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**"By August of 2016, Women Constituted 15.93% of Active Duty Personnel in the U.S. Armed Forces: Approximately 164,941 in Enlisted Ranks and 39,610 as Officers (Department of Defense 2016)"**

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## **Proposal: 2017 RCEU Program**

**Faculty Mentor:** Dr. Christina Steidl - *Participated in RCEU in 2013*  
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### **Project Summary:**

By August of 2016, women constituted 15.93% of active duty personnel in the U.S. Armed Forces: approximately 164,941 in enlisted ranks and 39,610 as officers (Department of Defense 2016). The roles in which women serve have also changed; while women continue to be represented predominantly in medical, administrative, supply, intelligence and communications specialties, the ban on women serving in ground combat forces will be completely phased out by 2016. Despite the increasing numbers of women serving and the changing roles in which they serve, nearly all social science research on women in the military has focused almost exclusively on two issues: sexual assault and experiences of post-traumatic stress. While obviously critical lines of inquiry, such a focus effectively reduces the complexities of their position to a matter of public health and severely limits our understanding of the broader experiences of these women. This project seeks to remedy such omissions by focusing on how women negotiate their gender performance within the masculine organizational culture of the U.S. military. Social science research has frequently examined gender, not as natural or biological, but as a social construction, a learned performance of femininity or masculinity imposed upon us by our culture and social environment (Butler 1990). The military constitutes a complicated context for women's gender performance in the sense that it maintains an organizational culture in which traditionally masculine traits are valued; professional success is associated with successful performance of a particular type of masculinity and women must continually negotiate the implicit conflict between their womanhood and the demands of their environment. This is not to suggest that women cannot be excellent soldiers, but instead that cultural notions of "soldierhood" and "womanhood" remain at odds.

To address the notion of "negotiating" gender performance in masculine spaces, Dr. Steidl has conducted thirty-five interviews with members of the U.S. armed forces: twenty-three women and twelve men. The interviews focused on contexts in which women (by virtue of their gender) do not fit the stereotypical participant profile, on the strategies that women participants use to navigate these contexts, and the effects that their participation has on their long-term career and life trajectories. The men's interviews addressed how men perceive women as successfully or unsuccessfully navigating their gender within the organizational context of the U.S. military, as well as how men themselves navigated potentially conflicting cultural messages about women's military service. During the RCEU experience, the student will be collaborating with Dr. Steidl on finishing transcription of the interviews, creating a qualitative coding schema, conducting qualitative analysis using QDAMinerLite software, and drafting a research article to be submitted for publication.

**Student Prerequisites:**

Applying students should have junior standing and should have completed at least 9 hours in sociology, including Soc 301 Research Methods and should have completed *either* Soc 306 Sociology of Gender or WGS 200 Introduction to Women's and Gender Studies. Applicants should have strong academic writing skills.

**Student Duties:**

The RCEU student will gain hands-on experience with multiple stages of the qualitative research process. The first stage will consist of transcribing the last twelve interviews. This involves developing skill in depicting respondents' verbal speed, tone and inflection in a textual form. Once these interviews are transcribed, the student will work closely with Dr. Steidl to construct a list of "a priori codes" derived from theoretical frameworks, research questions, and previous empirical findings. Using this initial code list, the student will search for patterns in the interview transcripts and "code" them using the qualitative software program QDAMinerLite. The student will meet regularly with Dr. Steidl to first review the coded transcripts, then to present written memos (a common strategy for qualitative analysis). These memos constitute an initial set of "research findings" that are then employed to draft research presentations and publications. Most of the RCEU will be spent in this analysis stage. Finally, the RCEU student will be working in conjunction with Dr. Steidl to draft a peer-reviewed journal article. During the writing process, the student will observe the multiple steps of converting research findings into an article for publication. If the student is available to continue this collaboration through the submission and publication process (i.e., beyond the RCEU period), they will be listed as an author on the resulting article.

**Mentor Supervision and Interaction:**

The RCEU student will be directly supervised by Dr. Steidl – providing many opportunities for one-on-one mentorship. At the beginning of the summer, Dr. Steidl will be meeting with the student multiple times each week to provide background and equipment training for the student. The student will learn to use the digital transcription equipment and will complete a number of learning-models for the software QDAMinerLite, which will be used for qualitative analysis of the completed interview transcripts. In addition, Dr. Steidl will provide a list of key articles for the student to read, including the key theoretical and empirical pieces that provide the framework for the study, and mentoring meetings will include discussion of these articles. For the most part, these mentoring meetings will take place in person at Dr. Steidl's office in Morton Hall although a few meetings may take place via Skype when Dr. Steidl is not in Huntsville; informal meetings will occur via email/telephone, probably on a daily basis. Most of the student's research activity should be completed in the sociology office in Morton Hall; some may be completed at the student's home or another location if preferred (e.g., review of literature). Beginning in the third week of the RCEU, both Dr. Steidl and the student should be starting to analyze interview transcripts. As the student's skill and comfort with both the analysis process and the software increases, we will meet less frequently (likely once a week for several hours) to compare coding reliability, discuss the themes that arise in memos, and provide ongoing feedback and evaluation of the RCEU experience. During the final month, the student will again meet more frequently with Dr. Steidl to collaboratively draft a research article from the analysis memos and to discuss the process of selecting a journal and formatting an article for submission.