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RETENTION OF FIRST-TIME FRESHMAN CADETS AT A SENIOR MILITARY
COLLEGE

by

KEITH P. ANTONIA

(Under the Direction of

Robert O. Michael)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to explore whether there were aspects of the culture of the Corps of Cadets at the University of North Georgia that influenced the departure of first-time freshman cadets prior to entering their second year. The topic of college student retention has been extensively researched and documented, and strategies for college student success abound; however, little research has been done on first-time freshman cadet retention at senior military colleges. Recruiting cadets has become increasingly difficult resulting from a combination of a waning United States fertility rate, a declining eligibility to serve in the military among Americans age 17 to 24, and a persistently low propensity to serve in the military among men and women in this age group. Because of recruiting difficulties, retaining cadets has become increasingly important. To explore whether there were aspects of the culture that influenced first-time freshman cadet departure, an examination of the interaction among four areas of inquiry was used: (a) the generation of students from which UNG was recruiting and of which the Corps of Cadets was composed (Generation Z), (b) organizational socialization theory, (c) the culture of the Corps of Cadets, and (d) theories of leadership. The problem was explored within the conceptual framework of organizational socialization within the culture of the Corps of Cadets

and through the lens of leadership theories. The research method used was qualitative ethnography employing narrative interviews, observations, and document collection. The findings confirmed that while transformational leadership was interspersed among the cadet leadership, there were some highly transactional and destructive aspects of the culture of leadership within the Corps of Cadets that influenced first-time freshman cadet departure.

INDEX WORDS: first-time cadet retention, senior military college retention, military college retention, military college socialization, Army leadership development, Army ROTC cadet retention, military college culture, leadership and culture, first-year cadet retention