Chapter 9
Military–to–Civilian Transition Through Credentials:
Certification Promotion by Military COOL Program

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ABSTRACT

This chapter reviews the United States COOL programs' promotion of certification during military employment to support transition to civilian employment and the CareerOneStop platform which profiles certifications. Some certifications on CareerOneStop have a designation from COOL indicating relevance to military workers. The chapter presents analyses showing that certain types of certifications are more likely to have a military designation than others. In brief, the designation is more likely for accredited and industry-recognized certifications and those tied to occupations with lower annual median wages and predictions of decrease and increase in employment versus a more stable trajectory. Some occupations also significantly differ in the likelihood of a military designation for certifications tied to it. The authors close with a discussion of recommendations including additional questions for consideration.

INTRODUCTION

The United States military and other institutions, government and private, have long been concerned about the transition from military service to civilian employment. The U.S Department of Labor (2021) states that around 200,000 individuals leave the military service each year. This number is consistent with the Department of Veterans Affairs (2018) and less than Dupree's (2000) estimate of the number as 250,000. One example of the U.S. government's ongoing efforts to help these individuals is the Transition Assistance Program (TAP), operated through the Veteran's Employment and Training Service within

the U.S. Department of Labor in cooperation with the Departments of Defense, Education, Homeland Security and Veterans Affairs, Small Business Administration, and Office of Personnel Management. TAPS provides resources to those transitioning and their spouses, primarily at the stage where they have already left the military. In addition to directly providing services, the government has and does work with private partners, for example, CareerOneStop and CareerBuilder, to help individuals identify military to civilian career options. Some government programs, such as "Credentialing Opportunities Online" (COOL) programs run by military branches, focus on the pre-transition period. In addition to helping those planning to transition out of the military, the COOL sites note that credentialing through a certification also may be useful for those individuals that are active duty seeking advancement or promotion or already separated from the military, and some of the COOL program features are available to these individuals as well as those who are planning a transition.

This chapter focuses on implications of using military designated certifications as part of the pre-transition phase of a career pathway involving change from military to civilian employment. The authors' research context is COOL's designation of some certifications as relevant to crosswalks from a military occupation to a civilian one. Planning ahead and a sense of self-determination of a career pathway can be key to the success of military to civilian transition (Keeling et al., 2019). By pursuing a civilian occupational certification while still in the military, an individual can proactively prepare for the transition out of military employment.

One of the greatest challenges in transitioning to civilian life that veterans report is finding a civilian job (Kintzle & Castro, 2018). Yet limited research exists to understand the essence and effectiveness of the myriad efforts to support military to civilian employment transitions (Batka & Hall, 2016). The George W. Bush Presidential Center report published in 2021, *Stand-To 2021: Advancing Veteran Employment, Education, & Health and Well-being*, finds that the number of veterans has declined but their diversity has grown and they have varying employment-related needs. A 2019 Pew Research Center survey report indicates that only 51% of post-9/11 veterans agreed that the military had prepared them for transition to civilian life (Parker et al., 2019). In another study, veterans indicated difficulty in evaluating which programs were most relevant and effective for their employment transition (Van Slyke & Armstrong, 2020). In his doctoral dissertation, Ward (2019) found that military to civilian transition challenges include emotional trauma and physical distress that affect pursuit of civilian employment and employment outcomes. Organizational and societal barriers, as well as personal challenges, can affect transitions to civilian employment (Keeling et al., 2018). Veterans report that civilian employers can lack understanding of military job experience and have weak onboarding for those transitioning to the civilian workforce (Dexter, 2020). There may be demographic differences in challenges faced in finding and keeping civilian employment. For example, Greer (2017) reports that women veterans have a higher unemployment rate than males and blames this at least partially on government programs supporting transition that are better suited to men.

There is a need for more research on efforts to support career pathways for veterans (George W. Bush Institute, 2021). This chapter's empirical analysis of promotion of non-academic certifications for transition to civilian employment fills a gap. The findings reported in this chapter build understanding of the relative promise of the occupational careers that the United States military branches implicitly endorse for transitioning military workers through their selection of civilian certifications to feature on their COOL sites and the resulting designation of military relevance on CareerOneStop. The authors reveal biases in the use of military designations using the CareerOneFinder profiles for certifications. This leads to

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