu), (440) 319-1794.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

***Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information to keep for your records.***

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL  
INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS  
DOCUMENT.)

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX H: USNA INFORMED CONSENT FORM**  
**CONSENT FORM**

The Experiences of a Peer Tutor (PT) at a Service Academy  
Drew J. Van Dam, Jr., Principal Investigator  
Liberty University  
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study regarding the experiences of a peer tutor (PT) at a service academy. You were selected as a possible participant because you served as a PT at the research site for a period equal to, or greater than, one academic semester. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Drew J. Van Dam, Jr., a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

**Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to describe the experiences of undergraduate students who serve as PTs at federal service academies in the East and Midwest United States. All data collected will be done through an interview and will be analyzed using Moustakas' (1994) Phenomenological Data Reduction process.

**Procedures:** If you agree to be in this study, you are requested to do the following tasks:

1. Complete and submit a one-week journal related to your experiences leading up to the choice to become a PT, your time moving into the role of a PT, your time spent as a PT, and the experiences moving out of the role of a PT. The journal will be collected at the focus group interview.
2. Participate in a one-hour interview with the researcher. The interview will take place in a mutually agreed upon location in a face-to-face setting. The interview will be audio and/or video recorded.
3. Permit access to your PT records including your initial application and documents completed during your PT experience as a source of data for the study.
4. Participate in a focus group with the researcher and other study participants. The focus group will take place in a face-to-face format the day after the one-on-one interview with the researcher, and will be conducted with the other participants at the same research site. The focus group will be audio recorded.
5. Participate in the member-checking process to review the findings and conclusions reached by the researcher and to provide feedback on the accuracy of the information you provided.

**Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:**

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

**Benefits:** Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. Benefits to society include:

- Helping describe benefits of being a PT at a service academy
- Providing a description of student experiences as PTs
- Participating in a qualitative research study

Additionally, findings from this study may be published and potentially prove beneficial to higher education administrators in military settings, potential military college students and their parents, and prospective employers of military college graduates.

**Compensation:**

By participating in this study, you will receive refreshments and homemade snacks.

**Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records, recordings, and associated transcripts will be stored securely in password-protected data files. Written and hard copy records will be kept in a secure file cabinet until such time that they are converted to electronic form and stored on a password-protected computer. All electronic files will be backed up using an online backup service. Access to data will be limited to the researcher and will not be used for purposes outside of this study without additional consent of research participants. Furthermore, participants will be assigned a pseudonym. I will conduct the interviews in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation. Assigned pseudonyms will be used in all written or electronic records and reports to protect participant identity. All pseudonyms will be kept on a list stored separately from the data in a locked drawer. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings. However, because focus groups require the involvement of other participants, I cannot assure participants that other members of the focus group will not share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

**Conflicts of Interest Disclosure:**

The researcher serves as an instructor at the United States Military Academy at West Point. To limit potential conflicts, the researcher will be on long-term training and will not be instructing during the research collection period. Further, no students will have been or will be in the same classroom as the researcher prior to or after this study has been conducted. This disclosure is made so that you can decide if this relationship will

affect your willingness to participate in this study. No action will be taken against an individual based on his or her decision to participate in this study.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University, United States Military Academy, United States Coast Guard Academy, United States Merchant Marine Academy, United States Naval Academy, or the principle investigator of this study. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time without affecting those relationships.

**How to Withdraw from Study:**

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please do so by emailing the principal investigator, Drew Van Dam at [dvandam@liberty.edu](mailto:dvandam@liberty.edu) or [drew.vandam@usma.edu](mailto:drew.vandam@usma.edu) or by calling 845-522-9646. Should you decide to withdraw from the study, any information or materials you provided will be excluded from data collection, analysis, and study findings. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

**Contacts and Questions:**

The researcher conducting this study is Drew Van Dam. You may ask any questions you have now about this study via e-mail to [dvandam@liberty.edu](mailto:dvandam@liberty.edu) or [drew.vandam@usma.edu](mailto:drew.vandam@usma.edu) or by calling (845) 522-9646. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact the researcher at the same e-mail address or telephone number. This study is being conducted with the assistance of Mr. Seth Endicott, USNA Advanced Learning Specialist and MGSP Coordinator, [endicott@usna.edu](mailto:endicott@usna.edu), (410) 293-3956. This study is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. James Eller, [jeller2@liberty.edu](mailto:jeller2@liberty.edu), (440) 319-1794.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu). If you have any questions of concerns regarding this study as it relates to you as a USNA student and your rights regarding research related injuries, you may contact the Institutional Review Board via email at [hrppoffice@usna.edu](mailto:hrppoffice@usna.edu).

***Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information to keep for your records.***

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX I: USCGA INFORMED CONSENT FORM CONSENT FORM**

The Experiences of a Peer Tutor (PT) at a Service Academy  
Drew J. Van Dam, Jr., Principal Investigator  
Liberty University  
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study regarding the experiences of a peer tutor (PT) at a service academy. You were selected as a possible participant because you served as a PT at the research site for a period equal to, or greater than, one academic semester. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Drew J. Van Dam, Jr., a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to describe the experiences of undergraduate students who serve as PTs at federal service academies in the East and Midwest United States.

**Procedures:** If you agree to be in this study, you are requested to do the following tasks:

1. Complete and submit a one-week journal related to your experiences leading up to the choice to become a PT, your time moving into the role of a PT, your time spent as a PT, and the experiences moving out of the role of a PT. The journal will be collected at the focus group interview.
2. Participate in a one-hour interview with the researcher. The interview will take place in a mutually agreed upon location in a face-to-face setting. The interview will be audio and/or video recorded.
3. Permit access to your PT records including your initial application and documents completed during your PT experience as a source of data for the study.
4. Participate in a focus group with the researcher and other study participants. The focus group will take place in a face-to-face format the day after the one-on-one interview with the researcher, and will be conducted with the other participants at the same research site. The focus group will be audio recorded.
5. Participate in the member-checking process to review the findings and conclusions reached by the researcher and to provide feedback on the accuracy of the information you provided.

### **Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:**

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

**Benefits:** Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. Benefits to society include:

- Helping describe benefits of being a PT at a service academy
- Providing a description of student experiences as PTs
- Participating in a qualitative research study

Additionally, findings from this study may be published and potentially prove beneficial to higher education administrators in military settings, potential military college students and their parents, and prospective employers of military college graduates.

**Compensation:**

By participating in this study, you will receive refreshments and homemade snacks.

**Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records, recordings, and associated transcripts will be stored securely in password-protected data files. Written and hard copy records will be kept in a secure file cabinet until such time that they are converted to electronic form and stored on a password-protected computer. All electronic files will be backed up using an online backup service. Access to data will be limited to the researcher and will not be used for purposes outside of this study without additional consent of research participants. Furthermore, participants will be assigned a pseudonym. I will conduct the interviews in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation. Assigned pseudonyms will be used in all written or electronic records and reports to protect participant identity. All pseudonyms will be kept on a list stored separately from the data in a locked drawer. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings. However, because focus groups require the involvement of other participants, I cannot assure participants that other members of the focus group will not share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

**Conflicts of Interest Disclosure:**

The researcher serves as an instructor at the United States Military Academy at West Point. To limit potential conflicts, the researcher will be on long-term training and will not be instructing during the research collection period. Further, no students will have been or will be in the same classroom as the researcher prior to or after this study has been conducted. This disclosure is made so that you can decide if this relationship will affect your willingness to participate in this study. No action will be taken against an individual based on his or her decision to participate in this study.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University, United States Military Academy, United States Coast Guard Academy, United States Merchant Marine Academy, United States Naval Academy, or the principle investigator of this study. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time without affecting those relationships.

### **How to Withdraw from Study:**

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please do so by emailing the principal investigator, Drew Van Dam at [dvandam@liberty.edu](mailto:dvandam@liberty.edu) or [drew.vandam@usma.edu](mailto:drew.vandam@usma.edu) or by calling 845-522-9646. Should you decide to withdraw from the study, any information or materials you provided will be excluded from data collection, analysis, and study findings. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

### **Contacts and Questions:**

The researcher conducting this study is Drew Van Dam. **You are encouraged** to contact the researcher regarding any questions you have now about this study via e-mail to [dvandam@liberty.edu](mailto:dvandam@liberty.edu) or [drew.vandam@usma.edu](mailto:drew.vandam@usma.edu) or by calling (845) 522-9646. If you have questions regarding your involvement as a Coast Guard Cadet please contact Dr. Leonard Giambra, the Chair of the Institutional Review Board at the US Coast Guard Academy via email at [Leonard.M.Giambra@uscg.mil](mailto:Leonard.M.Giambra@uscg.mil) or at (860) 701-6667. This study is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. James Eller, [jeller2@liberty.edu](mailto:jeller2@liberty.edu), (440) 319-1794.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher or those listed above, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

***Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information to keep for your records.***

### **Statement of Consent:**

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL  
INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS  
DOCUMENT.)

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX J: REFLEXIVE JOURNAL SAMPLES

August 23, 2018

Today was the first day where I conducted formal interviews. While I work at this academy, I still felt a sense of uneasiness as well as pride as I walked to the interview at the library. Pride because I work here and I know the purpose behind why we do what we do hear. Uneasy because there's a great deal of pressure to not only complete my dissertation and work towards my doctorate, but also to create a study that is viable which begins with the first interview.

Interviewing Wesley was great. He was outstanding in providing information and flexible with my introductory interviewing style. While I made sure I had my recording devices as well as my consent forms ready to go, I had found a secure, confidential meeting place and we were both relaxed and ready, what I had failed to do was to bring along the printed out questions. I was fortunate enough to be able to print them out at the library and continue on, not my finest moment.

Wesley seemed to really understand his purpose at the academy and seems like a person anyone could be friends with. He came across direct and did not mince words when discussing why he was so successful here as compared to some of his peers at the academy. He enjoyed his time as a peer tutor and was eager to discuss why. He strikes me as an All-American type of person, that academics came easy for him and that he simply wants to help others.

October 21, 2018

Today is the first interview at this academy. I'm very nervous, while I have all the maps and documents and recording devices and refreshments/snacks ready to go, I'm in a place I've never been before. I'm confident that I'll conduct the interview without any problems, I, for whatever reason am nervous. I hope this will subside after the first interview, will update a little later as my interviews are spread out over the course of this afternoon.

I'm finished with my interviews today! The first thought that went through my mind was I can't believe I've done this. Five interviews in one day...and these were much more fruitful than those at the other academy. I feel that this program is more robust and focused than the first academy I went to for interviews. These students were thoughtful, descriptive, and careful. They did not seem to rush through their thoughts, rather, they took their time.

Perhaps my favorite interview was the third interview where I had to stop and remind the student that they could opt out at any time. For this student it wasn't a matter of getting her to feel comfortable, it was a matter of her understanding that she didn't have to go through with this. At that point, she relaxed and provided information to the nth degree. Her presence was not as a leader, but as more of a civilian who happened to

be at a service academy, kind of like myself. I thought we made a great team as opposed to the other interviews where I was an outsider looking for information.

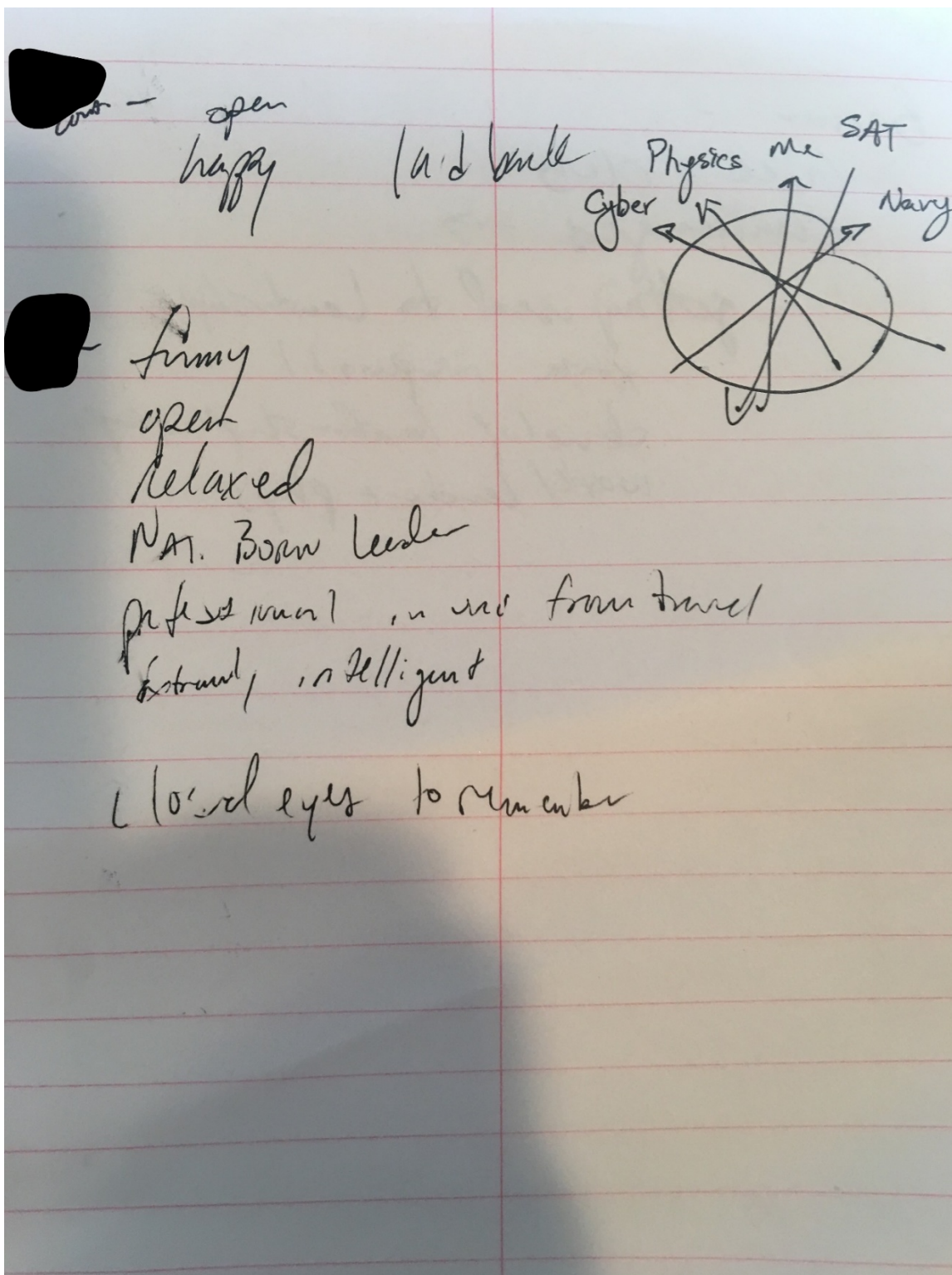
November 14, 2018

Traveling up to Charlie is not as easy as I thought it would be. I spent three hours in the car trying to get here and realize that this is similar to going to the Alpha Academy. It may have been wise to attempt to get a hotel, however, I am only able to interview one student so I really hope this isn't all for nothing.

I keep reflecting back on data saturation...I believe I have it as every person in this study reported that they didn't expect to get anything out of being a PT, yet, they all seemed to get something out of helping others. After interviewing Fiona, I really hope that Holly can shed some light on what Fiona expressed or that re-confirm the themes that are emerging. I'll return to this after my interview today.

I am extremely happy I came up to meet Holly. Her descriptions are exactly the same as those that attend Alpha and Bravo academies. She confirmed the themes that had emerged from all others and never once mentioned any issues with plagiarism or issues with helping others as a PT. I did not expect her to list as many voluntary activities prior to attending Charlie nor that she would say that she tutored more than two classes. She, by far, is the most aggressive in her desire to help her peers academically as no other PT tutored more than two classes. What did catch me off-guard was the lack of oversight that Holly described her PT program had, and that she wanted to create a more robust PT program which no other student described and goes to her leadership development in a program that she holds in high regard.

## APPENDIX K: INTERVIEW JOURNAL NOTES



## APPENDIX L: PARTICIPANT JOURNAL RESPONSE

The following journal entries were provided by Peter and included in the study.

These responses were kept by Peter until I requested them, approximately one week after his one on one interview had been conducted.

- What do you remember most about the process of becoming a PT?
  - I remember that I was asked in an email to help tutor for IT105 my freshman year. I had not been doing well in the class the initial two weeks, but a friend of mine had shown me a few things and the rest just “clicked.” I decided to go to the initial session because I thought I might be able to help other students experience the same thing. After the first session, I continued to receive emails asking the other tutors and I back, so I continued to return. Because of the amount of times and the consistency with which I followed the study sessions for the class and a few other classes, the current CIC for IT105 started speaking to me about becoming the CIC for the class the next year. I eventually accepted the position and continued on with the tutoring program.
- What strategies or techniques do you remember from your training that you favored while performing your duty as a PT?
  - As a tutor, I have always favored an approach that involves diving into the course material and seeing what roadblocks I run into with individuals that I tutor as we progress along. I usually employ a discussion/demonstration + back brief technique that I find is typically very effective. I also am very careful to tie concepts to each other and ensure the individual is able to back brief me on the concept interconnections. When I run the individual through the material, I act as a hands on “guide.” However, the moment that something comes along that I know the individual would have to work out themselves in the course or on a test, I give them the opportunity to talk through what they would do and then carefully prod them along in the right directions with pieces of advice or corrections.
- What challenges do you remember from your time as a PT?
  - I think that most tutors run into challenges when an individual, for whatever reason, seems to be unable/unwilling to grasp the material no matter how long the tutor is willing to stay and help. Initial frustration with the material often brings this about, and it is very difficult to get around. Sometimes a tutor’s preferred tutoring methods do not work on certain individuals because everyone learns differently. Other times it might be the relationship between the student and tutor itself and a fresh


face is needed. And yet other times individuals would show up to study sessions without a clue what was going on in an entire course when finals were coming up. I personally often found that finding time to volunteer as a tutor was challenging.

- What made you feel that you were confident in your abilities as a PT and why?
  - What initially made me feel confident in my abilities as a tutor was feedback that I received from my first tutoring session. There were slips of paper given out by the tutoring CIC to the students with sections to rate a tutor and add comments if they so choose. Most of the comments that I received about my session were extremely positive, so they helped me feel a large amount of success. After that point; however, when I tutored for several different courses, large groups, and individuals, I began employing back briefs as a primary means of gauging how effective my tutoring had been.
  
- Please describe the lasting impression you have from your time spent as a PT.
  - I would say that the lasting impression I have of being a peer tutor at the academy is a positive one. I do not think I would have continued to devote my time and energy to it if I did not find it worthwhile. I have learned several things about teaching, about myself, about learning, and about interpersonal skills through my time as a tutor. I am particularly proud of the all-volunteer nature of the program at the academy, and that we get such a large showing of tutors and students for organized study sessions. If given the opportunity to start again at the academy, I would not hesitate to become a tutor a second time.
  
- If another student were contemplating the idea of becoming a PT at your service academy, what would you say to them and why?
  - I would highly recommend to other students that they should try and become a peer tutor if they are contemplating the idea. The tutoring program always needs fresh faces to ensure that new ideas and students currently enrolled in certain classes are circulating. I would caution the individual that becoming a peer tutor requires time and commitment, regardless of how long the individual stays with the program, but I would also state that the experience is definitely a rewarding one. I would recommend taking the opportunity offered by the CEP to get CRLA certified, and I would recommend becoming a company tutor. I would also state that becoming a peer tutor at the academy does not always require a formalized setting, and that the mantra “cooperate to graduate” is an important element of almost every academic context.

**APPENDIX M: PARTICIPANT JOURNAL RESPONSE**

Significant Statement	Code
"the joy of helping others learn and overcome obstacles"	Selfless Service
"The mantra 'collaborate to graduate' is an important element"	Teamwork
" I gained confidence in my abilities after I realized that other students were requesting me" - Feedback	Confidence
"the confidence that you get from repeated exposure to speaking in front of groups of people and to individuals from a position where you're supposed to be the authority on the subject"	Interpersonal Skills
"What I was teaching was my bread and butter"	Knowledge Base
"Not giving enough time to preparation"	Being prepared
"Aha moment" & " really just kind of knowing that, you did something that helped someone else learn. That was a huge positive for me"	Rewarding
"Every second you spend helping another person improve is another second spent solidifying your own knowledge and honing your skills as a leader"	Leadership Focus
"my biggest challenges was finding the patience necessary to teach"	Personal Development
Strategies that help you help others	Professional Development
PT Director Support	Resources
"There is a lot more that goes into teaching than people realize"	Challenges

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