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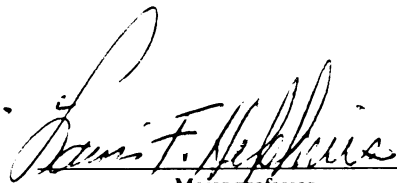
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A COMPARISON OF PERCEIVED INSTITUTIONAL  
IMAGE BETWEEN OLDER DAY AND  
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**A COMPARISON OF PERCEIVED INSTITUTIONAL IMAGE BETWEEN  
OLDER DAY AND OLDER EVENING STUDENTS**

**by**

**RUTH JESSICA GOULD KURLANDSKY**

**AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION**

**Submitted to  
Michigan State University  
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**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**Department of College and University Administration**

**1990**

## **ABSTRACT**

### **A COMPARISON OF PERCEIVED INSTITUTIONAL IMAGE BETWEEN OLDER DAY AND OLDER EVENING STUDENTS**

**By**

**Ruth Jessica Gould Kurlandsky**

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to determine if there are differences in the perception of the institutional image of Grand Rapids Junior College on the part of selected groups of day-attending and evening-attending students over the age of 25.

#### **Design and Methodology**

In the Fall 1989 semester, students in day and evening sections of the same courses were asked to complete a survey instrument including college image factors and demographic information (all anonymously). Responses were collected on Likert-type items describing components of a college image; students were asked to respond twice: once, to describe their "ideal" college; the second time, to describe their "real" current experience. A difference score was computed and used as a measure of satisfaction.

Findings

The day and evening student groups demonstrated a great deal of similarity with each other. Significant differences were found on four factors: concern/involvement of the faculty, placement service, general support services, and campus safety. On all these factors, evening students were less satisfied than day students. In addition, evening students were more likely to be employed than day students and reported higher family income.

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## CHAPTER I

### THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

#### Introduction

Marketing has become a concern common to many colleges and universities. The tangible aspects of it range from handing out keychains with the college name on it to understanding the notion of an institution-wide marketing approach with careful preparation of a marketing plan and appropriate research leading to market segmentation and institutional adjustment of objectives, programs and services.

The pressure for marketing seems to be driven by the decline in the number of college age students--the tail end of the famous post-World War II baby boom was 18 years old in 1982. The focus of this pressure is on recruitment, either to keep the number of applications for admission equivalent to the "boom" years or to actually increase admissions at institutions which were built in the 1960s, specifically to meet the needs of those populous years.

Grand Rapids Junior College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, is a public two-year college with a seventy-five year history



of excellence. It began at the suggestion of the University of Michigan, as a "feeder school" from the Western part of the state. It served as the first two years of a four-year liberal arts program. In the expansion of the sixties, it took on more students and an occupational component. Along the way came growth in the number of course offerings at night and on weekends. Just recently, the some divisions of the College have experienced a "crossover": the number of students attending what has been called Continuing Education classes now slightly exceeds the number of students who attend during the traditional day-time hours.

Generally, the needs of older students seemed to be different than those of the traditional eighteen year old college freshman, and older students were the ones who worked during the day and came to school during Continuing Education times, if at all. Now, however, there are increasing numbers of older students who come during traditional hours. As the number of teenagers decreases, the proportion of older students will increase.

What effect will this growth in "older student" population have on the marketing effort of the College? Do older students perceive the College differently? More specifically, this researcher is interested in whether older students who attend at night perceive the College differently than older students who attend during the day. The most obvious difference in the evening is the darkness--not a trivial factor when trying to find one's way around a multi-

building campus. Next is the fact that no departmental secretaries are on duty, nor is most other service personnel. Fred Harrington, in *The Future of Adult Education* (1977), summed it up succinctly when he described the barriers for adults who want to be in an on-campus credit program: the day system is rigidly designed for the young, full-time student--and adults who need flexibility must work around those rules; the evening college has a "grubby, hurried feeling" (p. 44) and is taught by day instructors who are tired and wish they were home or part-time instructors who aren't around outside of class time to provide any support.

The support service offices of the College, which might provide help and encouragement that evening college faculty may be unable to provide, are open only on a somewhat limited basis. The Bookstore, for example, while open from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. the entire semester, maintains evening hours until 8:00 p.m. only the first three weeks of the semester. The cafeteria remains open until 8:30 p.m. but the alternate snack bar area closes daily at 2:00 p.m. The Career Resource Center is open Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and maintains late hours until 8:00 p.m. on only two evenings a week. Counseling is available until 8:00 on the four evenings a week that classes are offered; Job Placement is only until 7:00 p.m. only on Mondays. Those who need support services on weekends have an even tougher time. While the current situation is more supportive than the earlier weekday only schedule, a student who leaves work at

5:30 for a 6:00 to 9:00 (or 10:00) o'clock class has no chance to make use of a support office on that trip. Additional trips, or special arrangements, must be made. On top of everything else, of course, parking tokens cost more for a three-hour unit in the evening than during the day.

Nevertheless, there is substantial enrollment in the evening and on weekends, and there is no sign of a decrease. There is always the possibility, however, that the evening enrollment need could be met by other colleges in the area. Perception of this type of trend on the part of the administration would certainly be considered a marketing problem.

#### Statement of the Problem

It is important to study the image of an institution because people respond to their perception of a college's image, and not necessarily to its reality. (Kotler, 1985, p. 37) Different groups in the institution's market may have different impressions of the quality or responsiveness or services offered by that institution.

The problem, in the setting at Grand Rapids Junior College and probably in other colleges with both day and night components, is that it is not known whether older night students perceive the College's image differently than do older day students. The following questions appear to be important in this type of research: Is there a difference in the perception of the College between older day

students and older evening students? What is the direction of this difference? Is the magnitude statistically significant?

Additionally, if there is a difference in perception, are there discernable differences between the groups? What are the specific differences in perception between the two groups? What factors might correlate with or cause the differences in perception?

### Purpose of the Study

Older students have entered the college and university system in great numbers, influenced by demographic, societal and economic factors. While much has been written about adult education and about evening programs (see Chapter II, below), there has been apparently little research which differentiates between groups of adults.

The purpose of this study is to compare perceptions of the institutional image of a college between two groups of older students--those who see the college in the light of traditional day programs and those who attend the evening programs.

### Significance of the Study

Such a study can be of use in orienting the institution's market plan in reference to these two target groups. In addition, a difference in perception between these two groups can guide the providing of services which



are perceived to be lacking in one setting or the other. For example, suppose that night students as a group are more likely to perceive a lack of services such as career counseling than day students are. The college could decide to open the Career Resource Center in the evening. But suppose the Center is already open in the evening? Then a "corrective" measure would be to engage in publicity about the Center's hours; another measure might be to "market" such services along with general evening course marketing.

#### Definition of Terms

older student: any currently enrolled student who has attained the age of twenty-five years. This group is also referred to as adult students.

day attending: older student, as above, who is enrolled in classes only weekdays between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.

evening attending: older student, as above, who is enrolled in classes that meet after 5:00 p.m. A student who is enrolled in evening classes and in a weekend course may be included. A student who is enrolled in evening classes but also attends during the day will not be included in this study.

#### Hypothesis

This study is concerned with the perception of institutional image on the part of adult students who attend

day classes and a separate group of adult students who attend evening classes. It is hypothesized that there is a difference in their overall perceptions of the college. The investigator believes that this difference will be most evident in three areas:

1. That day students perceive that the campus is less forbidding than do the night students.
2. That support services are perceived as less available by night students than by day students.
3. That those attending during the day will be less likely than the night students to be employed full-time.

Stated as null hypotheses to be tested:

There is no difference between day adult students and evening adult students on measures of satisfaction about the college experience.

Sub-hypothesis 1: There is no difference between day adult students and evening adult students on measures of campus safety or campus attractiveness.

Sub-hypothesis 2: There is no difference between day adult students and evening adult students on measures of satisfaction with support services.

Sub-hypothesis 3: There is no difference between day adult students and evening adult students in likelihood of employment.

### Limitations of the study

The study is limited by the concerns of survey research: the ability to measure what the researcher thinks is being measured; and the additional difficulties involved in tabulation and validation.

### Delimitations of the Study

This study only deals with perceptions of students at Grand Rapids Junior College. This college is larger and more comprehensive than many two year colleges, but does not have the residential component of most four year colleges. However, any college which has a substantial commuter oriented, evening class program, may find useful results. The results of this study could be used to stimulate thought at similar campus settings.

### Procedures Used in this Study

The population of this study will consist of the older adult students enrolled at Grand Rapids Junior College in the Fall semester of 1989. The research sample will consist of approximately 500-600 older students enrolled in the day and evening programs during the Fall of 1989. A questionnaire has been developed and will be pretested during the 1989 summer session. It follows other questionnaires used before in this type of study. (See Chapter III, below.) The questionnaire asks subjects to respond to Likert-type items describing their ideal college, and their real experience at

Grand Rapids Junior College, and asks for some demographic data. Therefore, two major areas will be examined: 1) Do differences in the perceptions of day and evening older students exist in the surveyed topics; and 2) How well are the perceived realities correlated with the desired qualities within each of these two groups? If there are differences between the groups, the demographic data will be examined to determine differences between the two groups, as people.

#### Organization of the Study

This study is divided into five chapters. Chapter I introduces the study and its purpose, the statement of the problem, a description of the population and the limitations of the project. Chapter II includes a review of the relevant marketing literature and an overview of the adult education literature. Chapter III describes the methodology used in developing the questionnaire, the method for obtaining the data and the procedures used in analyzing the data. Chapter IV presents the findings of the study. The conclusions to be drawn from the study and implications for further research are in Chapter V.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Marketing in Higher Education

Marketing as a business function has been utilized for a long time. As a function for non-profit organizations, it began to develop in the 1960s and early seventies--as illustrated by the appearance of articles in professional journals. The field began to "crystallize" in 1975 with the publication of Philip Kotler's book, *Marketing for Nonprofit Organizations*, now in its third edition as *Strategic Marketing for Nonprofit Organizations* (Kotler and Andreasen, 1987).

Douglas Leister (1975), in an article probably written before the publication of the 1975 Kotler work, outlined the concept of marketing in the *Journal of Higher Education*. He presented the notion of education as a product in a very competitive marketplace. Although the decline in the birthrate had to have happened eighteen years earlier, colleges seemed to be caught by surprise with the need to actively seek students in order to keep their recently

expanded space full. The growth of community colleges, while needed to absorb the baby boom, then had a lasting impact when the boom passed through the college years. Leister reports on a perceptual study of students at several regionally competing institutions in western Washington state. Identifying an institution's strengths and weaknesses relative to its competitors assists in market positioning.

James C. Blackburn (1979) traces the appearance of articles in the professional literature leading up to Kotler's 1975 book and points out that a major article urging, rather than merely describing, marketing and its potential uses in higher education, appeared in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. It was therefore read widely and its suggestions taken under consideration in different places simultaneously, a not uncommon occurrence in education. In addition, Blackburn notes that colleges and universities had already been using techniques adapted from business practices; giving such as examples as budgeting systems, management information systems, and planning charts. Perhaps the education community was ripe to adapt marketing in a widespread fashion, especially after the baby boom began to pass through the system.

Since 1975, a great deal of work has been done in marketing in the service sector of the economy, and in higher education, in particular. Kotler appears to remain the leader in the field and published *Strategic Marketing for Educational Institutions* in 1985 (Kotler and Fox, 1985).

During this time period, other people and institutions were also concerned with the use of marketing in higher education. The College Board held a Colloquium on College Admissions in 1976. Four papers were presented at the first meeting of this Colloquium since 1963. In the first presentation, Humphrey Doermann (1976) projects that the United States will experience a 15 year period of no growth or of actual shrinkage in higher education enrollment, due to the decline in the birth rate earlier, and now the decline in the size of the annual high school graduating class. New opportunities to broaden the applicant pool--such as the recruitment of older students and the increase in part-time students--will bring with them new problems in program design, public policy and public subsidy. The second presentation was by Philip Kotler (1976), who presented his audience with an explanation of marketing theory and ideas on applying that to college admissions. His presentation was an effort to counter the negative image that the use of marketing had among administrators and among the public. He was careful to point out the differences between marketing and advertising. Kotler states "...the aim of marketing is to make selling unnecessary. The better the marketing job, the less the need for hard selling." He outlines seven activities basic to the college marketing process. The first step, positioning the institution in the marketplace, involves assessing the public's perceived image of that institution. One of the last steps, college improvement

planning, involves measuring student satisfaction with the quality of the academic and other facilities on campus. In the third presentation, Howard Geltzer and Al Ries explained the concept of positioning. As the birthrate declined, for example, the makers of baby shampoo repositioned their product as gentle enough for every day. Thus, baby--now gentle--shampoo could be sold to adults. They suggest that colleges need to do the same thing: find a "hole", an unmet need in the marketplace, and position themselves to fill that hole, to be perceived as the providers of a particular kind of educational service. The final presentation, by Daniel Sullivan and Larry Litten, demonstrates the use of research as a key to more successful marketing for admissions. Based on their study at Carleton College, they discuss the use of interviews with prospective students, including those who inquire but do not apply, those who apply but do not enroll and those who do enroll. Other factors, such as cost, location, financial aid, and reputation are considered; overall, this study is considered a model for admissions research by the organizer of the conference. Leonard Berry

and Bruce Allen (1977) describe marketing as a concept of exchange relationships with all of an institutions various publics. Both of the authors are faculty members of academic departments of marketing. They explain that marketing is more than the need to attract more students, but the need to improve all of its exchange relationships. They suggest that this is done by adapting the organizational structure for



better functioning of the marketing function, including assessing the current relationships, assigning priorities and planning strategies for improvement. They believe that the marketing function will be crucial for most institutions of higher education, and that higher education as a societal institution will be stronger after a retrenchment process lasting a few decades.

In an article representative of the widespread notice of the increasing need for competition among colleges for the dwindling pool of potential students, Edward Fiske, in the *Atlantic Monthly* (1979), reported on the "shift from a seller's to a buyer's market" (p. 93) and called it "the most traumatic change now under way in American higher education." (p. 93) He discusses the coming period of declining enrollment, forecast on the shift in the demographic age curve--not as many teenagers coming up through the ranks. He gives examples of hard sell, and often silly recruiting techniques, ranging from free frisbees to no-need scholarships. While pointing out that this makes education just like big business, he warns that there are several problems possible in this rush. He suggests that the most obvious problem is lack of truth in the publicity. Other problems are the increased cost and the sacrifice of quality in the programs. He does agree that colleges may need to adjust programs to meet the changing needs of students, but reminds readers that the end result of "education" is a degree or certificate, that students must be evaluated

regardless of the selling job needed to get them there, and that perhaps some colleges "should fold" in the crunch.

Also in 1979, Jossey-Bass Inc., Publishers, devoted one of their quarterly sourcebooks in the series *New Directions for Institutional Research to Developing a Total Marketing Plan* (Lucas, 1979). There were four essays in this collection, all focusing on the educational researcher and the appropriate role for the marketing concept and market research techniques. Of particular interest to this researcher was the article by Gerald Gaither (1979) about research tools. He suggests that a college's image is very important; "an unrealistic image builds unrealistic expectations." (p. 38) Students who find what they expected after they enroll are more likely to be retained. It is therefore important for a college to know what its image is, in order to determine whether there is need for work on changing the image. A marketing survey is presented where students rate their own and an ideal college on various factors. Both mail questionnaire and personal interview techniques are discussed. He includes a very cogent description of the special problems inherent in student marketing: first, many public institutions are not supposed to use public money for recruitment, often perceived as marketing; second, existing personnel, often faculty, need to lose their feeling of suspicion about proper marketing; third, the concepts of educational marketing are not yet well-developed--they are, rather, being adapted from the

profit sector; fourth, the researcher gets little immediate feedback; and fifth, while marketing was often ignored in the non-profit sector, and possibly denigrated, marketing activities were occurring in an underground fashion, without full recognition. It is time now to practice a conscious and thoughtful approach.

The College Board (1980), believing that after the growth of the 1960s and 1970s, there would be "virtually no collective experience or policy precedent to guide administrators in managing the envisioned retrenchment..." (p. ix) convened a colloquium to present the views of those who favor marketing as a tool to increase admissions and those who see risk in the possible effects of marketing on the overall system and on the public interest. Participation was limited in order to achieve a seminar setting; the meeting was held at the Wingspread Conference Center and is now sometimes referred to in the literature as the Wingspread Colloquium. [This researcher, upon seeing this reference the first time, thought of admissions officers learning to move faster by spreading their wings.] Larry Litten, the Colloquium director, expressed the sense of the meeting in a short statement at the beginning of the published proceedings (The College Board, 1980): there are "both potential benefits and risks from the adoption by colleges of the formal concepts, principles, and practices of marketing..." (p. 1) The proper idea of marketing is to clearly identify ✓ the characteristics and qualities of a college and then to

present them accurately to the public.

Brent Knight and Dennis Johnson (1981) describe marketing as a "people-oriented, student-centered concept [that]... is the opposite of crass promotion or poorly conceived schemes." They, too, cite Philip Kotler as the foremost authority. Their point is that marketing can help higher education by requiring that a college find out why students do not enroll or are not retained. Without using the word "image", they point out that a college must find out what potential students think of it, and address recognizable problems in the marketing plan. For example, a college may appear to serve only residential students, when local students could easily commute and receive a good education. As a technique for discovering the problems in a college's image, they recommend the focus group. The college can then use the information obtained to improve or change aspects of the college, or to try to clarify its reputation. They go on to cite the need for responsive faculty and office staff. The marketing program can affect the college on many dimensions, including governmental relations, fund raising and better communications with various constituencies.

Stan Grabowski published a large report for the American Association for Higher Education called *Marketing in Higher Education* (1981). In this report, he explains what marketing should be and how to prepare a marketing plan. He summarizes the parts of a marketing plan and points out that an institution must have a clear idea of its own mission and

goals in order to position itself for the market and to communicate that position to various aspects of the public, such as potential students, parents, alumni, staff, current students, and high school contacts. In a discussion of image, he points out that it is important to measure one's own image and to compare it to that of competing institutions. A large bibliography is appended which illustrates the growing amount of literature in the field. As the literature becomes more voluminous, topics are getting more specific than simply "using marketing in higher education."

William Turner (1982) prepared a doctoral dissertation on the use of market positioning research in higher education. His contention is that an institution of higher education should position itself in the market for the most effective recruitment; that in order to know what its position is or should be, it is necessary to use a research model to determine the perception of the institution on the part of the public. In particular, popular perception may also represent an understanding of the weaker aspects of the institution (p. 149). His paper presents a multidimensional scaling model for the type of research needed to determine perception.

As the baby boom hit the college age in the 1960s and made much noise about the need for relevance in education, some new colleges were created. When the "bust" began to arrive in the late '70s, some were in trouble. Evergreen

State College in Washington was one of these. Its former director of college relations, Charles Fowler (1983), reported that it survived by applying the concepts of marketing "to institutional recruiting, retention, and public relations." (p. 20) Although there was "criticism from idealistic academics" (p. 20), the plan was successful at increasing enrollment, student retention, and public awareness. He outlines a six step plan that he believes ✓ other institutions should follow.

Robert Cook and Ronald Zallocco (1983) used a computational model, based on one used in marketing to predict brand preference by consumers, to identify selection criteria used by students to choose colleges. Using eighteen attributes of colleges, they surveyed freshmen at five universities in Ohio. They measured perceived images and ✓ preferences and determined that "university preferences and attendance can be predicted based on the beliefs about and relative importance of attributes and characteristics of the universities themselves." (p. 205, 208) They suggest that this kind of data is useful in estimating institutional competition and preparing marketing plans.

The Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) supported the publication of a practical guide to marketing higher education (Topor, 1983). In the foreword, M. Fredric Volkmann reminds readers that "only a few years ago, it was certain political suicide" (p. ix) to talk about marketing in higher education. One spoke of improving

communications or working for better results. Now that attitudes toward marketing in the educational community are beginning to change, it is important to do it properly. Topor presents marketing concepts in a case study fashion, complete with questions at the end of the chapters so that the reader may evaluate progress.

CASE put out a short pamphlet in 1986 (Smith and Hunt, 1986) which was a compilation of several short articles which appeared earlier in various issues of CASE Currents. The best reading is "Choice Comments"--eight students tell the real reasons behind their college choices.

Also in 1986, CASE published another book by Robert Topor (1986). This is entirely devoted to the topic of institutional image. He defines image as others have defined it: "the aggregate...of the feelings, beliefs, attitudes, impressions, thoughts, perceptions, ideas, recollections, conclusions, and mindsets people have of" an institution. He also points out that an image is abstract, complex, and changeable. It is necessary to use market research to determine what an institution's image is. He points out that most people think too narrowly; image is not just a publication, for example. Everything an institution does can become part of its image. He also explains how to build an image, purposefully, for an institution, how to select a market position, and how to prepare and implement a marketing plan.

The impact of the whole idea of marketing applied to

institutions of higher education can perhaps best be summed up by the title of an article by Robert Grossman (1987): "Marketing: Key to Institutional Survival and Success." The battle over whether marketing is appropriate in the academic setting is finished: marketing won.

### The Admissions Officer

Marketing is often thought of as an Admissions Office function--the need to recruit students by selling them the idea that a particular college is the correct choice for them. Veysey (1980), a higher education historian, traces the development of the Admissions Office as a separate unit of a college or university--it doesn't even appear until after World War I. In its early functions, the object seems to have been to keep out certain ethnic groups and minorities and thus maintain the image of upper class comfort that an institution had. (p. 8) By the 1950's the notion of meritocracy had spread, and with the Civil Rights movement, concerns began to change. Since 1965, the pressure of changing demographics has pushed marketing as a recruitment tool to the forefront of efforts to maintain enrollment numbers.

Evidence that marketing is an Admissions concern is the content of the quarterly journal, *College and University*, a publication of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers. While many articles are general and deal with basic admissions functions, there are



always some devoted specifically to a marketing effort or idea.

Robert Sternberg and Jeanne Davis (1978) published a paper in this journal that seems to be perhaps the last of the admissions articles without the concept of marketing. Their thesis is that on May 1, when students must confess which college they have actually chosen out of all they have applied to and, specifically out of the ones that have granted them admission, admissions officers would like to know why any student they have selected would choose to go elsewhere. They describe two studies they have done of students' perceptions of Yale University and sixteen of its major competitors. They performed surveys to determine whether there are certain dimensions of attributes which differentiate colleges and some clusters of attributes that belong to groups of colleges. There were. They suggest that the study was useful, but restricted to known subgroups of colleges, not a universally broad approach.

In 1979, William Caren and Frank Kemerer published an article in this journal called "The Internal Dimensions of Institutional Marketing," in which they cite Kotler's work (1976) several times and an earlier article in the same journal. They begin with a statement that administrators at this time were still reluctant to adopt a marketing concept, even though other business practices had already been widely adopted in education. Their belief is that up to that time, the reluctance had been due to luxury--an institution could

always spend more money in preference to doing something new, and to a feeling of uniqueness: that colleges solve problems in a collegial setting and do not find the techniques of business appropriate. They go on to argue that higher education administrators are beginning to adapt some of the techniques of marketing, but are being guided by external forces. This leads to a "hard-sell"--flashier brochures, phone calls to parents, more expensive word processing. Instead, they suggest, attention should be paid to internal dimensions. The institution should reorient its structure and responsiveness in terms of a marketing approach, beginning with the mission statement, and including full campus participation and a change in the organization chart, if necessary. The authors also highly recommend institutional research on such things as demographics, enrollment patterns, why admitted students failed to enroll, and why students don't stay, as fundamental support for a marketing plan.

The rush into marketing or pseudo-marketing approaches must have begun with a vengeance. As soon as 1981 Larry Litten published a paper, also in the journal *College and University*, called "Avoiding and Stemming Abuses in Academic Marketing." He recommends greater education or training for administrators as to what marketing should really be about and education for the public about the role and function of institutions of higher education. He advocates greater communication, discussion, and research among marketers,

market researchers, administrators, faculty and students. The intimate role of the student in the production of the "product" (education) does make this a unique field. He recommends limitations on such specific abuses as hard-sell recruiting; for example, he suggests no more than two unsolicited direct contacts to any prospective student, and those should be by mail, the least invasive medium.

John Maguire and Robert Lay (1981), in the same issue as the article described above, discuss the college choice process. They postulate that the process of deciding which college to attend is composed of two subprocesses: the evolution of an "image" of the college in the mind of the student and then the appraisal of how those images match the student's perceived needs and capabilities. Images are modified by the acquisition of more information, but nevertheless play a role in the choosing a college. They report on an image survey administered to 2500 applicants accepted at Boston College, using 28 attributes to solicit responses on Likert scales. Using several statistical techniques, they were able to suggest that seven factors account for most of the variability in predicting college choice. The importance of image during the decision process seemed to vary over the time from application to actually beginning classes, including a period of cognitive dissonance after the first deposit was paid, but before the student really began on campus.

Huddleston and Karr (1982) presented a definition of ✓

"image" and a means of measuring it. Interestingly enough, they did not cite the Maguire and Lay article. By 1982, these authors felt that "institutional image is one of the most discussed concepts in college admissions." (p. 364) Their article focuses on the need to understand the image concept, because student decisions are based on it, and on the need to know what an institution's image is, so that it can be changed if needed. The development of a desirable image may take a long time, and once established, may last a long time. There are many instances in everyone's experience where a college seems to be "coasting" on its reputation, after that good reputation seems no longer to be deserved. Huddleston and Karr believe that careful planning can result in image modification. However, image must be known, therefore measured, first. They describe a study using the semantic differential for twelve attributes of an ideal college image and a real image of Bradley University; administered to students visiting its Undergraduate Admissions Office. They found that the image of the real Bradley differed significantly from the ideal image on nine of the twelve attributes. The image profile drawn from the study was a "zig-zag"--that is, different attributes received different scores, not an "it's all OK" type of response pattern.

M. Overton Phelps and C. C. Swann (1984) published a cautionary article. They advised admissions officers and counselors to think about the need to give students wise

guidance, rather than just a hard sell when one's college could use all the bodies it could get. There are no right answers, they say, but it is necessary to stop and think.

In 1985 George Brooker and Michael Noble published an article lamenting the lack of implementation of formal marketing programs in institutions of higher education. They felt, at the time, that well-managed organizations were able to recognize the importance of doing this, but that most educational administrators were identifying "marketing as merely selling or promotion." (p. 192) The article was not a study, but an advocacy for marketing. They reviewed why marketing is important to any organization, why colleges have problems with proper implementation, and suggested specific solutions. Problems cited included "complexity of the marketing mix (product/service, price, promotion and place)" (p. 193) and the breadth of constituencies that want to contribute to the process. The solution suggested is a careful plan, made known to the entire institution, including appointment and proper function of a university official responsible for marketing. They do believe that this administrator should not be authoritative, but rather cooperative with the other units of the organization. They agree that higher education is a unique situation, not like businesses, but argue that the careful marketing plan can build on the strength of the uniqueness of an institution.

Cindy Struckman-Johnson and Steven Kinsley (1985) ✓  
reported on a study which assessed the image perception of

the University of South Dakota among the institution's various constituencies, including potential students (high school seniors), current students and University alumni. They first explain that they view the concept of image as a set of "oversimplified notions about qualities such as academic reputation, faculty expertise, athletic emphasis, or campus appearance." (p. 316) Image reflects perceptions and not necessarily the "reality" of the college. They argue that the reasons for assessing image are clear, but the methodology is not well developed. They suggest that the image profile approach developed by Huddleston and Karr (1982) is the most promising. Using a set of semantic differential scales similar to the ones used by Huddleston and Karr, they surveyed several thousand people, by mail. A response rate of 25-30% was obtained for the different subgroups. They drew an image profile for the "ideal" university for the combined population and for the University of South Dakota for each of the subgroups. All held a generally positive image of the ideal and the real university, with various factors getting "higher" scores than others--that is, in looking at the image profile drawn, there is "zig-zag" from 1.5 to 5 on a seven point scale. High school seniors had a generally more positive opinion on the scales than either the current students or the alumni; current students seemed to be least positive about such things as campus attractiveness; alumni seemed to now perceive the University as less competitive in admissions,

having a smaller enrollment, and gave the lowest rating of all groups about preparation for a job. Struckman-Johnson and Kinsley suggest that this pattern reflects a "worldliness" factor. Alumni are the people who have been out in the so-called real world for up to five years, and their perceptions have been colored by experience. On the other hand, their appreciation of the personal atmosphere of the University and its small town atmosphere seemed to have been enhanced by time. Their study had an impact on the University's planning. The factors perceived as weak were going to be addressed in the marketing plan of the institution, and an updated survey was to be completed at a later date.

Textbooks, by their very nature, summarize the research that has gone before and attempt to crystallize the various earlier presentations into some coherent theory or approach. Kotler and Fox, in their 1985 book, *Strategic Marketing for Educational Institutions*, present the methods of image measurement used by Huddleston and Karr, and by Struckman-Johnson and Kinsey. They separate a person's image of an institution from that person's attitudes about that institution: two people may hold the same image of Harvard, for example, but feel differently toward it. Nevertheless, those who hold a positive image are more likely to be drawn to it. Kotler and Fox go beyond image measuring of the real or ideal on the part of outside subjects to suggest that the school's administrators and board develop a profile of the

desired image. (Did they forget faculty?) The desired image should be drawn alongside the perceived image(s) of the target market group(s) so that the gaps can be seen. There are then actions that can be taken, within the context of the marketing plan, so that the gaps can be made smaller. They caution that changing an image is a slow process; once people have an image of an institution, they tend to perceive only what continues to fit that image. However large or small the connection between image and behavior, they believe that the connection is real, and that a college benefits by measuring its own image and planning actions based on that measurement. ✓

Despite all the scholarly work going on in marketing at this time, Michael Noble (1986) complained that marketing is still largely misunderstood. Too many institutions talk about marketing but "do" selling and advertising. He points out that it is "not a trivial issue" (p. 319) because potential students, and their parents, hear the promises made by a college trying to sell itself and become angry when those promises seem to go unmet after enrollment. Some have even sued. In order to determine the development of professional marketing planning and execution at institutions of higher education, he prepared a questionnaire, which was pretested and then mailed to a stratified sample, accounting for large and small, public and private, colleges and universities. The survey determined the extent to which the respondents had a high-level administrator responsible for marketing, whether that administrator had decision-making



influence over various offices, whether a professional marketing firm had been consulted, and whether marketing faculty had been used for consultation. His conclusion was that few of the respondents were actually "professionally managing their marketing activities" (p. 324) even though many of them seemed to be engaging in selling. Many administrators demonstrate understanding of the marketing concept; they don't, however, seem to act on that understanding.

### Adult Education

The research to be undertaken here began as an effort to explore perceptions of the author's college as a marketing concept: the "institutional image" described by the researchers mentioned above. At the same time, research has been proceeding by authors in the educational field, some of whom who would describe their work as "perception studies" in education without regard for the jargon of the marketing or business oriented field. In addition, this researcher is particularly interested in that literature which considers the need of the older or otherwise non-traditional student.

Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) point out that defining who is an adult and what constitutes education is difficult. But, however one decides to handle the ambiguity, it is clear that the educational institution is dealing with voluntary participation, when offering programs to adults. It is therefore very important to be aware of how and why an older

student decides to be a student. (p. 117-9) This calls for market research. Fred Harrington (1977), in addressing the barriers to adults returning to post-secondary schooling, describes the typical campus as having a set of rules oriented to "the young...of an earlier generation." (p. 31) He points out that returning students are often counseled to go to evening college (or summer session, or extension courses). Those who want day classes must be fitted into the system. He then describes the shortcomings of both options.

Jerold Apps (1981) posits that the return of adult students to campus constitutes a quiet revolution, perhaps more profound in its effect than the noise of the sixties. (p. 11) He is interested in improving the educational environments for the adult students. While he presents the contrasts between adult (returning) students and traditional students, he does not differentiate subgroups of adults. Cohen and Brawer, in their book *The American Community College* (1982), describe the overall picture of community colleges in this country. In their chapter on "Students," they point out that the presence of older students on campus has increased dramatically since the 1960s. Part of the reason is that many colleges set up special programs for retirees and recruited them; but, in general, many adults are returning to community colleges to get a degree that they never had a chance to get before or to upgrade job skills. (p. 31-2) But even in their rather thorough description, they do not distinguish between adults who choose to attend

more-or-less traditional day programs and adults who come in via the evening college or special session programs.

Leonard V. Koos (1970) begins his substantial book on *The Community College Student* with a subheading "The Later Adolescent." Chapter 10 does get to the issue of "Adult Education and the Adult Student." He points out that the proportion of adult students in community colleges has been growing and that these adults are generally assumed to be part-time enrollees, presumably in special programs, often run at night. However, he goes on to note that the proportion of adult students in full-time programs has also been increasing--and leaves one with the impression that this includes adults fitting into the traditional day programs. (p. 388) There follows some discussion on the needs of adult students in various periods of their lives--young adulthood, middle age, and later maturity--but no differentiation between day program attenders and night school students.

Outside of textbooks, journal articles began to show interest in marketing in adult and continuing education and in the community college setting. As early as 1974, W. Wray Buchanan and H. C. Barksdale published an article touting the development of marketing skills in university extension. They propose that offices of adult and continuing education are already using marketing tools "in carrying out their service mission." (p. 34) Their study included a survey of the 99 member institutions of the National Association of

State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges. They determined that the extension programs do engage in marketing, are very aware of pricing, and engage in various communication and distribution channels. Difficulties in adopting the marketing concept are attributed to the "lack of planning for the concept to be communicated to all employees." (p. 38) They conclude that marketing practitioners could help the extension administrators and that these administrators need to become "master craftsmen of marketing techniques." (p. 44)

As thinking about marketing in education was being driven by a perceived shortage of high school graduates, others were noticing that adults were a fast growing segment of the population. Edith Roth (1978) described numbers of adults then and soon over 60. She then cited legislation pending at the time which prohibits discrimination based on age in any programs funded by the federal government. She describes several special programs available for older adults, and suggests that colleges should be opening up and modifying programs specifically for this population. Although her point of view is that the geriatric population wants education and professionals ought to respond to their needs, a wise administrator could see the marketing potential.

At the annual convention of the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges in 1978, Guerin Fischer (1978) presented a paper describing a conceptual framework for marketing the community college. He believed that, at that

time, community colleges tended to believe that a list of recruitment activities represented a marketing effort; it is really only a selling effort. Whereas success of selling is measured in increased inquiries or applications, success of marketing is measured in increased attendance, and is achieved by coordinating all student services. Not just the community college recruiting office, but all the offices on campus, must respond to student requests.

Loma Meyer (1980) assessed the institutional image of eleven postsecondary institutions in the competitive marketplace of the Twin Cities, Minnesota. She determined the major "perceptual and evaluative dimensions" used by various groups of potential students in developing their perceptions of the institutions' positions. Understanding these dimensions is proposed as an aid to providing programs responsive to different "buyer's" needs in a competitive setting.

By 1981 the rush to marketing in the adult education literature must have been on its way to being an avalanche. James Gollattscheck (1981) advised caution in the jump to a marketing approach. The changes wrought in an institution by the needs of a marketing plan may not be what the institution expected. For example, a successful market outreach may bring in students with wider diversity--learning disabilities, physical handicaps, elderly students--that the faculty is not prepared to deal with. Gollattscheck does not say that marketing shouldn't be done, but does suggest that

adequate planning is necessary, as well as careful thought about the possible results of marketing.

Marketing activities had spread in two year colleges as well as four year institutions, even in the conservative midwest, by 1981. Janet Smith (1981) and her colleagues at Cuyahoga Community College of Cleveland, Ohio, surveyed 126 urban two or four year colleges and universities with student populations between twenty and thirty-five thousand. They found different concerns and market emphases between the two and four year settings. Two year colleges reported a need for attention to curricula not meeting market needs, including a concern for the variety of times that classes could be offered, and market research focused on identifying the needs of employers. Four year colleges (all urban settings) reported declining enrollment due to increased competition and a public perception that the campus was unsafe. Market research at these institutions focused on demographics and other information needs, and a lesser focus on identifying the needs of special groups. In two year colleges, marketing responsibility tended to reside with the Office of Public Relations, while in four year colleges, it was more likely to be in the Admissions Office. In both two and four year colleges, only about one-fourth of the faculty was reported as being fully supportive of the marketing activities.

Members of the League for Innovation in the Community College were surveyed by a graduate student in Journalism.

Diane Dann (1982) studied what community colleges were doing that was called marketing and who at the college was likely to be responsible for it. The study did not cover how well the marketing activity was done. She determined that the majority of those colleges surveyed were interested in marketing; one-third already had well-developed marketing functions by then and another third were interested in expanding this function. Smaller schools were more likely to be involved in marketing than medium or large sized schools. In particular, marketing activity was driven by dissatisfaction with enrollment levels. Marketing responsibility had been assigned to different places in the college's organization, but one-third reported that marketing was assigned to the public information officer. The scope of marketing activities seemed to vary depending on who was responsible; surprisingly, the scope seemed to be broader when responsibility was assigned to an instructional dean or admissions officer, rather than to the public relations officer.

Marketing activities can be carried out in different ways by different institutions. Certain similarities in structure or function must appear when the phenomenon becomes widespread. At an annual convention of the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, Quentin Bogart (1984) presented a paper describing four distinct structures for marketing in four geographically diverse community college districts. These were described according to what

organizational structure dominated the marketing planning process and its implementation. The four included: central administration control, with the involvement of the college president; marketing committee control; marketing division control, where a whole division of the college was professionally staffed for marketing and devoted to it; and the student services structure, where the Dean of Student Affairs was charged with organizing and leading a marketing program.

Once marketing programs have become established, it seems to be possible to move on to more specific questions. Several studies have been published which address the question of motivation. What are the needs of various potential groups of students and what are the attitudes that lead them to particular colleges? In particular, this researcher is interested in studies of older, non-traditional groups of students.

Michael Hu (1985) laments the lack "of a comprehensive, fully integrated marketing plan" (p. 201) in many colleges. At the same time, colleges are seeking non-traditional students in the 25 to 64 year old age group. He believes that a clear understanding of the needs of this group is important in order to establish a marketing plan which will attract them. He surveyed current students, including "regular day-time" and "evening/weekend" (p. 203) students, prospective students, and non-prospective students. Survey results were reported for these three subgroups of the



sample. In general, he reports a significant demand for higher education in the non-traditional group, which could be met by establishing "separate programs and promotional strategies" (p. 208) for the three groups. Current students seemed to focus on quality of the educational offering, prospective students on converting interest into action, and non-prospective students on overcoming barriers such as the need for financial aid, child care, weekend classes and counseling.

Arapahoe Community College performed a mail survey of 2000 randomly selected households in its service area. (Voorhees and Hart, 1985). The study occurred in response to an institutional desire to merge the marketing and planning functions. Results indicate that three-fourths of the respondents would be interested in enrolling in college level courses; that business and computer science were most often chosen; that the older the respondent, the more likely the choice of traditional liberal arts courses; that the preferred time was early evening and weeknights; that career counseling was rated as the most important support service.

George Dixon (1986) surveyed adult part-time students at North Carolina State University in an attempt to describe the demographic characteristics of part-time students, to determine their motivations, to identify their perceived barriers to higher education, and to determine any relationships between their reported motivations and the perceived barriers. He found that these students are

demographically similar to the country at large: white, middle class, relatively young. Dominant motivations were goal-oriented: to earn a degree, or get a promotion or better job, to prepare for a career change. Perceived barriers included lack of time and other responsibilities, but there was no correlation between motivation and perceived barriers. Those who really wanted to go to school would find a way. There is plenty of room for the institution to make things easier, however; such efforts as flexible scheduling of counseling will enhance the institution's reach among these students and the population not represented in the sample.

Brenda Rogers, Kevin Gilleland and George Dixon (1988) surveyed adults, 25 years and older, enrolled part-time in credit courses but not in degree programs. They sought to identify the motivations of these students and whether the motivations are related to socio-demographic variables. They, again, found goal-oriented motivations most common, even though these subjects were not enrolled in formal degree programs. Older adults and those with higher incomes were found to be less likely to be contemplating career change; females were more likely to be motivated by the prospect of job change than were males. The researchers believe that the motivations revealed should lead the institution to realize that academic advising is critical even to part-time, supposedly non-degree seeking students.

Although there may be studies in progress involving

adult students, especially as colleges and universities recognize the market to be tapped there, this researcher has not found any literature that distinguishes between groups of students primarily on time of attendance. Most studies distinguish on the basis of age and other demographic factors.

## CHAPTER III

### DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

#### Purpose

The purpose of this study is to compare perceptions of the institutional image of a college between two groups of older students--those who attend in the light of traditional day programs, whatever part-time arrangements they have made for doing so, and those who attend the evening programs.

#### Survey

This research consisted of the administration of a survey questionnaire to two groups of students: older adults who are attending classes during the day, and older adults who are attending classes in the evening. Each group was asked to respond to bipolar semantic differential adjectives describing the "ideal college" and the actual conditions at Grand Rapids Junior College.

The questionnaire was designed to follow Huddleston and Karr (1982) and Struckman-Johnson and Kinsley (1985). Both of these studies looked at institutional image perceptions at one institution--the first among potential students visiting Bradley University and the second among the various publics

of the University of South Dakota. Neither study was restricted according to age. The sets of bipolar adjectives included some which were appropriate to a residential college. These sets were modified for the nature of a two-year, urban, commuter, community college.

The survey was pretested with evening and day adult students during the summer session of 1989. The pretest revealed the length of time needed to complete the questionnaire and identified ambiguities in the structure of the questionnaire and in some particular items included. These were modified to correct for the problems uncovered. The questionnaire was then modified from its original typed format to allow for printing in keypunch compatible fashion. This was done in order to make the processing of the data more manageable.

The questionnaires were administered late enough in the semester so that students were comfortable with the campus and their courses. While this could have introduced a halo effect among those who have "stuck it out" for so long, it was also an effort to eliminate the rather strong sentiments of fear and uncertainty (and complaints about parking) that occur early in the semester. The period of actual presentation of the surveys included a week of bizarre early snow and a week of lovely Indian summer days; the researcher has assumed that weather related biases during the answering of survey questions were thereby somehow balanced out.

With permission of the administration and of the

individual teachers (and the Michigan State University Human Research Committee) questionnaires were handed out during classroom sessions and collected promptly. The actual instrument was distributed to all students, so that the study population--those 25 years of age or older--was not forced to identify itself. It was generally possible for the questionnaire to be completed in approximately 10 minutes.

### Sample Size

Sample size was 150-175 in each group. A large enough number to provide non-random data was needed, and, at the same time, administration of the survey had to be manageable within the time allotted and with the number of students available on campus, in classes offered both day and evening. Most students approached were quite willing to complete a questionnaire, especially if the process were going to shorten a lecture by fifteen minutes. Students also seemed to appreciate the need for data and to be intrigued by the ambiguously stated research topic: "looking for differences between older students who come in the day and older students who come in the evening."

### Data Collection

Questionnaires were administered in day and evening sections of Political Science 110, a course required in all degree programs, and in English 101. In this way, a wide variety of older students were included. Students not

seeking degrees were included by administration of the questionnaire in Computer Applications 101, a course which is widely taken by students seeking further training without a degree, as well as by degree-seeking students. All of these courses are available in the day time or in the evening (as well as on weekends). The Computer Applications courses tend to have a greater proportion of older students enrolled, in both the day and the evening sections, perhaps because of a greater perceived need for adults to be retrained in technology but not in English. Students select these sections purposefully (no one is put in a time slot against his/her own wishes).

Subjects in 100 level courses only were surveyed. Since the results were to have an outside marketing purpose, the focus of the study was on beginners. Attitudes of students in 200 level courses would be more appropriately investigated in a study whose focus is retention.

#### Utility of the Answers

The survey appears to repeat on two sides of a sheet of paper. One side asks for responses about an "ideal" college and the other side about the "real" situation at Grand Rapids Junior College. A difference in perception of the institution's image between day and evening students might not be meaningful by itself. Suppose that night students as a group were more likely to identify the College as having a less superior academic reputation than day students perceive.

Is it necessary to work to change that image perception among night students? What if the responses on the "ideal side" show that the desired academic reputation is equally less superior? That is, perhaps night students want a college that is not too "hard" and feel they have found it. Working on a change, in that case, might be a mistake. In order to provide useful data for these types of questions, a "satisfaction score" was constructed for individual questionnaires by finding the difference between the "ideal" score for one set of bipolar adjectives and the "real" score for the same set.

The utility of the study is in the determination of "where to begin" in considering changes to enhance the image of the college in the day or in the evening. Statistically significant differences between the two groups in the study are an indication of underlying "real" differences.

An open-ended question on the bottom of the questionnaire provided an attempt to explore some of the possible reasons for any differences in perception that may be noted in the study. This question was worded "Please tell why you feel this way about Grand Rapids Junior College." Responses were read by the researcher.

### Data Analysis

The data was analyzed with non-parametric statistics appropriate for the nominal data (sex, employment status, etc.) and for the ordinal data. Nominal data was tested with



the Pearson Chi-square; ordinal data was tested with the Mann-Whitney U test.

See Appendix A for a sample of the questionnaire used.

### Post-test Followup

The open-ended question provides some measure of the thought processes of the students surveyed, to the extent that the answers reflect real and operational feelings and decision making. Unfortunately, these answers also reflect the willingness of the subjects to sit still and write a coherent statement, in the face of the alternative possibility of leaving for the next class or other more desirable activity.

In order to obtain more thoughtful consideration of the factors involved and the differences in perception discovered once the data was analyzed, several day and evening older students were interviewed by the researcher after the data had been collected, keypunched and analyzed. Results of the questionnaire portion of the study were presented to each interviewee by the researcher. An interview lasting approximately twenty minutes was conducted in which the interviewee was asked to consider reasons for the results.

## CHAPTER IV

### ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

#### Surveys Collected

This chapter contains an analysis of the data developed in the administration of the questionnaire regarding older adult students' perceptions of the college experience. The data collected can be broken into three categories:

1. measures of the image of Grand Rapids Junior College on the part of day older students and evening older students
2. measures of satisfaction based on the difference between the perception score on the various factors of the "ideal" college and the perception score of the student's real experience at Grand Rapids Junior College on the part of the day older students and evening older students
3. reports of demographic characteristics.

Three hundred twenty-six surveys were collected. These were approximately evenly divided between day and evening students. See Table 1.

Table 1: Number of Surveys Collected

<u>Primary Time</u>	<u>Number of Students</u>
Day	156
Evening	165
No entry	5
	-----
Total	326

The Institution's Image

One section of the data collected on the questionnaire was the student's reaction to the descriptors of the college characteristics in terms of his/her own experiences at Grand Rapids Junior College. The analysis of these reactions gives a description of the institution's image in the way that Huddleston and Karr (1982) and Struckman-Johnson and Kinsley (1985) did.

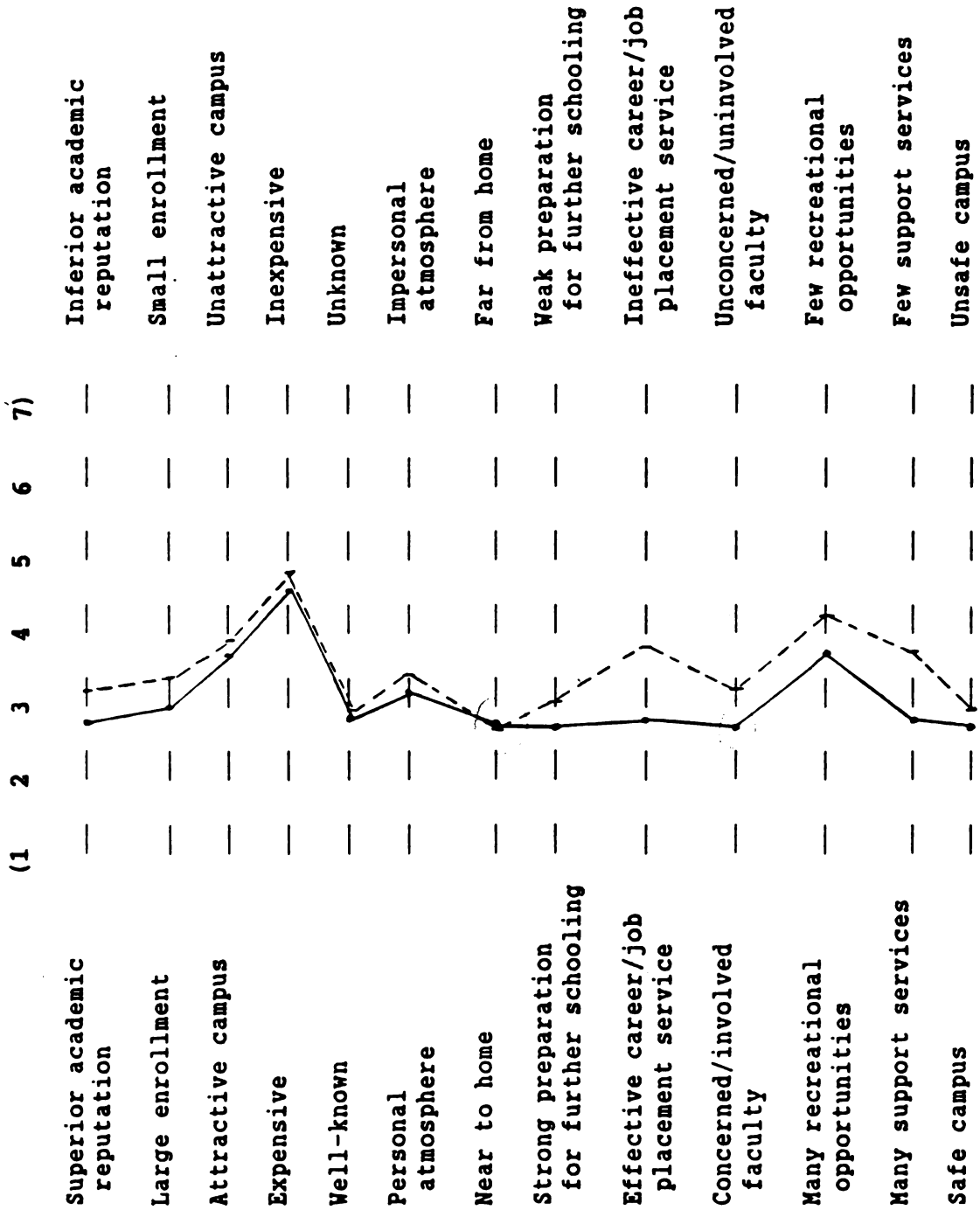
Listed in Table 2 are the average scores for each college image factor, for both evening and day attending older students. Precision is limited by the small number of degrees of freedom inherent in the type of data collected. However, the image profile constructed (see Figure 1) is nevertheless suggestive of useful descriptions.

**Table 2: Institutional Image of Grand Rapids  
Junior College--Day and Evening**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Day Score</b>	<b>Evening Score</b>
Academic Reputation	2.6	3.0
Enrollment (size)	2.9	3.2
Attractiveness of campus	3.5	3.7
Expense	4.2	4.6
Well-known/Unknown	2.7	2.8
Personal atmosphere	3.0	3.2
Distance from home	2.6	2.5
Preparation, further sch.	2.5	2.9
Placement service	2.7	3.6
Concerned faculty	2.5	3.0
Recreational opportunities	3.5	4.0
Support services	2.7	3.5
Safe campus	2.5	2.9

In Figure 1, on the following page, there is a diagram of the college image components, similar to what Struckman-Johnson and Kinsley (1985) call an image profile. In both of these two previous studies and in the current research, respondents see the institution in question in a generally positive light. This may be related to a human tendency towards cognitive dissonance rather than to any absolute measure of the status of a college image. Nevertheless, perceptions are the closest thing we have to reality. The older students at Grand Rapids Junior College see the institution as "pretty good" but not "very good" (2 or 3 on a scale of 1 to 7) on most characteristics. Nearness to home

Figure 1: Institutional Image Profile



— Day Students    - - - - Evening Students

and concerned/involved faculty rate perhaps the best (approximately 2 1/2). It is interesting to note that "cost" rates approximately 4 1/2 (closer to inexpensive than expensive, but not quite as "good" as the other factors) for the group as a whole: the profile on this component diverges from the reasonably straight line of the other components. This, despite the fact that the tuition at Grand Rapids Junior College is one of the highest of all the state's two year colleges.

#### Day Vs. Night Attenders' Image

The hypothesis in this study is that there would be a difference in the perceptions of the institution's image on the part of the day older students and the evening older students. A perusal of Figure 1 will show more similarities than differences! However, there are some differences which are analyzed in greater detail below. Evening students perceive a lesser academic reputation, less effective job placement service, less concerned faculty, fewer recreational opportunities, fewer support services, and less safe campus.

#### Ideal vs. Real Perceptions

For each characteristic of a college included in the questionnaire, students were asked to rate their ideal college, and, on the reverse side of the paper, their real

experience. A "satisfaction" variable was constructed by computing the difference between the "ideal" rating and the "real" rating for each characteristic, for each subject.

The students were in two groups: day attenders and evening attenders. Only students 25 or older were asked to respond. (Those younger were asked to return blank questionnaires.) The null hypothesis to be tested was:

There is no difference between day adult students and evening adult students on measures of satisfaction about the college experience.

The Mann-Whitney  $U$  test was used to test the difference between the two groups. Significance was assumed if the probability of such difference occurring randomly was less than or equal to .05 ( $p \leq .05$ ).

The null hypothesis was proven false in its general statement: there are significant differences between the two groups in the degree of satisfaction with four of the college image factors which were measured in this study. All four of these differences were in the same direction: evening students were less satisfied than day students about these factors. The three sub-hypotheses will be discussed in the appropriate sections below.

#### Non-Significant Items

Several of the satisfaction variables developed from the "two-sided" questionnaire produced differences which were

statistically not significant. These included:

academic reputation  
 enrollment (size)  
 attractiveness of campus  
 expense  
 well-known/unknown  
 atmosphere (personal/impersonal)  
 distance from home  
 preparation for further schooling  
 recreational opportunities

In developing a marketing plan for a large college with both day and evening components for older students, knowing which factors elicit similar responses from older day and older evening students might also be useful. These are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: College Image Factors Receiving Similar Scores from Day and Evening Students

Satisfaction Variable	p
Academic Reputation	0.083
Enrollment size	0.696
Campus attractiveness	0.255
Cost	0.309
Well/unknown	0.906
Personal atmosphere	0.171
Distance from home	0.834
Prepare further sch.	0.060
Recreational opport.	0.065



### Significant Differences

Four of the satisfaction variables demonstrated significant differences between the day and evening groups. The differences between the groups on the effectiveness of the placement service and on the degree of faculty concern/involvement were both significant at the  $p < .05$  level. The differences between the groups on the amount of support services and the safety of the campus were both significant at the  $p < .01$  level. In all of these four cases, the direction of the difference was that the evening students are less satisfied than the day students. These variables are presented in Table 4.

The null sub-hypotheses to be tested by these measurements were the following:

Sub-hypothesis 1: There is no difference between day adult students and evening adult students on measures of campus safety or campus attractiveness.

Sub-hypothesis 2: There is no difference between day adult students and evening adult students on measures of satisfaction with support services.

Both of these null sub-hypotheses were proven false by the measurements collected. Evening students were found to be less satisfied with campus safety, although not with campus attractiveness. Evening students were found to be less satisfied with support services in general and with the career/job placement service in particular.

One finding not stated in the null hypotheses is that evening students are less satisfied with the concern and

involvement of faculty. In the post-survey interviews, all those interviewed were unsurprised by this finding and able to articulate possible reasons: evening faculty is composed of full-time faculty who are tired and not doing their best, or of part-time faculty who, whether tired or not, don't know exactly how to be teachers, how to organize a class, keep the content moving or on track, how to respond to students with questions or problems.

**Table 4: College Image Factors Receiving  
Significantly Different Scores from  
Day and Evening Students**

<u>Satisfaction Variable</u>	<u>p</u>
Placement Service	0.020
Faculty	0.034
Support Services	0.001
Campus Safety	0.004

In presenting this data, the typical inclusion would be the "mean" of all the scores collected. In this case, the data is non-parametric: it has no fixed zero point and the intervals between incremental scores are not known to be consistent.

The medians are the appropriate measures of central tendency and z scores the measure of the spread of the data. The scores were not normally distributed. The Mann-Whitney U test takes all this into its process and provides a value for P that is the best indicator of a statistically significant difference between the day and the evening groups in this research project. (Siegel, 1956, pp. 116-126)

In the answers to the open-ended question at the bottom of the survey, students responded with mostly positive comments about the quality of the school, the helpfulness of the teachers, the closeness to home and the fact that the courses met their needs. Negative comments included the lack of parking and some wishes for better content. There were no comments to indicate that as a group evening students are any less satisfied with anything than day students are. In reference to the lower level of satisfaction with support services in general and with the placement service specifically, it is worth noting that most campus offices close early in the evening, before the classes are finished, and that students who come at night rarely have extra time to seek out services. In reference to security, one must note that it is dark in the evening for most of the semester; security personnel staff the evening

sessions until classes are over. One of the comments referred to evening faculty as "slack" and wished for greater professionalism. However, most comments gave credit for faculty who "care about you"; both in the day and in the evening.

### Demographic descriptors

Each respondent to the questionnaire was asked to complete items describing demographic characteristics of self. These items appeared at the bottom of the first page; most respondents appeared to easily complete them and then move on to the second side.

The null sub-hypothesis to be tested in this section was stated as follows:

Sub-hypothesis 3: There is no difference between day adult students and evening adult students in likelihood of employment.

This sub-hypothesis was also proven false. Older evening students are more likely to be currently employed than older day students and have higher family income than the day students. These results are presented in the sections below.

### Non-significant Items

Five of the items demonstrated no significant differences between the two groups. These were gender, age,

marital status, distance of the college from home, and existence of children. These results are also useful to know for marketing planning purposes. For example, this researcher has observed a tendency for some planners to expect women to be able to come to college in the day time when the children finally go to school, and men to be likely to be the student body after work. This study demonstrates that there is no difference in the proportions of adult men and women during the day or during the evening.

Age: Special comment

Although the data show no significant difference in age between the day group and the evening group in the research sample, it is important to repeat that only students 25 years of age or older were asked to complete the survey, and then to report the kinds of numbers that were encountered in the presentation of the survey. As described in Chapter 3, questionnaires were presented to day and evening sections of the same courses. In order to achieve a sample size of 157 for day students, 1796 students were approached. In order to achieve the sample size of 169 for evening students, only 350 students were confronted. This is a contrast of 48% students 25 or older in the evening sections, and only 9% in the day sections. The differences presented in this study are based on controlling the entry criterion for age.

**Table 5: Age of Respondents in the Day and Evening Research Groups**

	Day Students	Evening Students	p
Mean	32.44	33.11	0.242
Maximum	65	59	
# of cases	154	153	

**Table 6: Demographic Descriptors Demonstrating Similarity Between Day and Evening Students**

Demographic Descriptor	Number of Responses			p
	Day	Eve.	None	
Gender	156	165	5	0.185
Age	154	153	22	0.242
Marital Status	154	165	7	0.382
Distance from home	154	165	7	0.548
Preschool Children	106	117	103	0.372
School-age children	120	135	71	0.184
Post H.S. Children	85	106	135	0.519

### Statistically Significant Differences

The family income response and the presently employed (yes/no) response were significantly different at the  $p < .001$  level. The evening group demonstrated higher family income and reported a greater likelihood of being employed

than the day group.

**Table 7: Demographic Descriptors Which are Different for Day and Evening Students**

<u>Demographic Descriptor</u>	<u>Number of Responses</u>			<u>p</u>
	<u>Day</u>	<u>Eve.</u>	<u>None</u>	
Family Income	145	156	25	0.000
Currently Employed	152	162	12	0.000

It is not at all evident why the evening group is so much more likely to be employed and to have greater family income. Anecdotally, this researcher has observed a high likelihood for day students to be employed; research has shown, now, that the likelihood is even higher among evening students. Perhaps the better paying jobs exist during daytime hours; thus those people are the ones attending in the evening. It will be a subject for further research to determine the reason(s) for this difference, and what impact, if any, there should be on the design of services. It could impact the institution's enrollment for example, if the institution's image is such that prospective students think there is no financial aid for evening students because the

image includes the idea that evening students make enough money so as not to need help. The income variable is presented in Table 8, and the likelihood of employment data is presented in Table 9.

In the post-survey interviews, those students interviewed felt that greater employment logically leads to higher income; the difference seems to be that those who come in the evening are not only employed more often than not, but in full-time, better paying day jobs. Day older students may be not working at all, surviving on grants and loans, or working only part-time, perhaps at minimum wage, whether with financial aid or without.

**Table 8: Family Income Reported by Day and Evening Students**

<u>Income</u>	<u>Day Students</u>	<u>Evening Students</u>
\$0-10,000	38	10
\$10-25,000	52	48
\$25-50,000	40	74
> \$50,000	15	24
<b>Total cases</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>156 *</b>

\* 25 missing cases



**Table 9: Likelihood of Employment by Day and Evening Students**

<u>Employed?</u>	<u>Day Students</u>	<u>Evening Students</u>
Yes	109	146
No	43	16
Total cases	152	162 *

\* 12 missing cases

### Interviews

After the data for this research project had been collected and analyzed, several students were interviewed individually. These students were currently either primarily day attending or primarily evening attending. Some were surprised at the aggregate research findings; some were not. Further interpretations of the results and possible reasons for their feelings are discussed in Chapter 5. What is most interesting to note, however, is that the most articulate of these interviewees are those who have attended both day and evening classes. Having seen the College in both the light of day and the darkness of evening, they are more able to speculate on the observations and judgements of the students who make up the research results.

## CHAPTER V

### FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND SUMMARY

#### The Problem

The primary purpose of this study was to determine whether there are differences in institutional image perception between older students attending college in the evening and older students attending college during the day. Only students 25 years of age or older were considered for inclusion in the sample populations. Classes were identified which offer sections in the day or in the evening; the survey instrument was presented, completed, and collected in these classes. Data was collected in the Fall semester, 1989.

Differences between the groups might lead to institutional planning for change on the factors found to be subjects of difference in levels of satisfaction with the perception of the institution's image between the day and the evening attending older students.

#### Design and Procedure

A questionnaire was designed to determine differences between a student's perceived "ideal" college and perceived "real" experience at Grand Rapids Junior College. Students

responded to thirteen descriptors of the college experience on Likert-type scales and then also to some demographic descriptors. On each Likert-type item, students were asked to respond to the bipolar adjective descriptors by checking an interval from 1 to 7 on both the "ideal" side of the questionnaire and the "real" side. A difference score was constructed by subtracting the "real" from the "ideal" score. The Mann-Whitney *U* test was used to test for statistically significant differences between the older day students and the older evening students. The differences in the reported demographic descriptors were tested by means of the Mann-Whitney *U* test for ordinal data or the Pearson chi-square for the nominal data.

The questionnaire was administered in the Fall semester of 1989 to both day and evening students, yielding a combined sample size of approximately 310.

### Findings

The most interesting finding of the study is that there were very few differences between the day group and the evening group within the confines of the study.

Once the entry criterion was set for age 25, the age of the two groups was virtually the same, as was the proportion of males and females. There was no statistically significant difference in marital status, nor in numbers and ages of children. There was also no difference in distance traveled from home.

On the Likert-type scales probing the perceptions of various college characteristics, there were no statistically significant differences in the perceptions of the two groups as to academic reputation of the college, the enrollment size, the attractiveness of the campus, the expense of attendance, the general reputation (was it well-known or unknown), the atmosphere (personal or impersonal), the distance from home, the adequacy of preparation for further schooling, and the availability of recreational opportunities.

Where there were differences between the two groups in the perception of these characteristics, the evening students appeared to be less satisfied. Evening students perceive the Grand Rapids Junior College Placement Service to be less adequate than their "ideal" Placement Service and the Faculty of Grand Rapids Junior College to be less concerned/involved than faculty at the "ideal" college. Both of these differences were statistically significant at the level of  $p < .05$ . Evening students were also less satisfied with campus safety and with general support services. Both of these differences were statistically significant at the level of  $p < .01$ .

In the demographic descriptors, the evening group was more likely to be employed and had greater family income. Both of these differences were statistically significant at the level of  $p < .001$ .

### Conclusions

The major conclusion from this study is that there is very little difference between the older day and older evening students on the items measured in this study. The differences that were statistically significant were that evening students are less satisfied with the placement service and the concern/involvement demonstrated by faculty, and less satisfied with perceived campus safety and with support services in general. It is not possible to conclude that these factors should be modified; it can be concluded that these four factors are somehow perceived as less than desired by evening older students, as contrasted to day attending older students.

Evening students were more likely to be employed and had higher family income than day students in this study. It is not possible to draw a conclusion as to the reasons for this disparity from the data collected in this research. One can conclude that for the population included in this study there are no differences in number of children, marital status, or distance driven from home; there are also no differences in gender proportion between the day and evening groups, or in age (after they entry criterion of 25 years was met). One cannot, however, conclude that there are no differences in needs for services between the two groups--the numbers of children may be the same, but the difference in need for

child care, for example, between evening and day, was beyond the scope of this study.

### Reflections

During the post-survey interviews, students were able to express some reasons behind the significant differences that were discovered in this study. The difference in satisfaction on the issue of concerned/involved faculty was the most clearly addressed and unanimously stated. The significant difference that was discovered was that older evening students are less satisfied in their perception of faculty than older day students. It should be noted that in many cases, the faculty perceived are the same people both night and day. In other cases, evening faculty have interesting day jobs and an affinity for the subject taught at night--one might even assume more enthusiasm for a course taught once as a special duty than one taught all day. However, both day and evening students feel that faculty are more tired and less caring at night, less able to devote individual attention to students. In addition, there is a perceived short-coming in the ability to organize and handle a class; these teachers are more likely to be thought of as amateurs. Thoughts expressed in interviews included these: "They [evening teachers] don't know the study habits of students--what they'll do and not do--like read their assignments." "Adjunct faculty has a tendency to go over the

head of the student." "Adjunct professors may be more articulate, less used to evening students' lack of background." Perhaps the most revealing (this researcher's favorite) comment: "Evening students are older and grumpier."

This researcher's own observation is that everybody is less "sharp" at night. Evening faculty is composed of day faculty teaching overtime, or people with other day responsibilities who teach only at night. These adjunct faculty may be less likely to think of teaching as a supportive profession, and possibly more likely to think of classroom presence only, simply a job to be done.

The issue of campus safety was also reasonably clearcut. It's dark at night and the security guards are not as obvious. "I never see one walking around the parking ramp where they ought to be." Students apparently consider the parking ramp a dangerous place, despite the lack of evidence to support this. "The guards should go around it on scooters so everyone can see them." "Reality may be the same for day and night, but people have more concern at night."

Dissatisfaction with the career/job placement service and support services in general was usually seen as a single issue by the interviewees. Despite some evening hours, these services are perceived as simply not available at night. "You have to take time off from work and get here in the day

time." "Evening students expect more, maybe want a job after only one class." "Bookstore never stays open long enough for night students--a week or two isn't enough." An expression of overall shortcomings, perhaps coloring one's feelings about everything: "You get a break in a night class--can't even get any food!"

Struckman-Johnson and Kinsley (1985) identified an "alumni worldliness" factor in analyzing differences between potential students, current students, and alumni, in their study of institutional image. Alumni evidenced somewhat less enthusiastic perceptions of the factors that made up the institution's image, apparently because their experiences in the real world tempered some of their responses, especially on scale items relating to jobs. Evening students in this study may be showing some of the same real-world tempering. They wish for better, and perceive somewhat less magic in the college experience.

Another question to consider is why did Huddleston and Karr (1982) find differences in perception between image and reality on nine factors out of twelve? In their study, the differences were computed between the "ideal" and the "real" rather than between different groups of students. While their study is not completely parallel to the current research, it is interesting to speculate on why only four factors of the institutional image profile turned up significant differences here. One thought expressed by an



interviewee is that Grand Rapids is a very conservative area. "This place is pretty much straight down the line." That is, people may tend to make an overall judgement about something, then carry that value in their heads. All subsequent sub-judgements (judgements on factors that make up the whole) deviate only slightly from the internal overall position.

### Cognitive Dissonance

Some years ago, Leon Festinger stated a theory that has now become common parlance. That is his idea of cognitive dissonance. The idea is that a person faced with the need to accept or tolerate a situation not to his/her liking eventually adapts; one's perception becomes modified in some way so that it isn't as bad as one had thought. The fox thought the unreachable grapes were sour; the person undergoing cognitive dissonance finds meaning, utility, possibly even pleasure, in a previously negatively perceived situation. A student who for whatever reasons did not want to attend a certain college and lands there anyway, will sooner or later, if remaining there, come to see it as an acceptable place. The day and evening older students at Grand Rapids Junior College all had similarly acceptable perceptions of most of its image factors. It is possible that greater variety in original perceptions was tempered by something like cognitive dissonance so that the measurements of perception within the groups had regressed toward some standard degree of acceptability.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings, however limited, of this study, the administration of Grand Rapids Junior College might find a positive effect on the institution's image would result from taking action in several areas. First, some kind of training for evening faculty in the "handling" of their classes (not in communicating content) could result in a more positive perception by the evening older students of the concern/involvement demonstrated by faculty. Second, it would be useful to determine whether evening students really find the support services of a poor quality or simply don't know these services are available to evening attenders. If the former, it will be appropriate to improve these services. If the latter, "advertising" might help. Third, the image of campus safety in the evening needs to be addressed. Do statistics show that the campus is less safe during the dark hours than during the day, or do people just feel that way? The answer to this question will determine the action to be taken: improve safety in some way, or provide reassurance that safety is not a problem (or is not a greater problem in the evening than during the day).

### Implications for Further Study

In many ways, this study has raised more questions than it has answered. Among them are: are there differences between groups of older students who attend predominantly residential schools as well as between the groups of commuter

students here described? Are there differences between the youngest of the students studied in this project and the oldest? Are there differences between groups who have passed through various life-cycle events and those who have not? Given the noticeable lack of differences between the day and evening groups studied here, does anything a college does make a difference? Perhaps there are emotions within the students that lead to perceptions of satisfaction.

The evening students were less satisfied with some of the college image factors; they were, as a group, also more likely to be employed and had higher family income. Another study might consider the possibility of interactive effects of these demographic factors: are those who are "making it" likely to expect more of the people they encounter (faculty) and of a service they consider necessary to the hunt for success?

This study was conducted only at Grand Rapids Junior College. Other studies which involve other commuter or residential schools might be productive in determining whether there are any other significant differences in perception among various groups of older students. This study was also limited to first year level students. This researcher was attempting to measure the institutional image perception of those entering the college. A study which attempts to measure the perception of those who stay for several semesters and compare it to the perception of those who drop out could prove very helpful in the ongoing effort

to improve retention.

A very articulate group, not included in this study, but anecdotally consulted by this researcher, is the college's own faculty. Those who have taught in both day and evening sessions are able to discern some of the differences between the research groups and to supply some possible reasons. Another study could explore faculty perceptions of the differences between the institution's image in the day and in the evening. Faculty, from long association with students, is also likely to be able to suggest reasons behind the students' differing perceptions.

#### Changing an Image

It is important to deal with the issue of image, even if it seems one ought to deal with "substance." According to Kotler (1985, p. 37) "people often respond to the institution's image, not necessarily its reality. Publics holding a negative image of a school will avoid or disparage it, even if the institution is of high quality, and those holding a positive image will be drawn to it." The research described in this paper has outlined some of the perceptions of Grand Rapids Junior College held by two groups of older students. As older students are becoming a larger proportion of actual and potential college students, it will be well to know what their perceptions are. In particular, it should be useful to know on what factors the evening students seem to

be less satisfied; this is the arena where changes in perception will be needed, even as changes in substance have begun. Kotler (p. 43) points out that "images tend to be 'sticky' and last long after the reality of the institution has changed." Thus, even though support services are available in the evening, no one seems to know it. Should the institution decide that its image needs changing, there are appropriate factors developed in this study for work to begin.

**APPENDIX**  
**SURVEY INSTRUMENT**

**(Reduced in Size 30%)**

## CHARACTERISTICS OF COLLEGES

Below are 13 sets of terms which may be used to describe a college program. Please indicate, by putting a check mark on each of the scales below, where each of these sets of characteristics rates in evaluating your ideal college.

	(1	2	3	4	5	6	7)		
Superior academic reputation	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Inferior academic reputation	(1)
Large enrollment	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Small enrollment	(2)
Attractive campus	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Unattractive campus	(3)
Expensive	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Inexpensive	(4)
Well-known	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Unknown	(5)
Personal atmosphere	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Impersonal atmosphere	(6)
Near to home	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Far from home	(7)
Strong preparation for further schooling	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Weak preparation for further schooling	(8)
Effective career/job placement service	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Ineffective career/job placement service	(9)
Concerned/involved faculty	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Unconcerned/uninvolved faculty	(10)
Many recreational opportunities	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Few recreational opportunities	(11)
Many support services	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Few support services	(12)
Safe campus	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Unsafe campus	(13)
Gender	___ 1	Male	(14)					Age	___ 15-16)
	___ 2	Female							
Marital status	___ 1	Single	(17)					Family income	___ 1 0-10,000 (18)
	___ 2	Married							___ 2 10-25,000
	___ 3	Divorced							___ 3 25-50,000
	___ 4	Widowed							___ 4 50,000 or more
Distance from home to GRJC	___ 1	0 - 5 miles	(19)					Presently employed	___ 1 Yes (20)
	___ 2	5 - 15 miles							___ 2 No
	___ 3	15 - 30 miles							
	___ 4	more than 30 miles							
Do you have children in					YES (1)			NO (2)	
Pre-school ages					—			—	(21)
School - elementary to high					—			—	(22)
Post high school					—			—	(23)

Your previous rankings applied to your ideal college. Below, please use the same methods to rate your evaluation of your own experiences at Grand Rapids Junior College.

	(1	2	3	4	5	6	7)		
Superior academic reputation	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Inferior academic reputation	(24)
Large enrollment	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Small enrollment	(25)
Attractive campus	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Unattractive campus	(26)
Expensive	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Inexpensive	(27)
Well-known	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Unknown	(28)
Personal atmosphere	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Impersonal atmosphere	(29)
Near to home	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Far from home	(30)
Strong preparation for further schooling	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Weak preparation for further schooling	(31)
Effective career/job placement service	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Ineffective career/job placement service	(32)
Concerned/involved faculty	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Unconcerned/uninvolved faculty	(33)
Many recreational opportunities	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Few recreational opportunities	(34)
Many support services	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Few support services	(35)
Safe campus	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Unsafe campus	(36)

Are most of the classes you attend at GRJC on ☐ 1 Weekdays (37)  
☐ 2 Evenings  
☐ 3 Weekends

In your own words, please tell why you feel as you do about Grand Rapids Junior College.



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