

Co-Designing with Veteran Students

Columbus, OH. USA

Impetus for the Study

The purpose of this research was to utilize co-design thinking to investigate and understand the experiences of veteran students entering into college at The Ohio State University (OSU) after military service, and to assist the university in improving those transition experiences. The research significance is that an increasing number of post-9/11 era veterans are utilizing the educational benefits earned through their service. Many of these service members have spent years inside a military culture, which has inadequately prepared them for a transition to the civilian and academic environments.

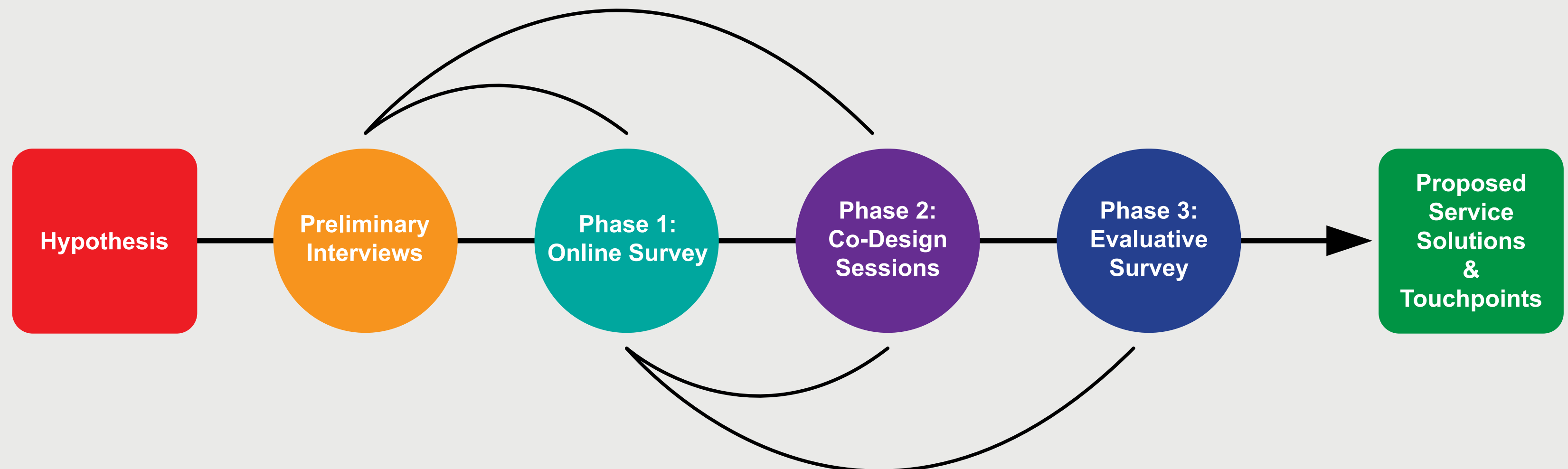
It has been found that veteran students often self-segregate due to age differences, and their experiences gained through military service. Additionally, while OSU's Office of Military and Veteran Services (OMVS) has been doing incredible things to help veteran students transition away from the military and into OSU, many of their practices tend to promote self-segregation rather than integration.

Although it is not true across the entire population of veteran students, the research conducted showed that many sought opportunities for improved social integration programs. Opportunities lie in finding a balance between the culture that veteran students share, and integration into the civilian culture they are now part of. Additionally, veteran students could benefit from additional support in regards to academics and logistics when navigating through OSU.

The study conducted was comprised of preliminary interviews with a director of the OMVS, an initial survey, four co-design sessions with volunteer veteran students, and an evaluative survey to gain deeper insight into the possible new service concepts generated during the co-design sessions. Based on the research results, proposed new services and improvements to existing ones were presented to OSU's OMVS.

Research Plan

Based on the hypothesis of veteran student self-segregation at OSU, an iterative research plan was developed to dive deeper into their experiences and to better understand what veteran students thought and felt about transitioning into and through the collegiate environment. This plan consisted of four stages, each designed to build on the accumulated information gained by the stages that preceded it. The four stages of the methodology are described below.



Phase 0: Preliminary Interviews

Mike Forrest, a director of OSU's Office of Military and Veteran Services (OMVS), was interviewed to develop a knowledge base of the offerings and operations of the OMVS. Additionally, any insights that he had in regards to the experiences of veteran students at OSU, and trends that he could identify in regard to areas of need for veteran students, were gathered. This information, along with insights from the literature review, was then used in order to inform the first phase of participant research.

Phase 1: Online Survey

Phase 1 consisted of an online survey that was developed to gain a broad understanding of the thoughts of veteran students at OSU, including, for example, if and how they interacted with other students that were not veterans themselves, whether they belonged to any organizations or clubs, what did they think about the OMVS, and did they utilize any of the additional services that the OMVS offered. This survey was distributed via email to all undergraduate veteran students at OSU through the OMVS.

Phase 2: Co-Design Sessions

Phase 2 consisted of co-design sessions where participants first reflected on how they perceived themselves in relation to no longer being in the military, and then created a timeline with a prepared toolkit of their experience at OSU. After sharing their individual timelines, the participants collectively developed an "ideal" timeline for veteran students, transitioning into and through college at OSU, and then shared what they had developed. The aggregate data from the co-design groups was then analyzed for insights and opportunities that could be further developed.

Phase 3: Evaluative Survey

The final phase of the research plan consisted of an online survey that was sent to OSU's veteran student population and asked them to evaluate the desirability and validity of the prototype solutions. Based on the feedback generated through this phase, the prototype solutions were refined and developed into recommendations to be considered by the OMVS for implementation. This survey was distributed via email to all undergraduate veteran students at OSU through the OMVS just as the Phase 1 Survey was.

Phase 2 Co-Design Sessions



A co-design participant reflects on how they consider themselves today: a veteran, a student, a veteran student, or a student veteran? and who they want to be: a veteran, a civilian, a veteran civilian, or a civilian veteran?



A participant in the process of creating an experience map of their current college transition and integration experience.



Co-design participants working to map out an "ideal" experience for veteran students transitioning into and through the collegiate environment at OSU.



Participants explain the "ideal" experience map for future veteran students that they co-designed.

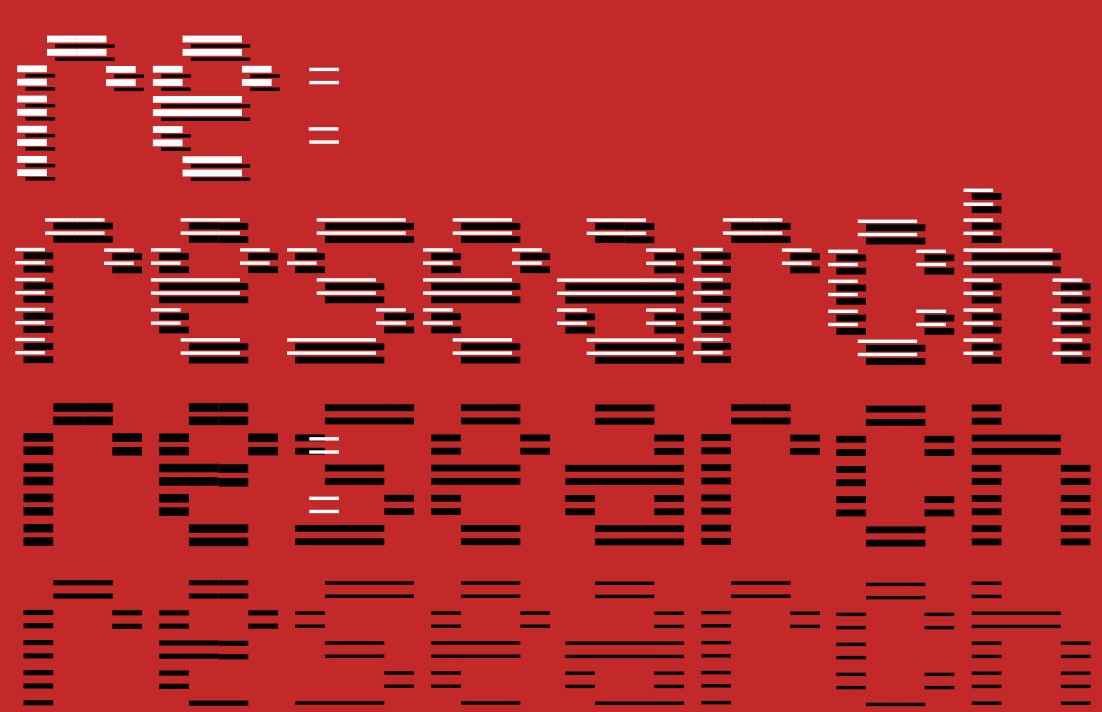
Proposed Service Solutions & Touchpoints

One of the recommendations for new service touchpoints is the use of co-design sessions, for development and implementation by OSU's OMVS as a tool to help new veteran students in academic exploration. The tool would help veterans to exercise introspection in their transition into the collegiate environment and assist them in creating a "roadmap" toward the completion of their degree.

A few of the additional touchpoints are as follows:

- Classes (for credit) to help with academic skills
- Mentoring (through a TA position) new veteran students
- Classes for "life skills," i.e., finance and money management, etc.
- Veteran study groups
- Upper level veteran mentor "buddies" for new veteran students
- Being paired with an upperclassman in degree field (veteran or civilian)
- Integrative social events organized for veteran & civilian students
- OMVS organized events to become involved with groups or organizations outside of OSU
- An "exit program" to assist with transitioning out of college
- More daytime social events

*Josh Morrow served 11 years in the U.S. Army Reserves with multiple overseas deployments, earned his BSD in Industrial Design from OSU in 2008, and is now completing his MFA in Design Research and Development.



Author

Joshua B. Morrow*

Organization

Department of Design
The Ohio State University

Thesis Committee

Elizabeth B.-N. Sanders
Peter Kwok Chan
Michael Forrest