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**BACCALAUREATE DEGREE PERSISTENCE AMONG ADULT LEARNERS:
THE CASE OF FEMALE AFRICAN-AMERICANS**

By

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A DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

BACCALAUREATE DEGREE PERSISTENCE AMONG ADULT LEARNERS THE CASE OF FEMALE AFRICAN-AMERICANS

By

Nickolas Fleezanis

This study focused on adult learner persistence to baccalaureate degree completion. By applying Howard S. Becker's construct of situational adjustment to understand the adjustment to the academic requirements of degree completion, this study's purpose was to gain a student's perspective in defining and understanding persistence. Through the interview process, students' reflections on and perceptions of the motivation, learning and performance that they felt were required to persist were probed.

Five African-American adult learners were selected from a group of seniors completing their bachelor's degrees based on age, minority status and proximity to degree completion. They attended a medium-sized urban, private university specializing in business related programs. The data collected from the interviews with the five women indicated the importance of the motivational aspects of persistence, which included established goals and commitment to degree completion, and the effects of external relationships, and the resiliency, independence and pride of these women.

The effect of grades and GPAs on persistence was a significant part of this study. The subject's resiliency when faced with performance that did not meet their expectations was critical to their persistence. Their ability to deal with grades and how grading pressure affected their ability to persist is discussed.

The data collected also indicated the importance of learning to assess the performance that each of the women had to elicit in order to complete their degrees. Learning to assess their performance dealt with such factors as learning to deal with time constraints, learning institutional rules and learning to deal with grades and GPAs.

The study also points out the limited influence the institution of higher education had on these particular students and their persistence to degree completion. The study exposes the fact that these particular African-American females brought with them the necessary attributes to complete their degrees.

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PREFACE

As an observer and participant in the lives and experiences of students who have completed the journey to degree completion, I feel both excited and privileged in being able to add their voices to the understanding of this process. Many of these students have allowed me to share their joys as they participated in commencement and afterwards when they received their diplomas.

For nearly three decades I have been allowed to become a part of this process of degree completion in the lives of many women and men who have come to me both for guidance and help. All too often, many of us in academia become callous toward and insulated from the students who look to us for direction on their journey to earning their baccalaureate degree. They are not numbers, random samples, variables or things to be counted. We forget that, like us, they need guidance and encouragement as they move toward a new sense of life, its meaning and purpose.

Throughout my own journey to degree completion over the past eight years as a commuter student, I found few fellow students or faculty who could be called true mentors. My own experience leads me to believe that facing the challenges of completing a degree is a solitary business. Those of us who find mentors to help us with the struggle are fortunate. What we need to remember is that education is a human enterprise that requires people from the presidency to the classroom who are able to give of themselves.

For the past 28 years, I have devoted the majority of my professional life to the education and advising of adult learners. I have chosen the topic of adult learner

persistence in the hopes that it will not only shed light on the topic, but also allow those who read it to gain a sense of the compassion that stimulates people to change. Educators are in the business of changing people's lives, often improving their quality of life and their appreciation of what being educated really means.

Attempting to gain an understanding of how these five African-American women were able to persist and change themselves to adapt to the academic situation that they faced was truly a challenge. However, through open and honest dialogues and sharing our own experiences and reflections as students, I feel that there was a bond that formed among us. My problems and experiences were not that different from their own.

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CHAPTER ONE

A Different Look at Persistence

The American College Testing (ACT) Corporation recently reported the number of students who complete a baccalaureate degree within five-years from four-year colleges and universities has steadily dropped to an all-time low of 52.1 percent in 1998 (ACT, 1999a). Analogous to this decrease in degree completion is the fact that “among these four-year institutions, public institutions experienced considerably lower graduation rates after five-years (42.9%) than private institutions (56.2%)” (Mashburn, 2000). ACT also reports that the numbers of students who drop-out between the first and second year has shown a steady increase over the past 15 years. ACT also reported that in 1998, more than one-fourth of freshmen (26.4%) failed to return to the institution they were first enrolled at for their second year (1999b). Appendixes D and E show non-returning rates of freshman among private and public institutions from 1983 through 2001.

Adults find themselves under increasing pressure from both the public and private sectors to become credentialed in order to maintain or advance their careers. Ever-increasing numbers of adult females, who make up the majority of the non-traditional re-entry student population, are pursuing degrees to gain employment or improve their career prospects (Caracelli, 1986). Appendix F displays a table that indicates the increase in the number of women that are attending institutions of higher education from 1969 through 1997 enrolled both part-time and full-time in public and private institutions.

Holliday’s research on women re-entering higher education indicates the following.

The re-entry woman today is no longer just the middle class, middle-

income, middle-aged woman with time on her hands for enrichment courses.

Re-entry women are represented more and more by minority, lower-income women who are single parents and heads of households and single women interested in career advancement. These women are serious, determined, enthusiastic, highly motivated, eager to learn and academically successful” (as quoted in Apps, 1988, p. 177).

Industry pressures to obtain degrees and increasing numbers of females seeking degrees, coupled with technological advancements that have displaced workers, have produced much of the current rise in numbers of adult learners returning to college campuses to obtain degrees (Ackell, 1982; Apps, 1988; Conrad, 1993). However, a disturbing fact still remains: the rate of persistence to degree completion among college students, especially among minority adult learners, has not increased over the last 30 years and has shown a decline in the past ten years (NCES, 1999).

In order to understand the nature of this project and to have a better grasp of the subjects selected for this study, the terms non-traditional student or adult learner must be defined. Jan-Marie Spanard, who has studied re-entry learners in higher education, gives a definition:

The average adult student has been defined as being older than 25, taking a half-time course load or less, living off-campus and commuting to classes (or

studying through distance learning means), working part-time or more, and generally having some responsibility for contributing to family finances (1990, p. 311).

Bean and Metzner have extended this definition:

A non-traditional student is older than 24, or does not live in a campus residence (e.g. is a commuter), or is a part-time student, or some combination of these three factors; or is not greatly influenced by the social environment of the institution; and is chiefly concerned with the institution's academic offerings (especially courses, certification, and degree) (1985, p. 489).

Adult learners are less concerned with the social and political realms of college life than are younger students; indeed, they simply wish to complete the institutional requirements for the degrees they seek (Bean and Metzner, 1985). Adult learners who return to higher education as commuter students are not generally interested in extracurricular activities, because in many cases, they have established personal lives which may include their own groups of friends and families. Their interests are in the academic areas of college life and the completion of degree programs (Ackell, 1982; Bean and Metzner, 1985; Apps, 1988; Conrad, 1993).

This study attempts to link the construct of situation adjustment to the problem of persistence among female African-American adult learners. Situational adjustment promotes the idea that change does occur during adulthood as opposed to many theorist

who believe that change in adulthood is an anomaly to be explained by earlier childhood development.

One of the earlier constructs that attempts to address the problem of change in adulthood, which also is the basic premise for this research, is taken from what Howard S. Becker calls "situational adjustment" (1964). Its implications for persistence will become the lens through which this research will be focused. Becker's basic assumption is that change in adulthood is not an aberration or, as he calls it, an "anomaly" from the established elements of personality or self (1964, p. 40). Change in adulthood is not merely an elaboration of the existing structure of norms, attitudes, values, and beliefs established in childhood and adolescence. Rather, such change should be viewed as an individual's ability to learn the requirements of a situation and assess the performance required to succeed within that situation (Becker, 1964).

The problem of persistence among adult learners who attempt to complete baccalaureate degrees needs to be studied within a socially constructed context that embraces the following overarching concept: "one of the most common mechanisms in the development of the person in adulthood is the process of situational adjustment" (Becker, 1964, p. 44). Becker admits that this is a rather gross conception, one whose underpinnings are grounded in an individual's motivation, ability to assess and learn the requirements of a situation, and ability to deliver the performance to succeed within it (1964).

According to Becker, "If he has a strong desire to continue, the ability to assess accurately what is required, and can deliver the required performance, the individual turns himself into the kind of person the situation demands" (1964, p. 44). Becker's construct

will allow the examination of the ways in which five female minority adult learners adjusted to the academic challenge of an institution of higher education (IHE) and successfully assessed and delivered the performances essential to completing baccalaureate degrees.

Becker's construct can be considered analogous to Brim's concept of learning adult roles. Becker describes the difference between role learning and situational adjustment in the following manner.

One learns to be a doctor or a policeman, learns the definitions of the statuses involved and the appropriate behavior with respect to them. But the notion of situational adjustment is more flexible than that of adult role learning. It allows us to deal with smaller units and make a finer analysis. We construct the process of learning an adult role by analyzing sequences of smaller and more numerous situational adjustments. We should have in our minds the picture of a person trying to meet the expectations he encounters in immediate face-to-face situations: doing well in today's chemistry class, managing to be poised and mature on tonight's date, surmounting the small crises of the moment. Sequences and combinations of small units of adjustment produce the larger units of role learning (1964, p. 44).

The construct of situational adjustment, embedded within five qualitative case studies, should enable the reader to view degree completion from a broader perspective rather than from a viewpoint that Rubenson (1982) describes as "reductionist" in character,

specifically, “studies in which the social context is treated secondary [sic] to individual psychological variables” (p. 62). By employing ethnographic techniques it was possible to understand what the five individual subjects faced in completing baccalaureate degrees. This understanding may stimulate institutional change that creates environments that improve the retention of adult learners. In his study of persistence among Hispanics in higher education Attinasi has urged, “what is needed are naturalistic, descriptive studies guided by research perspectives that emphasize the insider’s point of view” (1989, p. 250). The current study proposes to be just that.

The Broader Context of the Study

At this point it is beneficial to define the broader context within which the specific situation to be studied exists. The University and the five women chosen to be part of this study are located in a large mid-western metropolitan area composed of a city of just under a million people, within a county of more than two million people. The city has an 83% African-American resident majority (U.S. Census, 2000). The U.S. Census reports that within the county the University resides, single females make-up 13% of the home owners; while in the city the University is located, 13% of the home owners are single females. The entire demographic distribution of inhabitants in the southeastern region of this state is highly segregated by race and socioeconomic classifications. The river front of the city has been redeveloped by large corporate concerns and wealthier non-minority city dwellers, while many of the surrounding neighborhoods of the metropolis are in economic distress and decay.

The automotive industry and its suppliers dominate the area’s economy. The largest percentage of the minority population is employed in non-skilled or semi-skilled jobs

related to the automotive industry, health-related industries, banking and insurance industries, a decaying public school system, governmental agencies, and public utilities. The latest attempt to diversify the economic base of the metropolis has been the introduction of three separately owned gambling casinos.

Postsecondary institutions available to residents within the city consist of one large public research university, a public community college, a private religious affiliated university, and a variety of both public and private vocational schools. Three other large public community colleges and the independent non-profit university that the subjects of this study attend also serve urban and suburban residents.

The institution that the study's subjects attend is an independent, open enrollment, non-profit university offering associate's, bachelor's and master's degrees in business-related fields. The campus that the subjects of this study attended has a student body of 3100 composed predominantly of African-American women. Seventy percent of the students attend with the assistance of some form of financial aid, either from state or federal funding agencies (Stingel, 2000). Many of the minority women who attend the University are working with incomes that put them out of reach of federal and state grant programs. This forces them to be dependent on student loans to pay for tuition, books and fees, which adds to the personal debt of an already financially over-burdened single head of the household.

The Academic Situation Defined

Defining the academic situation is crucial if it is to become the focal point through which the conceptualization of situational adjustment can be applied to understand adult

learner persistence. Becker, Geer, and Hughes give the following definition of students' perceptions of the academic area of college:

The most important features in students' definition of the situation are the following:

A statement of the goals one can reasonably strive for in the situation; a description of the organizations within which action occurs and the demands they make on participants; the rules, both formal and informal, by which one's action is constrained; and the rewards and punishments one may look forward to as a consequence of his performance (p. 29).

The academic situation of college life, this study's focus, is controlled by the faculty and administration. Programs of study, with their systems of courses, credit hours, examinations, and grades are conditions set by the faculty (Becker, Geer, and Hughes, 1968). Various administrative departments within the institution establish the policies, rules and regulations, such as residency, graduation requirements, tuition, and fees. Given their complexities, these conditions often represent a formidable array of obstacles to which students must adjust.

In this realm of academic challenges and requirements, students exist in a state of what Becker, Geer, and Hughes call "subjection" (1968, p. 7). Students are relatively powerless to change or deviate from the traditional academic curriculum and the grading system that acts as its reward system. This rigidity in itself represents a unique, or at least unusual, situation for adults who are accustomed to having power and negotiating or

controlling the terms within the work and personal situations in which they find themselves.

Since many adult learners who return to higher education tend not to be affiliated with any institutionally sponsored group or organization, they are often faced with mediating the academic rigors that confront them on their own. Typical adult learners commute to campus in just enough time to attend class, have very little time to interact with faculty members outside the classroom, and, unless small informal support groups are established, face the requirements of the course work and institutional policies and procedures alone.

Murray described the older commuter student as experiencing what he called an “environmental press” (1938). In describing Murray’s “environmental press”, Bean and Metzner indicate that non-traditional students have

(a) less interaction in college environment with peers or faculty members and less interaction through extracurricular activities and the use of campus services, (b) class-related activities very similar to traditional students, and (c) much greater interaction with the noncollegiate, external environment (1985, pp. 489-490).

If the conceptualization of situational adjustment is to be applied to adult learner persistence within the academic area of college life, a clear understanding of how students assess their performances and gauge their levels of learning is essential. The

traditional means by which students judge their own performances and the performances of their peers are grades and grade point averages.

Within the academic area of college life, grades are viewed as the “chief institutionalized value and the institutional basis of punishment and reward in academic pursuits” (Becker, Gerr, and Hughes, 1968, p. 33). As students adjust to the academic situations that confront them in completing degree programs, they form what Becker and his associates (1995) call the “grade point perspective.” This perspective is acquired due to the placement of such a high value upon grades by the institutional culture that exists within formalized education.

This method of determining performance is universal within academia, with the exception of a small number of institutions that use the narrative portfolio method of academic evaluation. The letter grade remains the favored symbol indicating academic performance, with a few schools using numeral grading scales.

The grade point average is calculated by summing the total number of credit hours the student has attempted and dividing that sum into the sum of the grade values or honor points the student has achieved. This grading system is applied to the academic situation to evaluate individual projects, written assignments, examinations, entire courses, and is finally the summative or overall performance indicator in the form of the cumulative GPA.

Another defining element of the academic situation is the credit hour. The majority of institutions of higher education determine an exact number of credit hours that must be earned by students in their pursuit of degrees. Students determine their progress to degree completion by the credits that are earned within a variety of prescribed academic

areas, including general education, core courses, major requirements and elective courses. By receiving passing grades in these prescribed course areas students determine their success or failure toward their ultimate goal of degree completion.

Within the two standard types of course lengths, semester and quarter, there are total numbers of credit hours that must be earned. These credits are earned by receiving a passing grade of D or better. Within the semester system, usually with 15 to 18 week courses, the total number of credit hours that must be earned to achieve the baccalaureate degree is commonly 120. In the quarter system, with courses traditionally 10 to 12 weeks in length, the total number of credits needed for degree completion is commonly 180. These totals may vary from institution to institution.

A definitive explanation of the credit hour is given by the National Center for Educational Statistics:

Credit Hour: The unit by which an institution may measure its course work. The number of hours per week in a class and the number of weeks in the session usually define the number of credit hours assigned to a course. One credit hour is usually assigned to a class that meets fifty minutes a week over a period of a semester, quarter, or term; in laboratory, fieldwork, drawing, music, practical arts, physical education, or similar type of instruction, one credit hour is assigned for a session that meets two or three hours a week for a semester, quarter, or term (1968, p. 15).

There are two components to this time-to-credit ratio, lecture and non-lecture course delivery options, with a third determining component based on the amount of time spent by the student outside of the classroom. C. James Quann (1979) gives an authoritative and comprehensive definition of all three components:

Credit Ratios: Academic credit is a measure of the total time commitment required of a typical student in a particular course of study. Total time consists of three components: (1) time spent in class; (2) time in laboratory, studio, field work, or other scheduled activity; (3) time devoted to reading, studying, problem solving, writing, or preparation. One quarter or semester credit hour is assigned in the following ratio of component hours per week devoted to the course of study: (1) lecture courses – one contact hour for each credit hour, two hours of outside work implied; (2) laboratory or studio course – at least two contact hours for each credit hour (one hour of outside preparation implied); (3) independent study – at least three hours of work per week for each credit hour (p. 192).

As students matriculate through their degree programs they must maintain certain standards in order to proceed. Minimum grade-point-averages must be achieved at specific levels (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior or credit hour ranges) or students are put on probation or eventually dismissed from the institution. For high achievement, rewards are given in the form of placement on deans' lists or awarding of scholarships, which afford the recipients a higher status among their fellow students. Students become

keenly aware of their academic standing as a performance criterion and how it may affect their reaching the goals they have set.

Rationale for the Study

It is clearly to the benefit of academia and society to understand the dynamics of adult learner persistence to degree completion. As William G. Tierney puts it

the successful retention of students offers at least three benefits: the student will be able to reap the rewards that a college degree affords, the college or university will be able to maintain the income that derives from the student's attendance, and society will be able to utilize the skills of students in becoming more productive (1992, p. 604).

Since adult learners account for nearly half of all enrolled students attending college (NCES, 1999), it is essential to know more than the individual statistics, demographics, and the levels of social and academic integration that students must achieve in order to complete baccalaureate degrees. Adult learners generally do not face the same needs that adolescents do for socialization and maturation experiences to be provided by the colleges they attend. Most adult learners are part-time students, commuting to college campuses for the express purpose of attending classes to obtain credentials. In most cases adult learners, unlike adolescent resident students, do not have the luxury of large blocks of time to interact with faculty and peers one-on-one or in small groups. Bean and Metzner correctly argue that the adult learner's challenge in collegiate life is not one of social integration or socialization by the institution of higher education (1985). Adult

learners come to the college campus having much of their socialization of norms, attitudes, values, and beliefs already formalized. Chickering and Havighurst indicate that adult learners

usually have little interest in establishing new relationships with fellow students because they already have an existing range of friendships. They will have little interest in extracurricular activities, special interest groups, and the like because they already are overcommitted to school, church, and/or community groups and projects (1990, p.37).

Adult learners often come to the college environment already participating in a variety of social roles; indeed they are usually connected to many social institutions, such as education, families, the economy, and the political/legal system (Elder, 1978, 1980). As adults reassume the roles of students, they face situations that place these newfound or reacquired roles in conflict with the other roles in their lives. Studies conducted at Empire State College in New York (1984) and by Apps (1986) describe the conflicts between student and non-student roles and the available time to cope with the situations these conflicting roles impose.

Being a student is a socially constructed phenomenon that must be looked at from within the confines of the social and academic situations created by the college or university. The multiplicity of social roles and situations that adult learners must cope with and adjust to makes the construct of situational adjustment not only appealing as a

lens through which to view adult learner persistence to completion of a degree program but also as a means to look at this process from the individual student's perspective.

Statement of the Problem

Although adult learners make up nearly half of the students entering colleges and universities across America, less than half of these reentering adults persist to complete baccalaureate degrees, a rate consistent with traditional student persistence rates (NCES, 1999). In an attempt to investigate this problem, this study will describe the experiences of five minority female adult learners whose perceptions about completing baccalaureate degrees will be framed within Becker's construct of situational adjustment.

Three major research questions will be examined:

1. As African-American female adult learners struggle to succeed in the academic situations they face, what attributes do they bring to the academic situation that allows them to be successful?
2. As African-American female adult learners face the challenges of degree completion, what essential factors are learned in their adjustment to the demands of the academic situation?
3. As African-American female adult learners strive to adjust to the academic situations they face in the completing degrees, how do they assess their performance in the academic situation?

Significance and Implications of the Study

A theoretical shift in the research is necessary if academia is to understand adult learner persistence to degree completion. This theoretical shift can occur only when educational researchers begin to view adults as capable of changing their behaviors based

on the experiences they have in adulthood rather than being permanently tied to the deep-seated components of personality and self developed in childhood and adolescence.

As has been noted earlier, adults do not need the broad socialization experiences that adolescents require (Ackell, 1982; Bean and Metzner, 1985; Apps, 1988; Conrad, 1993). Thus, adults are less likely to feel the need to integrate socially into the institution's cultural life. Instead, many adults must adjust to the academic situations created by colleges and universities in order to complete the requirements necessary to earn a degree. This necessity makes the construct of situational adjustment a more effective means to examine adult learner persistence, for it enables researchers to see how adult learners determine and succeed at demonstrating the acceptable behaviors and skills required of the particular degree programs they seek to complete.

Socialization is a learning process, according to Bragg, in which one must acquire the "acceptable behavior, values and attitudes for the performance of a particular role" (1976, p. 6). Bragg goes on to explain that these behaviors, values and attitudes "are not inherent in an individual, but must be acquired" (1976, p. 6). Therefore, if socialization is a learning process for adolescents who enter college life, it must be broad ranging and encompassing the academic, socio-political, and personal areas of their lives. For adult learners, the emphasis of any socialization process must be on relearning and further developing the role of student. Their pursuit of degrees requires them to adjust primarily to the academic area of college life and the situations that lead to degree completion.

The theoretical underpinnings of Howard S. Becker's construct of situational adjustment stem from the social psychological domain, specifically that of symbolic

interaction. Becker, who attempts to explain the “development of the person in adulthood,” continues his explanation of situational adjustment:

If we view situational adjustment as a major process of personal development, we must look to the character of the situation for the explanation of why people change as they do. We ask what there is in the situation that requires the person to act in a certain way or to hold certain beliefs. We do not ask what there is in him that requires the action or belief. All we need to know of the person is that for some reason or another he desires to continue his participation in the situation or to do well in it. From this we can deduce that he will do what he can to do what is necessary in that situation. Our further analysis must adjust itself to the character of the situation (1964, p. 44).

Becker’s construct of situational adjustment is used to frame the process of persistence to degree completion which include what motivated these five subjects to return and complete a degree; the critical learning occurred during the degree completion process that allows these subjects to succeed; and what performances were necessary in completing their degree programs. Thus, situational adjustment focused on the academic area of college, is used to bring to light the students’ perspectives in understanding the process of degree completion. Linked to the concept of situational adjustment is the resiliency that each of the subjects displayed throughout the degree completion process.

CHAPTER TWO

WHAT DOES PAST RESEARCH TELL OF PERSISTENCE?

We learn from the literature, a great deal about the psychological and social characteristics of students: their personality traits, their attitudes on a variety of subjects, their social class, religion, and ethnicity. We can learn how these attributes are related to one another and how, taken singly or in combination, they correlate with student academic performance in school and their adjustment in later life. But we will not learn much about what they do, how they feel about it, what they think they are doing and why.

Becker, Geer, and Hughes, 1995

The current concept of student persistence in higher education has been shaped by several stakeholders deeply committed to the processes and missions of academia. Administrators of colleges and universities, especially since the 1970s, have been keenly interested in the phenomenon of persistence due to the projected declines in traditional college-age populations and the changing composition of student bodies. Trying to keep more students in school suddenly became an answer to the projected problem of declining enrollments. Thus works by researchers like Astin, Tinto, Chickering, Cope, Lenning, Terenzini, Pascarella, et al, which tried to determine who stays in school and why they stay became of great interest to academic stakeholders. However, this past research on persistence was driven by many theorists who took a narrow view of

what it means to persist. This narrow view only saw a single outcome to persisting: degree completion. But positive outcomes from persistence for adult learners do not necessarily result in earning a degree. They may result in completing a course or series of courses, either for certification or just for the sake of learning.

Characteristics Associated with Persistence

The preponderance of research on attrition has been focused on a population sample composed primarily of residential, predominantly white, male students aged 18 to 24 years old (McNeely, 1937; Iffert, 1958; Summerskill, 1962; Chickering, 1969; Feldman, 1969; Spady, 1970, 1971; Feldman and Newcomb, 1970; Tinto, 1975, 1982, 1987; Cope and Hannah, 1975; Pascarella, 1980, 1986; Raimst, 1981; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1983, 1986; Pascarella and Wolfle, 1985). This narrow sampling of higher education's student population and the theoretical premises that have evolved from research on this narrow sample have limited application to the diverse and older population of students who attend colleges and universities today.

A significant portion of the research done over the past 60 years dealing with persistence was focused on traditional 18 to 24 year old, middle class, white, male, residential students. In all fairness to earlier researchers, however, the vast majority of college students were white males ages 18-24 throughout much of the first half of the twentieth century. Moreover, college was and still is in many quarters perceived as a rite of passage from adolescence to early adulthood (Feldman and Newcomb, 1970; Kasworm, 1990; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991; Tierney, 1992).

This youth orientation in much of the past research makes it difficult to rely on when confronting issues of persistence and change among adult learners (Pascarella and

Terenzini, 1990). Indeed, to draw meaningful inferences about the 25 to 65 year old re-entering students who face academia today requires research centered in the realities of adult students.

Much of the research conducted in the 1960s and 1970s on student persistence analyzed characteristics focused on four major issues, as reviewed by Lenning, Beal, and Sauer (1980): student characteristics, institutional characteristics, interactions, and external forces and variables.

Student Characteristics

Five student characteristics are noted: academics, demographics, aspirations and motivations, finances, and employment. All correlated to student persistence. *Academic factors* include such characteristics as high school grade point averages and academic aptitudes as measured by such tests as the SAT, ACT, GRE, GMAT, TABE, and entrance examinations. Poor study habits, first-term grades and the academic rating of high schools are additional academic measures of persistence to degree completion. These academic factors remain the strongest predictors of persistence.

Demographic factors, included but were not limited to, age, sex, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and even hometown location and size of high school. All of these variables were studied to determine persistence rates and causal effects on attrition among traditional, residential college students. These factors have been found to have less predictive value and have even given conflicting results when applied to both traditional and nontraditional student populations (Astin, 1964, 1972, 1975; Albino, 1973; Pedrini, 1976; Pantages and Creedon, 1978; Brabant and Garbin, 1976; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1979; Cope, 1971; Stark, 1975; DiCesare, Sedlacek, and Brooks, 1972).

The third group of causal factors under student characteristics contains, student *aspirations and motivation*. Pantages and Creedon (1978) in their review of the research on persistence concluded that the evidence “failed to establish relationships among levels of motivation, commitment to the college, the strength and content of educational goals, and attrition” (p. 71). However, there are research findings dealing with commitment by Hackman and Dysinger (1970) the effect of clear-cut goals on persistence by Angers (1961) and the relationship of career and college affiliated to goal certainty by Abel (1966) and Demitroff (1974) that demonstrate a positive effect on persistence. These variables encompass issues such as level of degree aspiration, transfer plans, commitment to the institution, peer-group influences, vocational and occupational goals, and satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the college experience. Motivation plays a significant role in the construct of situational adjustment as conceived by Becker and employed in this study.

The fourth set of variables under student characteristics identified by Lenning, Beal, and Sauer was *financial factors*. Insufficient finances is usually the most quoted reason for students’ leaving higher education. Even a misconceived perception of financial problems may cause some students to withdraw. Financial aid and how the various forms of aid are applied can have different effects on how students persist. Scholarships and grants used to finance education as opposed to loans, especially large loan amounts, have a positive impact on persistence. Astin (1975) claims that the type of financial assistance can influence persistence; for example, “loans work negatively when combined with grants, work study is best with no grants, and any type of aid is best if not combined with other forms” (as cited in Lenning, Beal, and Sauer, 1980).

Research that looked at *employment* while participating in higher education found that working part-time, 25 hours or less a week, improves persistence rates, even in the freshman year (Astin, 1975). Working at a non-campus-based job has a positive effect on persistence unless the off-campus job is related to a career opportunity and is held for a long period of time. Full-time employment has been found to have a detrimental effect on persistence (Tinto, 1993). But not enough research has been done to confirm this factor's importance when applied to adult learners, many of whom attend part-time while working full-time.

The research on student characteristics shows a wide variety of factors that have been isolated and studied in terms of their relevance to student persistence. Academic factors still remain the most significant element in predicting how well a student does, but many adult learners return to colleges and universities with average to low-average previous academic performance and achieve average to above-average grade point averages and complete degrees. Demographic factors have little if any correlation to adult learner success; Becker dismisses these factors as irrelevant to an adult's ability to adjust to new situations. However, motivation did play a significant role in how the five adults learners in this study adjusted to the academic situation they entered in order to complete their degrees.

The last two student characteristics mentioned in this section, financial and employment factors, have both positive and negative effects on persistence among traditional students, but the adult learner seems to persist while employed either full or part-time and manages the burden of cost if sufficiently goal oriented and motivated.

Institutional Characteristics

The next group of factors isolated by Lenning, Beal and Sauer, deals with the institutional characteristics and their effect on why students leave college. Only in the last 15 years have researchers concentrated their efforts on the college environment and how it affects persistence rates (Pantages and Creedon, 1978). Lenning, Beal and Sauer (1980) divide these environmental influences into three areas: the *objective environment*; the environment created by *student involvement*; and the codified *administrative policies and procedures* of an institution.

The *objective environment* is comprised of institutional characteristics and services that create the situations within which students exist. These institutional characteristics were identified as (1) image, (2) public versus private status, (3) religious affiliation, (4) housing, (5) student services, (6) academic advising and orientation programs, and (7) institutional mission.

The institution's *image* creates an aura that can influence retention. More prestigious schools have higher retention rates partly due to the "perceived benefits for a student that outweigh the dissatisfactions" (Lenning, Beal, Sauer, 1980). The level of selectivity is a major factor in both the school's image and its ability to retain students.

Whether an institution is *public or private* has a bearing on its rate of retention and the numbers of students who complete their degrees. Highly selective four-year private schools have the highest degree completion rates, followed by highly selective four-year *publics*. Two-year public schools have fewer students who persist to degree completion. Students who attend two-year private schools may have differing educational goals and ~~are~~ more likely to leave school before they finish programs. Four-year institutions have ~~adv~~antages that do not exist at the two-year institutions in that they can offer a

greater array of services, including residence halls, financial assistance, employment opportunities and academic prestige.

Students attending institutions that have *religious affiliations* tend to persist to a greater extent than those who attend non-religiously affiliated institutions. Roman Catholic colleges show a greater degree completion rate than Protestant colleges. Astin (1975) related this phenomenon to Protestant parental attitudes as reported by students. However, Astin also found that both Catholic and Protestant affiliation had a positive effect on the probability of graduating (1975).

The *cost* of completing a college degree has a definite positive correlation to degree completion. The most expensive institutions retain the most students. It is important to keep in mind that students will suffer the high costs and other institutional flaws because of the prestige and power the institution's name exerts once they have completed their degree programs and moved into their careers (Astin, 1975; Nelson, 1972; Panos and Astin, 1968).

Housing is another institutional characteristic that affects retention or degree completion rates. Students who live on campus as compared to those who live off campus or at home had higher rates of retention (Alfert, 1966; Nasatir, 1969; DiCesare, Sedlacek, and Brooks, 1972; Chickering, 1974; Astin, 1975; Velez, 1985). There is a positive correlation to increased persistence for men who live in apartments off campus and a negative correlation for women. Fraternity or sorority housing has a stronger correlation to persistence than on-campus dormitory housing (Nasatir, 1969). Students who live at home through their freshman year and move into dormitory living on-campus their second year show more persistence than those living at home over the four to seven

period of degree completion. Living on campus facilitates the potential for more interaction between faculty, peers and extracurricular activities allowing for the social integration that Spady and Tinto allude to in their research on persistence. However, higher education demography has changed. It is estimated that nearly 60 percent of the total enrollment in higher education is composed of commuter students living at home or with parents (Stewart, Merrill, and Saluri, 1985).

Student services are also grouped under the objective environment when considering their effects on persistence relating to institutional characteristics. Since Lenning, Beal, and Sauer wrote their essay on persistence, in which they stated that little research had been done on the effect of student services on retention, there has been increased research on student service initiatives tied to the concept of enrollment management (Hossler, 1984, 1986; Hossler and Bean, 1990).

The research done in the area of student services, according to Lenning, Beal and Sauer, consisted largely of studies on counseling services. In general the findings indicated that effective counseling services increased retention rates and numbers of students who persisted to graduation. The unfortunate reality is that many students are unwilling to take advantage of counseling services. Therefore, it is essential that these counseling services either become more intrusive or students be made more aware of them if they are to improve retention.

Academic advising and *orientation programs* are effective ways to improve retention and graduation rates when employed in an enrollment management program. The positive effects of academic advising and orientation programs can be amplified further when combined with what Lenning, Beal and Sauer call learning-assistance centers.

These centers can be of a developmental/remedial nature, as most were when Lenning, Beal and Sauer wrote their synopsis of retention and attrition research in 1980 under the auspices of the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems. Today most learning-assistance centers are still remedial, offering reading, mathematics and study skills sessions, as well as writing seminars and tutoring to underprepared or academically at-risk students.

Another factor isolated under institutional characteristics and the objective environment is *institutional mission*. Lenning, Beal and Sauer indicate that institutions with well-defined mission statements have higher rates of retention. Institutions with well-defined mission statements attract students who fit the institutions' academic and campus cultures and persist to graduation at much higher rates. The authors feel that the consistency and accurate communication of a college's mission through its marketing strategies to prospective students and stakeholders is crucial to the retention of its students.

The second grouping of factors that falls under the heading of institutional characteristics, as outlined by Lenning, Beal and Sauer, is *student involvement*. Student involvement includes such factors as extracurricular activities, close friends, student-faculty relationships, and academic programs. Student involvement or what Tinto (1975, 1987) calls "student integration" has evolved from the work of Spady (1970) and Astin (1975, 1977), who claim that student interaction at all levels of the institution is critical to the persistence and retention of students.

Involvement in extracurricular activities reflects an individual's interpersonal involvement while attending college. Any positive effect of involvement in

extracurricular activities could be attributed to the student's participation in an "influential peer group" (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991). Students who are involved in extracurricular activities tend to have high educational aspirations according to Pascarella and Terenzini, who in turn made the assertion that association with this peer culture and its group norms produces beneficial effects on its members.

Similarly, students who develop close relationships with other students or members of the institutional culture have a higher propensity to persist. A retention study reported by Cope (1978) was designed to cultivate bonds between students and "significant others". These "significant others" could have been faculty, staff and other students who formed "meaningful relations" with certain students. The results of studies by Husband (1976) and Pascarella and Terenzini (1979) support the contention that close friends do positively influence persistence.

The third factor isolated by Lenning, Beal and Sauer under the heading of student involvement is *student-faculty relationships*. Pantages and Creedon (1978) indicated that "the quality of the relationship between a student and her or his professors is of crucial importance in determining satisfaction with the institution" (cited in Lenning, Beal and Sauer, 1980). Studies done by Pascarella and Ternzini 1978, 1979 support the Tinto model that indicates the frequency and quality of student contact with faculty is a contributing factor in retention. This emphasis on student-faculty interaction has led to the current concept of learning communities that emphasize the amount and quality of contact that students have with both faculty and institutional staff as means of fostering learning and upgrading retention. Tinto has also modified his model to emphasize the influence of faculty on student retention.

The fourth factor that Lenning, Beal and Sauer categorize under student involvement is ***academic programs***. Alexander Astin (1975) pointed out that retention could be positively influenced when students are involved in honors programs, foreign study programs and by challenging courses through credit-by-examination. Astin's reasoning is that "students who are involved in the academic life of the institution are more likely to expend the effort necessary to get good grades than are students who are not involved" (as cited in Lenning, Beal and Sauer, p. 21).

Students who are allowed to work within the institution as work-study employees, research assistants, peer tutors, or peer counselors are all more likely to persist.

Lenning, Beal and Sauer's final institutional characteristic is ***administrative policies and procedures***. The three authors indicated that research was lacking in the understanding of how institutional policies and procedures influence student willingness to stay in school. They have indicated, however, that the punitive nature of many administrative policies and procedures has a definite negative effect on retention and persistence to degree completion. Pantages and Creedon (1978) referred to a greater humanizing of the interactions between students and institutional staff members as resulting in benefits for both the institution and its students. The less the policies and procedures of an institution impede student matriculation, the more likely it is that students will remain. Therefore this phenomenon of stopping out should be made less painful and punitive since it is a circumstance that occurs more frequently with adults who intend to complete degree programs. Some institutions penalize adult learners who stop out either by making them repeat courses they have had or by reviewing their programs of study and adding courses to their curriculum if the program is not

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Interactions

The next major set of variables related to student persistence as outlined by Lenning, Beal and Sauer is *interactions*. The 1980s saw much research on persistence and attrition focused on the outcome of the interaction between students and institutions of higher education. “The characteristics of the interaction, not the student or institution alone, affect a student’s decision to stay or drop out. Students remaining in school and attaining goals or completing a program represent a fit between a variety of factors relating to both the student and the environment” (Lenning, Beal and Sauer 1980, p. 43). Those students who leave an institution are said to suffer from *lack of fit* (Spady, 1971; Tinto, 1975).

Lenning, Beal and Sauer attribute a wide range of variables to the term *fit*, which can include both “moral and social integration, meaningful contact between the student and the faculty, development of relationships between students and those who care about them, and the responsiveness of the institution to the need students feel” (1980, p. 21). Other issues that relate to student/institutional fit are values and attitudes, expectations and their fulfillment, student/faculty intellectual interaction at the individual course level, and meeting the demands of the institution while gaining satisfaction in doing so. All of the variables that relate to *interactions* between the student and institution can either enhance or exacerbate persistence.

External Variables

A shift in emphasis occurred during the mid-1980s that highlighted environmental or external variables in the research on persistence or retention (Metzner and Bean, 1987; Bean and Vesper, 1992; Hanniford and Sagaria, 1994; Kasworm, 1990;

Spanard, 1990; Tinto, 1987). This shift in emphasis looked at large scale societal influences dealing with national economic trends, attitude shifts toward higher education, and governmental mandates. Lenning, Beal and Sauer list this shift as the fourth and last major category of factors that can influence persistence.

These external forces and variables can be broad national occurrences such as *recessions* or *local economic disruptions* such as the loss of a major industry. Such negative economic phenomena can have positive effects on enrollments and persistence rates by increasing the number of individuals able to take advantage of higher education opportunities or encouraging those already enrolled to persist in completing their degrees. On the other hand, positive economic forces such as boom times and low unemployment rates can negatively affect retention by drawing students out of the classroom into the job market.

Another external variable that has affected enrollment and retention is the *military draft*. For example, during the Vietnam era many males who were eligible for military service remained in school to avoid being drafted. If compulsory military service were to be reinstated, there could well be a similar increase in both the enrollment and retention of male students looking to avoid mandatory enlistment assuming that full-time student status caused one to be exempt from military service.

The nation's attitude toward college attendance and its implications for employment and cost can have a direct bearing on the retention of students. As long as the perception that a college education is crucial to obtaining better paying jobs persists, students will enroll and attempt to complete degrees. Here again, both national and local phenomena can affect attitudes concerning the value of a college education and one's willingness

to stay in school (Apps, 1988; McPherson and Schapiro, 1991).

With the publication of the report A Nation at Risk in 1984, attitudes toward education took on a negative posture influencing federal and state governments and the national media to portray the nation's educational system in a negative light. This change in attitude has prompted the demand for more accountability from institutions of both secondary and postsecondary education from all levels of government and accreditation commissions. Yet, despite this negative national attitude, enrollments in colleges and universities continue to increase.

Much of the research reviewed by Lenning, Beal, and Sauer leads to a profile of separate qualities, characteristics, and circumstances, which may predict students' abilities to persist and complete degree programs. But in spite of these predictive factors of persistence, many adult learners who do not fit the successful persistence profile overcome the obstacles that confront them and complete their degrees.

Lenning, Beal and Sauer (1980) reviewed 20 years of research directed at issues of retention within higher education. Three other notable studies critique the large body of knowledge dealing with attrition and retention in higher education, which was gathered over different periods of time. Feldman and Newcomb published the Impact of College on Students in 1969; Pantages and Creedon wrote a comprehensive article, Review of Educational Research in 1978; and Pascarella and Terenzini published their major work How College Affects Students in 1991. These three works chronicle research from the mid-1920s to the 1980s, nearly 60 years of research that dealt with the effects of college on students and the factors that may be associated with why students leave or stay in college. In spite of all this research, in 2001 academia still suffers the same attrition

rates that existed for over 60 years.

Gekowski and Schwartz (1961) in their research on student persistence and related factors, critiqued earlier research which focused on student attrition by pointing out that such studies dealt either with students who persisted or those who dropped out. No comparisons were done, especially in retrospective studies, and so the findings from these research studies are suspect because of their lack of control groups. Gekowski and Schwartz also pointed out that these studies focused on too few variables at one point in time.

Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) critiqued the applicability of most of the research, theories, and models that have arisen over the past 60 years in explaining issues of retention, persistence and change among a more diverse and older population of students entering higher education in the 1990s. These two authors also observed that “the absence of rigorous research on the effects of college on...older students is particularly embarrassing to the higher education research community” (p. 90).

The majority of the research reviewed in this chapter has dealt with the analysis of isolated or grouped variables and their effects upon attrition of traditional students at residential institutions. What all of this research has accomplished is to give us a profile of what an individual who persists to degree completion in higher education should be.

The complexity of the interactions among student, environmental, and institutional characteristics is so complex that no single study could possibly account for them all in a coherent and rational manner. In an attempt to describe the complexity of interactions and the multitude of intervening variables involved in researching attrition, Spady (1970) admitted, “since no one theoretical model or research design could possibly

systematize or operationalize the specific relationships among all of the variables..., we do not attempt the absurd” (p. 77).

Tinto's Model of Persistence

The most widely implemented model of retention and attrition, the Tinto Student Integration Model of social and academic integration, is based on the premise that students with greater social and academic integration, are more likely to stay in college and finish degrees than students with lesser degrees of integration. “As initially conceived by Tinto, the model was designed to identify and understand the collegiate processes that facilitate or impede baccalaureate-degree completion at a four-year residential college” (Grosset, 1991).

Tinto borrows from Van Gennep's research on the rites of passage in tribal societies and Durkheim's social theory of suicide (Ashar and Skenes, 1993). Tinto uses these two theoretical frameworks of Van Gennep and Durkheim that both point to the social and intellectual integration of the individual into society to develop his theory of student social and academic integration into the social structure of institutions of higher education.

Tinto uses Van Gennep to develop an analogy between the passage to adulthood in tribal societies or cultures and persistence in college. "In order to enter adulthood or persist in college, individuals need to move through and complete the three phases of separation, transition, and incorporation" (Ashar and Skenes, 1993. p. 91). Tinto uses Durkheim to create a second analogy between a specific type of suicide, characterized by Durkheim as egotistical suicide, and a student's leaving college. Egotistical suicide, as described by Durkheim, results from one's inability to integrate with or establish

membership within a community or society (Ashar and Skenes, 1993). Clearly, Tinto builds his model of student persistence on the framework of social integration within the culture of the institution.

Tinto's work is also based on that of Spady (1970) and corroborates the research of Astin (1975, 1977), which focused on the importance of involvement for later college outcomes, specifically completions of degrees. Methodologically, much of the research based on Tinto's model was of a short-term nature, looking at causal relationships from term to term. Such work is of little help when examining a more longitudinal outcome such as degree completion.

Much of the research arising from Tinto's causal model of integration deals with traditional students who matriculate at residential four-year institutions. This research has generated certain institutional initiatives that have reduced attrition while increasing retention among this traditional cohort of college students attending residential institutions. However, Tinto's model has produced mixed results when applied either to institutions other than four-year residential colleges and universities or to adult learners (Weidman, 1985; Stoecker, Pascarella and Wolfle, 1988; Starks, 1987; Walleri and Peglow-Hoch, 1988; Metzner and Bean, 1987; Lichtman, Bass, Ager, 1993). Indeed, an increasing amount of research points to the ineffectiveness of this emphasis on social integration when applied to the adult learner.

According to Pappas and Loring (1985), "The concept of persistence or retention must be thought of differently for adults" (p. 139). Adult learners come to college not only with a broader range of experiential learning but also with external life situations and roles that affect their involvements with the cultures of institutions of higher

education. In many cases being a student is a secondary or tertiary role for an adult learner.

Although researchers have found the Tinto Model has some bearing when tested against the persistence of adult learners in terms of academic integration, specifically grades and the formal and informal interplay with faculty, its influence is not as profound in the areas of extracurricular activities and fellow student interplay (Ashar and Skenes, 1993; Cabrera, Nora, and Castaneda, 1993). Because adult learners often have external pressures and responsibilities as parents and employees that have an effect on college involvement (as shown by Metzner and Bean 1987), Tinto incorporated an external commitments component to his revised 1986 model of student attrition.

However, Tinto's model still has a traditional-residential student focus, as does much of the research on student persistence. Indeed, many educational researchers continue to apply these models to educational settings that have drastically changed over the last twenty years. With 37% of the total postsecondary enrollment concentrated in community colleges (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2000), augmented to a lesser extent by enrollments in urban commuter colleges and universities, it becomes clear why Tinto's Model based predominately on traditionally aged residential student experiences shows mixed or contradictory results when applied to the adult learners who commute to non-residential and residential colleges and universities.

Research on Adult Learner Persistence

The stark fact remains that there is a limited pool of research on adult learner persistence toward degree completion. Bean and Metzner (1985), in reviewing the work of Spady, Tinto, Pascarella, and Bean in terms of why traditional students drop out

of college, proposed a lessening of emphasis on social integration as a key element in adult learner persistence. They also support the claim that little research has been done with adult learners and their persistence to degree completion, especially at non-residential institutions. In a follow-up study, Metzner and Bean (1987) stressed the necessity of additional research encompassing adult learner attrition.

Although older part-time students have sometimes been included with traditional students in studies of persistence, little research has been devoted exclusively to these non-traditional students beyond a simple tabulation of dropout rates. For example, in an extensive literature review based on several hundred studies (Bean and Metzner, 1985), only four specifically examined persistence for part-time commuter students, and just five studies provided separate analyses for older commuter students.

There are clearly differences in how adults perceive the college experience as compared to 18-year-old freshmen who reside on campus. A growing number of researchers have looked at these differences and have developed a core of knowledge that begins to explain attrition and persistence of the adult learner (Brown and Robinson, 1988; Caracelli, 1986; Grosset, 1991; Hu, 1985; Joseph, 1980; Metzner and Bean, 1987; Staman, 1980; Starks, 1987). Still, an urgent need exists to study and develop new perspectives that more accurately examine the broader contextual issues that affect adult learners matriculating toward degree completion. These broader issues include institutional, personal, and external societal factors that negatively or positively affect adult non-traditional student persistence.

What is currently known about adult learners and the factors that discourage or support their persistence to the completion of baccalaureate degrees? The vast amount of

research done with traditional students has given us myriad characteristics and traits that typify the individual who completes a college degree. The current study will take from this vast array of research variables that deter or enhance adult learner persistence.

Adult learners who complete degrees possess a definite *goal orientation or commitment*, either personal or career directed (Weidman, 1985; Metzner and Bean, 1987; Walleri and Peglow-Hoch, 1988). The greatest number of reentering adult learners on college campuses today are returning to complete degrees started when they were younger. "They are seeking not only an institutional credential but also new careers or job promotions, enhanced life competence, or simply to continue their love of learning" (Kasworm, 1990, p. 366).

Age is also a factor of adult learner persistence to completion of degrees; indeed, "students who entered postsecondary education at age 18 or younger were more than twice (51 versus 19 percent) as likely as those who entered between the ages of 20 and 29 to have reported completing a baccalaureate degree within five years, and five times more likely than students who entered at age 30 or later" (NCES, 1996, p. 1). This information poses a real challenge for higher education since the majority of students entering postsecondary education are now non-traditional, adult learners, with women comprising the largest sector of this pool of students (Caracelli, 1986).

However, research coming from the community college sector stimulates some questions about previous findings that indicate older students are less likely to persist than younger students (Price, 1993; Windham, 1994). At one community college, a sample of 1,140 first-time students found that students ages 20-24 were at a higher risk of dropping out and not finishing a degree program than any other age group (Feldman,

1993). Another study by Mohammadi conducted at Patrick Henry Community College in Virginia, found attrition rates after one year of attendance to be highest for students ages 23-35 and 45-50 (1994). This finding may be explained by the fact that community colleges and other institutions of higher education have not created situations that lead to degree completion for present-day adult learners. Low persistence or degree completion rates can be partially attributed to insufficient efforts by “universities to understand the educational needs and wants” of this returning pool of students aged 25-64 (Hu, 1985, p. 201).

Full-time attendance, which amounts to three or more classes per term and is also referred to as the level of intensity of enrollment within a college setting, has been one of the most significant characteristics of persisters (Windham, 1994; Moore, 1995). Indeed, part-time attendance has been identified as characteristic of non-persisters (Lanni, 1992; Feldman, 1993; Price, 1993). "Half of baccalaureate degree seekers (52 percent) who first enrolled on a full-time basis reported having completed that degree within five years, compared to less than 15 percent of those who first enrolled as less than full-time" (NCES, 1996). Both *intensity* and *continuity* of enrollment have effects on students' persistence to degree completions. Continuity of enrollment refers to the continuous nature of a student's enrollment pattern throughout the period of degree completion. Faculty in many instances view part-time attendance as a lack of commitment, especially among female students (Hall, 1997).

Full-time employment has a definitely deleterious effect on degree completion among males pursuing baccalaureate degrees and females seeking associate degrees (Hanniford and Sagaria, 1994). Hanniford and Sagaria also found that a ***change***

in relationship status or the *birth of a child* often act as incentives to completing degree programs (1994).

The likelihood of students (including adult learners) persisting to completion of baccalaureate degrees is significantly higher depending on the *type of institution* at which they began. The National Center for Educational Statistics reported a 57 percent completion rate for students beginning their baccalaureate degrees at four-year institutions in contrast to 8 percent at two-year institutions (1996). Of course, this finding could simply reflect the fact that community colleges are traditionally open enrollment institutions, while many four-year institutions are more selective in their admissions procedures. However, a matter for serious consideration remains in that more minorities and women in lower socio-economic levels look to community colleges as their gateways to degree completion.

In the limited amount of research done on adult learners pursuing college degrees, support from spouses, family members, employers, and, to a limited degree, peers, has been documented as having positive effects on their persistence to degree completion (Bean and Metzner, 1985; Spanard, 1990; Van Stone, Nelson and Niemann, 1994).

Cabera, Nora, and Cataneda (1993) have proposed a merging of the Tinto and Bean models of student persistence in an attempt to broaden the research base. Their work is more inclusive of adult learners and the obvious differences in their needs and the demands they make upon higher education. Although these researchers still maintain a positivistic-experimental approach to studying persistence, they try to include the growing cohort of adult learners in their research.

A growing number of studies (Starks, 1987; Walleri and Peglow-Hoch, 1988;

Van Stone, Nelson, and Neiman, 1994) taking a naturalistic-qualitative approach to examining adult learners have attempted to utilize a more comprehensive approach to the problem of why returning adult learners do not complete baccalaureate degrees.

Starks (1987) did qualitative research to determine the variables that influence high risk adult females in persisting to graduation, as well as the variables that influence low-risk adult women to drop out of college. Although Starks's findings support Tinto's assertion that academic and social integration are the primary elements in retention of students, her qualitative interview techniques of exceptional cases highlighted *new dimensions* in the form and context of this social integration (1987).

It is Stark's contention that

The limitation of the quantitative studies on Tinto's theory is that by nature of the research techniques utilized, they result in models of risk where the statistics are calculated on averages. Characteristics of persisters and leavers are based on common patterns. The outliers or exceptions to the rule are discounted since quantitative results are often measured by scores of frequency and rely on the mean or mode to derive relationships or to describe characteristics. Thus the predictive or high risk models resulting from the quantitative methodology describe relationships of events, characteristics, outcomes and backgrounds of students derived from patterns of what is most common--what is most typical--what is most frequent. And when these models are used in general practice there is a danger of mislabeling students, of misplacing students in courses or programs, or of missing relevant information that may cast a student in an entirely different light.

Starks (1987) also found that Tinto's academic integration was not the same for the adult females she interviewed. This difference points to the need for more reflective and personalized analyses of how students perceive the issues of persistence in completing degree programs.

Walleri and Peglow-Hoch (1988) did a qualitative case study analysis of under-prepared non-traditional students in the Guided Studies Program at Mt. Hood Community College. Although their findings generally supported Tinto's contention that academic and social integration are paramount to success and persistence in college, such qualities may only be true for certain segments of the non-traditional student population and far less important for other segments. "Academic and social integration have a strong influence on student persistence when the students have definite goals and share values with the institution" (Walleri and Peglow-Hoch, 1988, p. 13).

Van Stone, Nelson, and Niemann (1994) conducted a qualitative study of poor single-mothers, college students and the effects of deeply-held social and psychological beliefs on their academic success. Through the interview process, these researchers were able to discover more deeply held perceptions of students and to begin a more comprehensive dialog on what it takes to complete a program from the students' point of view. Their conclusions and methodology have led to the belief that educational researchers must approach the problem of minority-female adult learner persistence from new perspectives. For example, the female students interviewed by Van Stone, Nelson, and Neimann commented that though psychological beliefs about effort, task difficulty, ability and luck might result in academic success, "they more often cited and provided greater

detail regarding the influence of sociological factors on their performance” (1994, p. 580).

The subjects of Van Stone, Nelson, and Neimann’s study were poor single-mothers who became college students and conveyed through the interview process the importance of sociological factors to their academic success. These participants mentioned the importance of the support of other students, faculty, and university services to their academic success. As was found in other studies of students of color (Loo and Rolison, 1986 and Tracey and Sedlacek, 1987) the participants of the Van Stone, Nelson, and Niemann study spoke of the importance of the understanding and acceptance of other students to their own academic success (1987). The authors suggest

This supports some researchers’ assertions that women may perceive learning in a different context than men, evaluating the quality of the experience in relation to their connection with others rather than the extent to which the experience provides knowledge and skills. This is not to say that women do not seek competence, rather they include the quality of their social interactions in their evaluations of the educational experience.

The culture of the classroom itself has also been a challenge for women, in that they feel they must compete with male peers and challenge faculty to be successful in meeting the demands of the academic situation (Guinier, Fine, and Balin, 1994). The competitive environment in the classroom and impersonal climate may be mitigating factors in causing women to doubt their abilities as learners. Jill Taurule (as cited by

Hayes and Flannery, 2000, p.73) has found in her studies in higher education that this competitive and often impersonal climate within classrooms has “played a role in fostering self-doubt and silence among women”.

After reviewing selected research that parallels this research on adult learners, it is just as important to look at research dealing with African-American student persistence in higher education.

Research on African-American Persistence in Higher Education

The degree completion rates for African-American students lag behind all racial groups except American-Indian students. The following three tables show degree completion rates for men and women over intervals of four, six, and nine years, as well as, degree completion rates for racial groups over the three periods of time studied. These three tables were taken from research done by Astin, Tsui, and Avalos, under the auspices of the Higher Education Research Institute (1996, p. 6, p. 7, p. 8). Table 2 shows baccalaureate degree completion rates for men and women over four, six, and nine year periods of time. The data represented in the three tables below was derived from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), which is a longitudinal study of the American higher education system. CIRP was established in 1966 by the American Council on Education and is the largest and longest standing empirical study dealing with higher education. The CIRP was assumed by the Graduate School of Education at UCLA in 1973.

The findings of the CIRP indicate the women complete bachelor’s degrees at a higher rate than men over all three time periods of 4, 6, and 9 years. This has significant social import since women make-up 56% of the enrolled student population nationally

according to the U.S. Department of Education (1999). The incidence of degree complete does increase over the nine year period from 39 to 45.7 percent for both men and women.

The CIRP data also indicates that African-Americans and American-Indians display the lowest rates of degree completion. African-American students do show a marked increase in degree completion over the 9 year period studied from 19.4% after four years, to 31.2% after 6 years, and 33.9% after 9 years of attendance. However, this is below the completion rates for Asian and White students, whose completion rates are 57.6% and 47.3% respectively. African-American women show one of the lowest rate of degree completion in the CIRP study of all racial groups after nine years of attendance 35.7%, with Puerto Rican-American women having the lowest rate of degree completion at 35%. Even more disturbing is the fact that African-Americans, American-Indians, along with Mexican-American and Puerto-Rican-Americans are underrepresented in the population of freshman entering college (Astin, 1982, 1996). Considering the fact that these minority groups will become a significant portion of our nation's total population in the coming decades, we will see more of these potential students needing the skills, knowledge, and degrees offered by higher education.

Of more importance to our nation as stated in a report, One Third of A Nation, published by the American Council on Education and the Education Commission of the States (as cited in Holmes, Ebbers, Robinson, and Mugenda, 2000), it was estimated that by the year 2010, "one third of all school-aged children in America will represent members of ethnic minority groups (African-American, American-Indian, Asian-American, and Hispanic people), and that approximately twenty-two million of the nation's labor force will be minority workers" (Holms, Ebbers, Robinson, and

Mugenda, 2000, p. 42).

A sizeable amount of the research that has dealt with African-American persistence in higher education has focused on such factors as academic preparedness, discrimination and prejudice, institutional size and fit, and a body of research on minority persistence as it is related to attendance at historically black colleges and universities.

There is a widely held concept that academic preparedness at the point of high school graduation is a key factor in the persistence of African-American students in higher education (Tinto, 1987, 1993). Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, and Hagedorn (1999) found no support for the claim that academic unpreparedness explained why African-American students persisted at a lower rate than whites. Even though African-American students admitted less preparation for college, at most, it has an “indirect effect” on their decision to leave higher education (Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, and Hagedorn, 1999). Other than large scale variances in academic ability, those factors that affected African-American students were no different then those affecting white students who chose to persist.

Even though a significant number of African-American men and women still select historically black institutions, the majority of black students in the United States select colleges and universities with predominantly white study bodies (Pascarella and Terinzini, 1991). However, this increase in minority attendance at predominantly white institutions has come with negative effects for African-American students. As minority students are exposed to prejudice and discrimination in classrooms and campuses, they experience greater levels of social isolation, alienation, personal dissatisfaction, and overt racism at colleges composed of predominantly white students as opposed to their counterparts at historically black colleges and universities (Allen, 1987; Bean and Hull,

1984; Bennett, 1983; Hurtado, 1992, 1994; Smedley, Myers and Harrel, 1993).

Examining the findings from this research, it is easy to hypothesize that attending a historically black college increases both persistence and academic achievement for black students, and much of the evidence in the research does support this hypothesis (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991).

Anderson (1985) concluded that attendance at a predominantly black college had as an outcome higher levels of academic achievement for black students. Higher levels of academic achievement resulted in greater numbers of black students completing baccalaureate degrees. One hypothesis as to why black students achieve higher grades at predominantly black, as opposed to predominantly white, institutions is the fact that the former are not as endowed with educational resources or as academically competitive as the latter (Bowles and DeCosta, 1971; Sowell, 1972). A contrary view is taken by Fleming, (1984), Nettles, Thoeny, and Grossman (1986) and Willie and Cunnigen (1981) who make a strong case for black students at predominantly black colleges and universities who benefit from a supportive social, cultural, and racial environment that enhances their successful adaptation to the demands of the academic situation of degree completion. Therefore, African-American students experience higher academic achievement at black colleges and universities due to the fact that the social environment enhances their academic success not the ease of getting above average grades.

Another interesting finding was isolated by Astin, Tsui, and Avalos (1996) when they attempted to control the effects of college environmental characteristics at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU). When Astin, et al. (1996) controlled for

institutional size, which negatively affects degree completion among African-American students, “the positive effects of attending an HBCU disappeared. This suggests that the positive effects of HBCUs on degree completion can be entirely explained in terms of their relatively small size” (1996). In other words it appears that there is nothing inherent in HBCUs environment that enhances degree completion rates among African-American students other than their small size.

The majority of the characteristics uncovered from this research point to adult learners and African-Americans being faced with significantly greater numbers of disabling features that hinder them from earning baccalaureate degrees. However, African-American adult learners do earn these degrees. The purpose of this study is to look at persistence to degree completion from a new theoretical viewpoint. By viewing the concept of persistence through the lens of situational adjustment, knowing that change does occur throughout an adult life, it is the intent of this study to focus on the students’ changing themselves to adapt to the challenges of the academic requirements of degree completion.

CHAPTER THREE

Conducting the Research

From a practitioner's point of view, the situational adjustment concept of change in adulthood offers a far more pragmatic approach to understanding why adult learners persist to degree completion. In order to be successful, adult learners have to adjust and change themselves to meet the demands of the academic situations that confront them as they attempt to complete college degrees. The question of what defines persistence then becomes one that differentiates between the integration of the student into the academic and social life of the institution as opposed to the student changing herself to be what collegiate academic life requires.

In approaching the problem of persistence from the sociological domain, and in particular from the construct of situational adjustment, it is the purpose of this study to obtain the reflections of five adult learners who are minority females in order to uncover their perceptions in relation to persistence to degree completion.

In the college or university environment adult learners must create their own reality of what academic life is in order to adjust and persist. Leaving college means they could not create an effective reality that allowed them to adjust to the academic demands and expectations being made upon them. Persistence occurs when adult learners adjust to the contextual realities of college life as they perceive them and make them part of their own lives.

This study attempts to confirm the usefulness of situational adjustment as a mechanism by which adult learner persistence can be understood. Thus, through an understanding of the adjustments that adult learners make as they pursue college degrees,

educators and researchers will gain insiders' views about how these particular students persisted to degree completion.

Design of the Study

A qualitative approach will be applied to the research problem of adult learner persistence. Qualitative research assumes that there is more than one objective reality in our understanding of any phenomenon that we experience. The qualitative researcher also assumes that there can be multiple realities that need to be interpreted, in contrast to being measured only by a hypothesis to be tested. Within qualitative inquiry, "there are no predetermined hypotheses, no treatments, and no restrictions on the end product" (Merriam, 1990, p. 17). The researcher does not manipulate isolated variables or administer a treatment; instead, the researcher observes, intuitively, and becomes aware of what is happening in a natural environment.

How adult learners adjust to the academic situations required in completing a baccalaureate degree is the issue to be investigated. By studying the success of five students, more understanding will be generated as to how these particular adult learners persisted to achieve their goal. The unit of analysis is the individual who is completing the degree program. This investigation relies on the data collected from interviews with five subjects who were near completion of their baccalaureate degrees.

As has been mentioned in this study, the issue of degree completion by adult learners needs to be viewed contextually and not separated into isolated variables or groups of variables that for the most part cannot be controlled in the real world. Merriam (1998) describes the case study as seeking a broader description and explanation. She adds that Yin (1984) observes, "case study is a design particularly suited to situations where it is

impossible to separate the phenomenon's variables from their context" (p.10). As Merriam so aptly puts it

The case study offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomena. Anchored in real-life situations, the case study results in a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon. It offers insights and illuminates meanings that expand its readers' experiences (1990, p. 32).

The study examines the reflections of five subjects who were near completion of their baccalaureate degrees at the time of the interviews. They were students at a large independent institution of higher education located in the Midwest. Each woman was a commuter student who worked full-time attending college on a full-time or part-time basis. All of the respondents were African-American females between the ages of 35 and 45, who compose a large portion of the student body on the campus from which the study was done. They were selected from a list of 300 potential graduates from the academic year 2000-2001. From this list of 300 potential graduates, who were of various ages and racial backgrounds, 12 African-American candidates were selected that fit the profile based on the age range sought and the necessary requirements for graduation. These graduation requirements are a cumulative GPA of 2.00 and a 2.5 GPA in major required courses. Introductory interviews with the 12 potential candidates reduced the list down to the five subjects that became part of the study.

A structured interview protocol was used for the initial one-hour interview.

The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed later as a means of increasing the trustworthiness of the notes that the interviewer took during the interview process. The data was triangulated for further trustworthiness by collecting academic transcripts for each subject. A second one-hour interview was conducted with each of the subjects to verify initial comments and reactions to interview questions and probes that were used in the introductory interview, as well as to expand on the reflections of the subjects wherever possible.

Function of the Researcher

Qualitative case studies are limited by the sensitivity and integrity of the investigator (Riley, 1963). The researcher is the single actor in collecting information and in the subsequent analysis of the data collected. "The amount of description, analysis, or summary material is basically up to the investigator" (Merriam, 1990, p. 33). The level of sensitivity and honesty of the researcher affects qualitative case studies. In this study, the researcher is also an authority figure within the institutional context, which might serve to dampen or discourage the candor of the subjects. It will therefore be necessary for the researcher to conduct the interviews in a fashion that does not create the impression that the information is being gathered to make decisions that may affect other participants known to the subjects or reflect negatively on their roles as students within the institution. It was also necessary to have the subjects understand that what they divulged to the researcher concerning the institution would not create negative reflections upon them or their accomplishments.

Professional biases which might predispose the researcher to expect certain cause and effect relationships must be avoided when analyzing the data collected from the

five subjects. This will be accomplished by focusing on the subjects' reflections through the lens of the situational adjustment model. The data generated from this study will inform the reader of the essential factors that were reported by the subjects as significant in the degree completion process.

The act of interviewing is complex and filled with traps that often hinder the researcher's ability to find the truth from the subject. It will be the researcher's responsibility to disarm the subjects and create a situation in which they feel confident enough to explain their honest reflections and experiences in the process of earning their baccalaureate degrees. This process will be further complicated by the fact that the subjects are all female. Care was taken to avoid a paternalistic attitude toward the five women within the study and the social context of the situation being studied.

This bias was avoided by the researcher's paying close attention to the following precautions. It was essential that the interviewer pay close attention to the concerns and attitudes of the subjects and defuse any possible assumed gender bias. Sensitivity to the subjects' emotional reactions, if any, was of the utmost concern. A concerted effort to remain sensitive to the subjects' feelings and emotional reactions became very important. The use of gender neutral language in the interview protocol and the exchanges between the researcher and the subject is one mechanism that helped avoid gender bias in the study.

All of these women represent success stories in that they have persisted to complete their baccalaureate degrees. As a result, the researcher in this study acts as a critical advocate for each subject, seeking to understand each subject's adjustment to the academic situation created by the institution they attended.

Ethical Issues

It is of utmost concern that the anonymity of the subjects who were selected for this qualitative study be assured and maintained. Each informant was given an informant release agreement and documents release agreement that note the confidentiality of both the information gathered during the interviews and the information collected from supporting documentation about her collegiate experience at the selected institution of higher education (see Appendixes B and C).

The subjects were given the address and telephone number of the researcher in the event they had questions or wished to withdraw from the research project. The subjects were also apprised of the purpose of the project and the procedures by which the project was to be conducted.

All statements or other identifying items that might be related to the subjects were disguised through the use of pseudonyms, or common and generic identifiers rather than specific names, titles, or locally used jargon. This procedure further protected the anonymity of the subjects and the institution that the subjects attended while pursuing their baccalaureate degrees.

Access to the institution of higher education from which the subjects will be selected for this study will be approved by appropriate administrators, as will access to any documents gathered.

Data Collection and Verification

The data collection for this study was primarily focused on the interviews of the subjects selected. By listening to the tape recordings, reading the notes taken by the researcher and the transcripts of each interview, it was possible to identify themes and

recurrences of concepts and ideas expressed by the subjects. The subsequent interview acted to clarify or reinforce initial comments, ideas, and expressions of the subjects. Key terms were identified and isolated to determine their significance to any important themes or realities that were being expressed by the subjects.

Since observation of the subjects was not possible during the process of degree completion, the researcher relied on the recollections and anecdotes of the subjects.

Another means of verifying the data was the collection of documents that pertain to the subjects' interactions, accomplishments, and difficulties during the period of degree completion. These documents included academic transcripts from high schools and previous colleges attended, the college catalog, and the academic record of each subject at the University that might shed some light on the reality or experiences involving the subjects during the period of degree completion.

An initial introductory interview was conducted with each informant to gather personal data. This procedure was followed by a structured one-hour interview, with the researcher asking questions that established issues that probe the model of situational adjustment dealing with motivation, learning, and performance (see Appendix A for complete interview protocol). A second one-hour interview was conducted which was more open-ended, with the intent of probing the comments, reflections, and anecdotes made during the initial interview session. The subjects were given the opportunity to review the transcript of the initial one-hour interview prior to coming to the second one-hour interview session.

Ultimately the interpretations and intuition of the researcher emerge from the interviews and records collected on each subjects that will determine applicability of the situational adjustment construct to persistence.

Data Analysis

The purpose of the collection of data in this study is not to generalize or develop a theory; the main emphasis is on describing and understanding the experiences offered by the subjects. In this study, the subjects represent students who have successfully completed the requirements for the baccalaureate degree. Each subject is a success story at the institution selected for the study since only 20 percent of all degree-seeking students at the University complete baccalaureate degrees.

Within a qualitatively-oriented descriptive case study, data analysis is an ongoing process. As Lincoln and Guba argue, the researcher determines whether particular “units” of information as they appear throughout the interview process and the notes taken during each interview are significant (1985, p. 344). The researcher is not in a position to know what will develop from the interviews with the subjects of the study. The data that was collected and any analyses of such data will determine the final outcome of the study. It is therefore critical to maintain ongoing analyses of the data from each interview and each document reviewed.

Note cards will be used to collect and arrange similar units of data gathered from the subjects. These similar units of data may be phrases, key terms, concepts, ideas, or experiences that shed light on the understanding of the subjects’ expressions about the realities of degree completion.

The analysis of the data was done by reviewing the audio-tapes of each

subjects interview, looking for recurrent themes or critical issues. The transcripts of each interview were also reviewed in conjunction with the researchers notes and audio-tapes to confirm the recurrent theme or critical issue that emerged. The subject's academic transcript was then reviewed as another means of confirming the existence of critical events and occurrences that were discussed in the individual interviews.

These units of data will be placed into categories based on what Guba and Lincoln call divergent and convergent thinking. In this study, convergence refers to those units that fit together, or those bits of data that converge into a particular category or idea. Divergence, on the other hand, reflects the ability of the researcher to tease out the various categories once they have been established. It is the researcher's responsibility to analyze these bits of data and fold them into these emerging categories. "The categories that one constructs should be internally homogenous; that is, all items in a single category ought to be similar" (Merriam, 1990, p. 135). Categories should also be heterogeneous, "differences among categories ought to be bold and clear" (Guba and Lincoln, 1981, p. 93).

Giving the subjects the opportunity to review and comment on the transcripts of their first interviews enabled each subject to expand on or clarify statements or issues that surfaced during that first one-hour session. This process served as a check on the researcher's interpretations of the statements about the realities of the degree completion process as expressed by the subjects.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS FROM THE INTERVIEWS

Each of the five women in this study came to the academic situation with certain qualities that were instrumental to their success in completing a baccalaureate degree program. This study differs from Becker's belief that what the individual brings to the situation is unimportant. Each of these women succeeded because they brought to the University the necessary traits that allowed them to adjust to and meet the challenges of degree completion. The study also uncovers what the five women learned in adjusting to the academic situation. Each woman assessed her performance primarily via the grades and GPAs that they earned while completing their baccalaureate degrees.

The Subjects' Personal Profile

Each of the subjects attended formal educational settings prior to entering the University to pursue a baccalaureate degree. Previous collegiate experience was not a criterion sought out intentionally, since each woman was selected from a list of graduating seniors on the basis of such variables as ethnicity, age and proximity to completion. Jewel, Cherlisha, Dannell, Jonella and Wonita were all transfer students either from local-urban community colleges or independent proprietary vocational schools. Cherlisha, Wonita and Jonella attended independent proprietary vocational schools. Jewel and Dannell transferred from local-urban community colleges. The fact that all the subjects selected for this study were transfer students may not be unusual since the campus the women were selected from enrolls more than 65% of its students as transfers from other institutions both local and out of state (Stingel, 2000). Since many

adult learners return to colleges and universities to finish degrees that they have already started elsewhere, the high incidence of transfer students among the five subjects may not be so unusual (Spanard, 1990). That these women chose either community colleges or vocational training schools for their first successful ventures into higher education stands as proof that for these five women community colleges and vocational training schools do act as gateways to baccalaureate degrees.

The continuity of each woman's educational experiences varied between periods of attending formal educational settings to periods of non-attendance. The paths these women took to earn their degrees were non-traditional, meaning they did not complete high school at age 18 and immediately enter higher education to earn baccalaureate degrees. Each took a different educational journey and experienced different types and levels of educational institutions, but all of them have joined the ranks of those who hold the baccalaureate degree. In order to accomplish this feat, each of these women displayed a great deal of resiliency in overcoming life changing events which could have left them in a state of hopelessness and defeat.

Even though Becker is not concerned with the prior experiences and background an individual possesses prior to entering a situation, it is critical to this study that these women's backgrounds be reviewed in order to better understand why they persisted.

Jewel

Jewel is 40 years old divorced, and has three children aged 12, 14, and 19. After graduating from a large inner-city high school with a 2.97 GPA, Jewel was admitted to a major mid-western urban research university. However, her experience at this institution was extremely negative and she dropped out within the first year. Jewel discussed her experiences with discrimination in the classroom and the sheer size of the institution

that made it difficult for her to adjust to this institution's academic and social situations.

After two years Jewel returned to higher education at the community college level and took several classes. She then waited two more years after the birth of her first child before re-entering the same community college. Subsequently she attended this institution continuously for over three years to complete her associate's degree in occupational therapy. She then experienced a 12-year break from higher education to raise her children as a single parent while working at several jobs to make ends meet before re-entering the institution she currently attends, and from which she will earn her baccalaureate degree.

Cherlisha

Cherlisha is 44 years old, divorced, and has a daughter now 27 years old and living independently. Cherlisha graduated from a large urban high school with a 2.13 GPA. Soon after graduation she worked for a large local retailer. When an opening became available, Cherlisha entered the police academy and became a police officer. She enrolled in an urban community college six years after leaving high school to take self-improvement courses. After completing several classes at the community college she went through a period of eight years of non-attendance focusing her efforts on raising her daughter and working.

Cherlisha then enrolled in an independent proprietary vocational school that offered certificate programs in court reporting, but she never finished the program. She lost interest in court reporting as a career option.

Cherlisha then changed careers several times, while working within the state criminal justice system, and finally in 1986 she became a bounty hunter for the state, a job she held for 12 years. However, she was involved in two serious automobile accidents which

as she says “took her off the street.” During her convalescence, she purchased a personal computer and discovered an entirely new career option for herself. Eight years passed before Cherlisha sought out another formal educational experience. Due to her injuries from the automobile accidents she was involved in on the job, Cherlisha was unable to attend traditional classes that required sitting for prolonged periods of time. However, her daughter coaxed her into pursuing a degree in computer information systems at the University, which was then an independent business college. Since making that decision in 1996, Cherlisha has attended continually and maintained a 2.98 GPA. She will complete her degree by June 2001.

Dannell

Dannell is 41 years old, a single mother who never married, and has a 20-year-old son. She completed high school in four years at a large urban high school with a 1.69 GPA. After graduating from high school, she declined an offer from her father to attend college and pursue a degree. Instead, Dannell went to work and shortly thereafter bore her only child.

After working and caring for her son for seven years, Dannell decided to begin her college career by enrolling at an urban community college. After three-and-a-half years of continuous enrollment at this community college during which she took liberal arts courses, Dannell stopped out for four years before returning to the community college to pursue a career in health administration. Three years later, Dannell left the community college after earning an associate’s degree in health administration. After 13 years Dannell returned to higher education at the University to pursue a specialized medical billing associate’s program. After reconsidering her career options, Dannell decided to change her major course of study from the area of health to a business oriented

program and will complete her baccalaureate degree in June of 2001.

Jonella

Jonella is 35 years old, a single mother who never married, and has a seven-year-old son. She graduated from a large urban high school with a 2.82 GPA. Since she aspired to have a career in the medical field, Jonella completed a nursing assistant vocational training program while attending high school. Immediately after completing high school, Jonella enrolled in a large urban community college to pursue a nursing program, but she had a very negative experience and dropped-out in the first year. As she put it, "I just wasn't focused."

After seven years away from a formal educational setting, Jonella enrolled at an independent vocational career school and completed a one-year certificate program as a medical assistant. Immediately after completing this one-year certificate program, Jonella enrolled in an independent community college to pursue an associate's degree in Applied Science on a part-time basis. After completing the associate's program in three years, Jonella enrolled at the University, upon the advice and prodding of one of her instructors, to pursue her baccalaureate degree. Jonella has maintained full-time student status at the University since 1998 while working full-time.

Wonita

Wonita is 44 years old, divorced and has one child who is now 27 years old and living independently. Wonita bore her only child while attending high school and did not graduate with her high class. However, she finished her high school diploma through an adult high school completion program with a 3.49 GPA while living in California, where her husband was stationed in the military. After returning to Michigan, Wonita held several different jobs before enrolling at an independent proprietary business school and

completing a 12-month certificate program in secretarial science, which began her career as a secretary. That accomplishment was followed by a period of three years of non-attendance while she worked and raised her child before she enrolled at the University to pursue an associate's degree in secretarial science. Wonita completed one quarter and then stopped attending. There was a period of five years during which Wonita was separated from her husband and forced to support herself and her son, before she re-entered the University to complete her associate's degree. Wonita subsequently spent three years of continuous enrollment as both a part-time and full-time student to finish her associate's degree.

After having earned her associate's degree, there was a four-year gap in her educational pursuits before Wonita decided to continue and complete a baccalaureate degree. Wonita initially enrolled in an accelerated program the University had just begun to offer. She has since shifted to traditional course offerings and has maintained continuous enrollment for the past nine years. Wonita changed her major area of study when she realized that in order to be successful and financially independent she had to elevate her career objective. This new gained knowledge gave her the self-confidence to move her from a secretarial to a management program. Wonita will complete her degree requirements and graduate at the end of the Spring Quarter 2001.

WHAT DID THE SUBJECTS BRING TO THE SITUATION

A Propensity for Learning

All of the women interviewed in this study have acquired and developed a propensity for learning, which was both instrumental in bringing them back to formal educational situations and seeing them through to the completion of their degree programs. Cherlisha commented early in her first interview, "I like learning. I like the school atmosphere. I

like reading. I always want to know new things. I always did.” Jonella was involved in a vocational training program while in high school. She also indicated that she attended every free training class or seminar that was offered and that she was eligible to attend.

When Dannell was asked if the things she learned in class were important to her, she responded,

Yes, I like the idea of gaining knowledge. That always fascinates me. You know, gaining knowledge. Just knowing something. And that way, you’re able to hold a conversation with someone and not feel stupid. Because I gain knowledge on a lot of levels, you know.

It was Wonita who most clearly addressed this propensity for learning in her interviews:

Well, someone told me once, I think it was one of my teachers, the more you learn, the more you realize how much you don’t know. And, as I proceeded through my course work, I kept learning more and more, and I thought ‘wow’. I’ve always liked learning. As you walk through life, you realize your ignorance. It doesn’t take much to realize how much you don’t know about various things. So, like I said, I’ve always wanted to learn. I guess I need that kind of stimulation. I’m not a complacent person, and probably even if I hadn’t gone to school, I would have found some other means of educating myself.

Jewel was also very engaged and absorbed in learning. "I do a lot of writing and I put that in my book", this book refers to a personal journal that she maintains. Jewel also mentioned that "I write poetry and short stories." This propensity for learning also extended to helping others who had difficulty in learning. Jewel's propensity for learning compelled her to share the knowledge she gained with others.

Independence and Pride

In addition to having a propensity for learning, each of the women in this study also projected independence and pride throughout the interview process. African-American women in American culture are not assigned the same dominant culture's stereotype of femininity. In fact Brown-Collins and Sussewell indicate that, "The irony of slave women's history is that womanhood was redefined to allow for the exploitation of their labor, resulting in the development of independent, self-reliant characteristics" (1988, p. 7).

This independence was openly discussed in the interviews and was noticeable in the women's comments about their ability to care for and support themselves and their children. Being divorced or a single parent responsible for raising and supporting children, surfaced as one of the main reasons for this independence and pride. Cherlisha said,

When you know early in life that you have no one else to fall back on, it's either do or die. That's the way it has been. I don't do anything that I can't do by myself. I'm not dependent upon anyone else. I can only count on Cherlisha. I know what I'm going to do, and if I don't do it, the only person that I can blame is me. I'm not going to let anybody else take on my life.

This pride is also evident in how well each woman does her job and how others depend upon her. For example, Dannell spoke with pride in her initial interview session about how she had already had two job promotions in less than a year.

Cherlisha spoke with pride concerning her administering the computer network at the correctional facility's where she is employed. She takes pride in maintaining that system and making sure its users are served. When asked if what she has learned in the classroom has added her in this ability Cherlisha's comment was, "Yes, they were because everything that I have done at the facility, it keeps it running smoothly, and then that looks good, like I'm a competent person. That's my goal." Cherlisha also mentioned she takes pride in helping friends and schoolmates with computer-related problems.

Jewel is a contract employee working for a large automotive firm. She prides herself in doing excellent work and maintaining a professional attitude in the human resource department in which she works. Even though she struggles with issues of sexism and discrimination in the work-place, she does not allow these social problems to deter her from bettering herself. These social issues were discussed in one of Jewel's classes dealing with social diversity. When she was asked about her feelings toward material that was learned in this class, Jewel reflected upon an incident that occurred dealing with the issue of racial discrimination and sexism in our society. She recalled very heated discussions. When challenged by a Caucasian male, who doubted the claims made by minority students, Jewel responded to him:

....until you've walked in my shoes, you can't tell me what didn't happen or don't happen, but you can't experience what I've experienced, ok? You can

only either imagine or, like he said, he didn't believe it. You would never experience that.

Each of these women is atypical when compared to the traditional married dependent female, who is not the breadwinner of the family in American society. Three of the five subjects selected for this study are divorced, while the other two are single mothers.

Being a single parent places the burden of supporting children and maintaining households in these women's hands and forces them to be economically independent.

Three of the five subjects are also employed in careers that are not typically female-dominated. Cherlisha is a systems analyst, Jewel is a human resource coordinator, and Dannell is a reconciliation specialist with a major health provider. Only Wonita and Jonella are employed in what is considered a typically female-dominated occupation as a secretary or receptionist.

These characteristics of independence and pride may also be the reason why these five women didn't feel the need to become integrated into the social or academic fabric of the University. Jewel explained how African-American females who possess this independence and pride may be unwilling to ask for help in understanding course material because of these very traits. In her words, "they don't want to look stupid in front of other people", meaning their classmates. Jewel also mentioned that she perceived many of her classmates as being unwilling to seek out help. "You know, I think where a lot of people mess-up at is that they're afraid to ask for help and they miss it." When questioned further about the issue of fear of approaching an instructor Jewel expanded her comment:

I don't think it's being afraid of the instructor. I think it's more of something to do with pride. They may not want them to know they don't know, and a lot of things you don't know and you're afraid to let it out to even say, 'I don't understand that. I don't know how to do that.'

When Jewel was asked if she thought this independence and pride might cause a student to be silent in class so as not to show her failure to understand a concept, she answered, "Yeah, because no one wants to feel like they're stupid and they really don't know."

However, in contrast to these sentiments about some of their peers, the women in this study were not afraid to seek out help and expected a great deal from themselves. In the interviews they often expressed a sense of frustration with faculty they perceived as doing inadequate jobs of teaching and responding to their needs.

Jewel mentioned how one of her mathematics instructors did not explain various concepts effectively enough so that the students could comprehend them. A perceived lack of concern on the part of the instructor caused her a great deal of frustration, since mathematics was not her strongest subject. Jewel's spoke of her frustration at length:

There was like one instructor I had, I didn't have difficulty with him. It was my algebra instructor. Because he wasn't explaining it clearly and then when he made a mistake, it was like, oh well, it's like, throw it out. But you're here to teach us these things and you're not explaining it. So I had to take it on myself to teach myself from the book. That's the only way I made it out of that class.

“If you’re going to do a job, do it right”, was Jewel’s comment. The perceived inability of the instructor to meet the need that Jewel had was further described in this fashion:

And if I tell you I need help and you’re the instructor, I think you should provide this or find some way for me to get it. You don’t tell me to go get a tutor when I come to you. You gave me this question, ok. Then you need to answer it. Don’t blow me off.

The lack of concern on the part of the instructor drove Jewel to seek help outside of class and made her feel as though she was learning on her own. She also eventually became a mathematics tutor, in an attempt to help other students, until the time commitment to tutoring became too much for her to handle. Jewel even tutored several students without pay on her own outside of the structured peer-tutoring program the University sponsored.

Cherlisha recalled an economics instructor covering the material very quickly in an abbreviated summer session. She felt as if she were alone and forced to understand the course material without the support of the instructor. Even though she thought highly of the majority of her instructors, this single individual stood out in her mind. As she put it

He was going too fast, and he had his own opinions, so you basically had to study by yourself because you’re still responsible for the work. It doesn’t matter if an instructor doesn’t teach it the way you want him to teach it.

You’re responsible for the material that he is presenting. If you don’t get it in

class, that means you got to spend all this extra time, which you're supposed to anyway, and learn the concepts. He didn't test us on anything he didn't present, but he presented so much so fast.

Because of her independent attitude, it was not difficult for Cherlisha to understand that the responsibility of learning the course material was hers alone and that the instructor is there only to assist and act as a guide in opening the door for the student to master the material. Whether this is done in a group format or alone, a key element in adjusting to the academic situation is the fact that each student must learn to master the course material.

Of the five women in this study, Wonita was the most reserved in her responses about issues of pride and independence among African-American women. On the other hand, Jonella was overtly direct and open about the issues of pride and independence. She takes pride in her job and doing what is expected of her to the best of her ability. She also felt, as did Jewel and Cherlisha, that some instructors did not understand the typical adult learner's situation, in which he or she is not just a student, but has other responsibilities outside of the classroom:

Instructors are what they are, but they need to realize that most of us are single parents and most of us are independent, and they need to realize we're adults, we're not children. They need to address us as adults.

When Jonella was asked how she felt about this indifference among faculty members, she

answered

Like they don't want to do their job. They don't want to help you...with some of them you just get the inkling it's just, I have a degree and whatever, and I struggled to get my degree, and it should be a struggle for you. I mean, I'm not saying that it should be easy, that you should just give a person the answers, but help somebody out.

Pride and independence were dominant traits in these women's personalities, which motivated them to return to obtain their degrees. To a lesser extent these same traits led them to experience frustration in their ability to accept their performances within the academic situations in which they found themselves.

Having a Goal and being Committed

In reviewing the factors that brought these five women back to higher education to either start or finish their baccalaureate degrees, the most prevalent and obvious initial factor was each individual's desire for self improvement or career advancement. However, it was what subjects brought to the academic situation that arose as the key feature that seemed to sustain them to complete their degrees. Becker does not place emphasis on an individual's prior experiences, simply on the fact that he or she decided to enter the situation. The findings of this study indicate that these women came to the situation with not only the motivation to succeed, but also the commitment to the goal that they would finish their degree.

By embracing the goal of degree completion, each was faced with the task of changing her identity by what Hewitt describes as defining, locating and differentiating oneself

from others (1992). As students entering the academic life, they had to adopt the values, norms and behaviors that constitute consistent viable adjustments to the demands of the academic situation they now find themselves in. This process means denying certain aspects of one's external culture and embracing the academic culture that defines the institution.

Dannell's point of reference was that she had started something and she was determined to see through to the end. This clarity of purpose exemplifies the independence and pride that each woman projected in their interview statements. Dannell best describes the attitude which each of these women exhibited.

I think what--what helped me finish is that I didn't want to quit. I didn't want to start something and then not finish it. And I don't think there was any particular person or thing that made that decision for me or helped me make that decision. I think it was that I started and I need to finish.

She also described how the institution continually sent her recruitment literature and that was one of the main reasons for her returning to higher education. Dannell recalled receiving "all these pamphlets" from the University and as she put it, "I just kept reading [the pamphlets] and decided, why not come back, go to school." Once she made the decision to return to college, Dannell continued through four years without a break in attendance to the point that she is at now, ready to graduate.

In Cherlisha's case, a life-changing event motivated her to return to school, but she brought with her a sense of independence, pride and resiliency that allowed these women to persevere and stick to their plans. When Cherlisha was asked what

it took to get through the requirements and earn her baccalaureate degree, she responded,

Well, you sacrifice a lot to finish your degree. So if you're going to go to school, give it some thought and make sure it's really what you want to do. It's not something that you jump in, like it's just a fad or something and say 'I'll go to school for a while.' You have to be sure that that's what you want to do because it's going to take a lot out of you, you're going to lose a lot of friends, it breaks up relationships, it breaks up everything. Because everybody wants to be first but school has to come first. You have to work, you have to make the sacrifice, and I was willing to do that.

When Jewel was asked if her to return to school was motivated by an economic, personal or job related goal, she answered

All Three. Personally I always wanted more out of life. When I first thought about what I wanted to be, I was going to be a doctor, a medical doctor. So that was there. The economic part or influence, everybody wants the quality of life to improve. Not everybody does. Some people are comfortable where they're at. I'm not comfortable where I'm at. In order to get to where I want to be, I had to get out there and get it, and obtaining that education is where it starts at. And as for the job, yeah, of course I want to move up in my job. I don't want to just stay at an entry level, but I want to be in management, and I'm in management, and that's where I want to be.

Wonita came to the University with the goal in mind to finish her baccalaureate degree before she reached the age of 40. Even though she did not meet her goal in the time frame she had established, she has reached her goal by finishing her degree this year. In her own words she explains that, "I've had to make a lot of adjustments, but the end goal is still the same. I may not have been able to do it exactly the way I planned, but still the goal remained the same-- to finish."

Jonella became more motivated the closer she came to earning her degree. However, she also became apprehensive and frightened. For as she put it,

Well, yes, I got more motivated because I could see the end. I got a little scared because you are at the end. I am afraid of success. When I get to the end, like you get to the end, what am I going to do? I've waited for this for so long. When you started out, you started out; someday I'll get to the end. And now, it's three months towards the end, and I'm like, am I going to find a great job? Will this job pay me enough money? Am I going to do all right? And then when you get to thinking about it, you get scared. I get so scared sometimes I want to bust out in tears. I get real scared then I just say, okay, it's going to be okay. It will be okay. And, I say, you just apply what you know and feed off of it and you'll know more and more everyday. You'll get to know more and more everyday.

Motivation is the initial component to the situational adjustment construct. It is the essential element that brings the individual into the situation and also serves as the major impetus to maintain the individual through the process of adjustment. Malcolm S.

Knowles, in defining his theory of adult learning, explains the significance of motivation to the adult learner. “While adults are responsive to some external motivators (better jobs, promotions, higher salaries, and the like), the most potent motivators are internal pressures (the desire for increased job satisfaction, self-esteem, quality of life, and the like)”.

The five women in the study indicated a variety of factors that motivated them to return to higher education and finish their baccalaureate degrees. These factors revolved around their propensity for learning, independence and pride and finally their commitment to that goal which was to finish their degree.

The fact that these five women came to the University and entered the academic situation with the goal of completing their degrees establishes a distinct difference from Becker’s situational adjustment construct, which does not concern itself with the individual’s prior experiences or goal commitment before entering the situation. In these five cases, having the goal already established to complete the degree was a definite motivational factor affecting each woman’s ability to persist to degree completion

WHAT WAS LEARNED IN ORDER TO SUCCEED

Learning to Deal with External Relationships

In reviewing the interview transcripts and audiotapes, another factor, which clearly emerged as influential to these subjects’ motivations to persist, was the influence of external interpersonal relationships. Both external friendships and family relationships were mentioned as both detrimental and supportive of their efforts by four of the five subjects. Competition for each subject’s time for study and reading was mentioned, coming from friends or family members outside of the University.

Cherlisha pointed out that her family would remind her that, “you never have time

for us anymore". Since Cherlisha was the first in her family to pursue a degree, she felt as though her family members were not tolerant or supportive of her efforts. As she put it, "They really are not understanding of it because they never finished high school". Cherlisha's supervisor at work was not supportive of her efforts to further her education, due to the fact that she viewed Cherlisha as a threat to her position.

These women felt strongly about the fact that those students who were not deeply committed to the goal of degree completion, this competition for time could have potentially devastating effects on their ability to be successful academically, and ultimately in their ability to persist. All five of the women gave the impression that they were very goal directed and focused on the fact that they were going to finish this degree. Since the majority of these women were the first members of their families to pursue college degrees, several of them felt that their relatives were jealous of them and gave them the feeling they didn't want them to succeed.

Jewel, on the other hand, did not feel the same pressure that Cherlisha alluded to in her response to the question that asked about individual(s) who might have impeded her motivation to persevere to degree completion. Jewel indicated that her family relationship was not, as she put it, "close knit". Even though she is the first in her family of eight children to obtain a college degree, Jewel did not feel the same antagonism that Cherlisha did from family members and friends. Her sense of independence and pride, or as Jewel phased it, "stubbornness" was a useful trait aiding in her persistence to degree completion.

When first asked, Dannell did not make an issue of the effect of external relationships upon her ability to maintain an adequate level of motivation. However, as the interview progressed, Dannell did admit that she felt her mother was not truly supportive of her

efforts to obtain a degree at this stage of her life. Dannell explained that her mother often made it seem that Dannell was trying to be better than her and her other two siblings. Her mother would say, "So you think your better"? On the contrary, her father was supportive of her efforts to improve herself by pursuing a degree. Dannell also mentioned that fellow coworkers were not only instrumental in urging her to come back to school, but they were also supportive of her efforts once she had begun. Dannell felt this support, which took the form of informal conversations and discussions with coworkers and supervisors, was a motivating factor and influenced her persistence to degree completion.

Jonella did not experience negative reactions from her family as she pursued her education. In fact she indicated that they were very supportive and would volunteer to take care of her son. Jonella did experience some negative feelings and reactions from co-workers who resented her leaving work early on certain days to attend class. In her words, some employees were supportive of her efforts and some were not, especially those who were not pursuing their own education and viewed her attempts at improving herself with some seeming jealousy.

I have support from my employer and from my co-workers. And what they are saying and not saying is what motivates me. It's not what they say, it's not saying. That first year I didn't have a car and I had to be at school at 4:45. Well I work and live in downtown ---- and my employer and I had already come to an agreement that some days I would have to leave early, earlier than usual, which I would substitute and not take a lunch for that day. My co-workers would get on my case. I mean, it was always something negative to

say. 'Why do you get to get off early?' And mind you, I work for a very small company. There are about 15 people there. Right now it's still like that. There's no motivation, no I think you're doing a good job, or anything like that. I shouldn't say all of them. I have one co-worker who's the controller. I had one person who is the electrical engineer. He helped with my algebra and stuff like that.

She did receive support from two upper level employees who both have degrees and gave her assistance in both her mathematics and accounting classes.

I had two male co-workers that helped me. And it's still like that now. I don't understand. I used to think it was just race-related because I'm the only Africa-American where I work, and I'm like, I'm trying to better myself. I don't know if it's a matter of envy because out of the 15 people, we have only five of them who have degrees. So I don't know why.

Jonella's employer loaned her the money to pay off a previous college loan that allowed her to return to the University and begin her baccalaureate degree. When Jonella approached her employer to repay the loan, he simply told her to keep the money. This was a turning point for Jonella, knowing that someone believed in her that much, and it boosted her confidence and motivation to pursue the next level of degree that she sought.

Wonita did not describe any negative influences from her family toward her pursuing her education even though she was the only member of the family who has earned a college degree. In fact she recalled her mother telling her, "read, read...don't be a

dummy”. Wonita also mentioned her mother was very supportive of her efforts in furthering her education and how pleased she is that she has, as Wonita put it, “Done something positive with my life”. Wonita also mentioned that one of her former employers who allowed her to use company computers to complete her course work. At that time Wonita did not have her own personal computer and this use of company owned computer hardware and software was very important to her meeting the demands of the academic requirements she faced.

Many African-American women are sole heads of households, forcing them into the roles of economic provider, parent and role model. This last function may well motivate them to pursue their degrees as role models for their children. For Cherlisha, this was an extremely critical motivating factor.

I think the experiences that supported me the most was my daughter constantly encouraging me. ‘My mother’s getting her bachelor’s degree.’ She started going to school too, and it was like a competition, but I’m finishing first.

Cherlisha mentioned on several occasions that it was her daughter who motivated her to return and pursue her baccalaureate degree. In fact, her daughter started a degree program at the University before she coaxed Cherlisha to enroll. Since Cherlisha is her daughter’s role model, it is her hope that her daughter will also return and finish her degree.

Jewel also envisions herself as a role model for her three children. She feels that her children are not getting enough or as much as they can from their education. Therefore,

she is using her own experiences as an example for them. She remembered telling her children, “how can you let your mama do this and you’re not doing it? And I take my report card and I place it right there on the table for them to see it!”

Jonella mentioned that, in addition to advancing her career, it was her son who motivated her to come back to school. In her words, “Basically it was my son, it was my son. I wanted to show him that you know some things you have to continue on, you have to do”. Dannell, on the other hand, did not see herself as a role model for her son, even though she admitted that, “I even try to encourage him to go to college”. But her efforts have gone unheeded. Dannell’s perception was that her son has not been motivated to seek out higher education or vocational training because of her example of completing the baccalaureate degree. She felt that her son had not reached the point in his life where he felt the necessity, as Dannell has, to better himself by furthering his education. For whatever reason, Wonita did not mention seeing herself as a role model to her son.

Learning Institutional Rules

The women in this study were faced with learning the academic and procedural rules and policies that drove the institution they attended. Each woman went about learning these rules, policies and procedures differently, either by trial and error, reliance on fellow students or referring to the college catalog. Whichever avenue they took to become aware of the effective techniques or appropriate behaviors to adjust to the academic situation, all of them succeeded in meeting the demands established by the University to earn their baccalaureate degrees.

Jewel’s perception of how she learned the rules and policies of the University came from her previous collegiate experiences. “It stems from just going to school period. There are always rules. You have to abide by them”. When probed further about

the specific rules of the institution she was currently attending she responded that “you find out that information. Just going through the system and asking questions”. Jewel indicated that she would seek out the office that dealt with any question she had or problem that needed resolution to find the answers or solutions to her difficulties.

Although the method was not directly referred to by all of the women in the study, three of them obviously learned the rules and policies at the University through the process of trial and error.

By attempting to meet degree requirements, each woman in the study, in dealing with issues such as course loads, course combinations and course deliveries (on-line, accelerated), learned whether or not she could deal with the varying features of these different course completion options. Often, students who are driven to complete their degrees in shorter than average periods of time may opt to carry more courses than usual or to select different course delivery options. These different course delivery options can take several forms such as accelerated five or seven week courses, video courses, television courses, audio courses, external learning courses, or on-line courses. Other than the accelerated courses, the remainder of these course delivery options requires limited classroom attendance, which often looks attractive to already overburdened working women.

But non-traditional course delivery options frequently present unique demands to a student who may not be prepared to handle such issues as time management, self-directed learning, and less dependence on faculty direction and structure. Each of the women in the study experienced several of the University’s non-traditional course delivery options with varying degrees of success. Their attempts at completing courses through different delivery options were essentially trial and error attempts at

meeting course and credit hour requirements.

Interestingly by contrast, Dannell presented an entirely different explanation than Jewel's as to how she learned the rules and policies of the institution. She depended on the University's catalog to learn what the rules of the institution were and how they would affect her. When Dannell was asked how she learned the rules and policies of the University she explained, "that information was given in the catalog." When asked if that is where she learned these requirements and policies she indicated, "Yes, I read the catalog, I read the catalog very thoroughly. And then if I'm not sure I would call, ask questions. That's the purpose of the catalog. I was reading that catalog like it was an everyday book."

When Dannell was told that many students don't rely on the catalog for information, she was shocked. Dannell also mentioned that the further she progressed into her degree program, the less she relied on the catalog for guidance. Dannell also mentioned that her previous educational experiences at the community college level helped her deal with requirements at the University, as well as talking with other students who had earned degrees. She also gained information about the University's policies from reading the pamphlets she continually received before she entered her program.

Without hesitation, Cherlisha said that she got all the information dealing with the rules and policies of the University she needed to finish her degree program from fellow students. She was obviously dependent on her fellow students both for assessing the academic situation she was confronted with and for understanding the rules and policies that were integral parts of this situation. When Cherlisha was asked which persons at the University most assisted her, she answered: "Well, the person who is an equal (meaning her peers). It goes back to the other students. They helped me finish. Because no

matter what you're going through in your life, they encourage you to continue on. They're just important to me."

Wonita's situation was unique for she had to learn the rules and policies of the University at two distinct periods in its history. She began her associate's degree before the institution had grown and became a university. When Wonita started at the institution, there was one central office, called the General Office, in which many of the key academic administrators and support staff were housed. As Wonita put it, "I had more contact with the General Office." This was an open office area in which students would go before or after class to ask questions of those staff persons who were available. Students would either have their questions answered or be sent to other offices for answers. Wonita did admit, however, that she didn't have much contact with many of the staff and faculty during this time. So when she was asked if much of her knowledge about institutional rules and policies was gained through trial and error experiences, she admitted, "Yeah, probably by trial and error. It's not like someone took me to the side and mentored me or anything or showed me the ropes. So it would be more trial and error. No one ever showed me anything." This in the 1980's when the emphasis on orientation to college life was not nearly as pronounced as it is today. Upon her return she experienced a more conscious service-oriented environment.

Jonella also felt that she was left to her own devices to learn the rules and policies of the University. When asked how she learned the rules of the institution she gave the following response.

By doin' em every quarter. Cause no one told me. I mean I learned on my own and only way I learned is because I went to one place and they said we

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don't do it here you have to go upstairs. No one told me. I knew about financial aid because like I said I went to school before.

Jonella felt that she should have been given more exposure to the various departments and their services by the admissions department. She felt that she was just left to fend for herself.

I think for the first couple of quarters they should at least make sure that you're ok. That you can get around. You know...they just dropped you. I mean I haven't seen my admissions person since I've been here....since that first day I haven't seen him.

Jonella also recently learned that she could make tuition payments by going directly to the Business Office. As she put it,

I just recently found out that you don't have to go to the Enrollment Services to get finalized (make payment), you can just go to the Business Office and just get finalized. And they don't have to print you off a paper, you can go over there and they'll print you off a paper (meaning a statement of account).

When Jonella was asked, "how did you learn that", her response was "trial and error."

All of the women in this study had previous educational experiences. Therefore they came to the University with an existing repertoire of behaviors, experiences, and understandings or knowledge of how postsecondary education works. These perceptions

were obviously relied upon to get them through some of the complexities that they faced at the University. Their prior knowledge and assumptions about how the system works guided their decision-making about such things as class selection, registration, adding and dropping classes, financial aid and all the other processes and responsibilities associated with the role of student.

Learning to Manage the Constraints of Time

Time was a constraining force that each of the women in the study had to learn to manipulate carefully. For example, there was usually just enough time for most of the women to reach the University and get to class. After class most of these women were forced to rush home either to look after their children or household responsibilities. Courses that started later in the evening or on weekends were sought by all the women to allow them the time required meeting both work and family responsibilities. Jewel mentioned that there really isn't time to mingle with students or faculty if one already has extensive work and family commitments. She noted the fact that "There just isn't time to do these things". Since all of the women in the study worked full-time, had or have parental responsibilities, and maintain households, they echoed Jewel's thoughts on this matter.

Each woman recalled how she had to deal with the constraints of time. Jewel recollected how she had to restructure her life.

Before I had ridiculous hours. I was up all times of the night. I didn't set a time to where I would pick up my books. And doing that it all piled up and then I had to, like, rush. I think at that time I didn't do my best. Even though it was good, I think I could done better. So I had to find time when to do

my work, when to study, and making I did my reading because sometimes I didn't always do my reading.

Wonita best captured the essence of the time issue in the following statements in response to her having any social interaction at the University. She said she did not

Because of the time issue. You know, you drag yourself in here and the next thing you want to do is get through the class, be done, and go on. I can remember that there were occasions when at the end of the class, you ended up feeling connected with a classmate. But it never went beyond that. I never meet anyone after class. Maybe once, in my accounting class, we all met to do a take-home final. But beyond that, I never socialized with anyone strictly on a social basis. Everybody's so involved in his or her own lives. A lot of these women have children. Everybody works. So there's really not a lot of time unless you develop something really special, like a really special relationship where you want to carry it on beyond school. Most people were cordial, and a lot of times you did kind of recognize there was some sort of bond at the end of the quarter, but by that time you were going your separate ways. You were going on to another class. So, nothing beyond the coursework itself or beyond being in class, nothing social beyond that.

Later in the interview, Wonita described how she felt dealing with the conflicts between working full-time, trying to complete schoolwork, and other responsibilities.

When you come to class after work, you're already functioning at a deficit. You're not really all there unless you have a Saturday class. I'm much sharper in the morning than I am in the evening. I'm running at full capacity in the morning, but by the time you've been in an office all day, listened to the phone, answered to the demands of all those people, then you drive to class... You're kind of, like, hazy. I'm not sure if... Some things you'll listen to, then other things you start to tune out on. You start to think about the clothes you're going to wash when you get home, what you're going to get at the grocery store, or you're just not there at all.

Wonita initially set a deadline to finish her baccalaureate degree at age 40. But she discovered that the constraints of time kept her from reaching this goal and she adjusted her deadline to the realistic demands of her complex adult life style. Working two jobs, caring for a household and being responsible for her son had a negative effect on Wonita's ability to deal with the additional burden of degree completion. Concerning African-American women who face this challenge of degree completion, Wonita said

Women are driven because, a lot of times, their the heads of households, they have children, and they feel very, you know, compelled to make their lives better. But, by the same token, they're heads of households. They're managing their homes, they're children, their jobs. It's different with a man, because a man lot of men don't have full responsible for their children. There are some, but not a lot. Most of it falls on the women. That's why they're all

the more pressured. It's like a double-edged sword. They feel more pressured because they have all the responsibility, and because of that responsibility they can't allow themselves to take on too much...It's not that important...when it came to the reality of it, it was like it's not so important. If I don't have my degree by the time I'm 40...but realistically I can't do this. What's the point if you're gonna put so much stress on yourself that you're not healthy.

Cherlisha described her dealing with the issues of time constraints with school, work and home responsibilities in the following fashion:

I'd try not to take classes that started immediately after I got off work, right at the 4:45 class. That didn't give you enough time. I usually chose the 5:30 or 6:30 classes. And, my employer allowed me to work flex-time, so I could come in early and then I could get off work at least an hour or an hour-and-a half before class starts so if I had to read, I could read. Because I didn't have time to do anything at work. And, uh, if I had three classes, and I went to school three or four nights a week, then I just didn't clean up my house, I didn't do anything. I just go to work, go to school, go home, go to bed, get up and go to work. And then days I didn't have school, that's when I cleaned up, other than that I didn't worry about it. I haven't cleaned up my house in three months.

Cherlisha also mentioned that study groups were scheduled either before class

started or on the weekends, which meant Saturday or Sunday meetings.

Dannell also felt the constraints of time while attending the University and pursuing her baccalaureate degree. When she was asked about this time constraint issue she offered the following comment.

Well, it just doesn't seem there's enough time in the day (pause) to do everything. Work, go to school, take care of a house. But, when you're determined to do something, you just make the time. Cause you're exhausted by the end of the day. But if there's something you are determined to do, you will make the time. And I managed to do that. Uh... you just do it. That's the best way I can answer that. You have to discipline yourself...you have to. Um, yeah, when you're working and going to school, and then taking care of, like you said...outside commitments, you have to discipline yourself. You know that you have this time to do this, this time to do that, and you just do that.

Dannell was then asked, "What does that mean you discipline yourself?" Her response was, "A social life...you don't have a social life. You don't have time." Dannell was then asked, "That means friends, relatives, family". Her answer was, "Out the door."

After further probing, Dannell admitted that her social life revolved around school and work. The responsibilities of school and work became her social life because of the time constraints of working and attending classes and caring for her home.

Learning to Deal with Grades and GPAs

Grades are the single most important indicator of a student's successful adjustment to the academic environment within higher education. Grades and the credit they carry are the

currency by which students determine their ability to progress and complete degree requirements in the majority of institutions of higher education in America. At the undergraduate level, grades are the single best predictor of a student's obtaining a bachelor's degree and of ultimately attending graduate school (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991).

Grades are not only influenced by one's academic ability and intelligence, but are also affected by such factors as individual motivation, study habits, and quality of effort. Therefore, grades are not only indicative of a student's successful adjustment to the academic situation in higher education but also reflect his or her work habits and attitudes. For the students in this study, these habits and attitudes were brought to the academic situation from prior academic experiences.

Each subject's transcript of grades tells a story in itself (see Appendix G). These grades are listed chronologically by quarter attended. As a part of the data collected for this study, the grades indicate that there were several quarters when individual grades suffered due to the combinations of courses coupled with outside responsibilities caused a reduction in GPA. Also evident are the courses that caused several of these students difficulty, which were for the most part either mathematics or quantitatively oriented courses or English courses. Withdrawal grades of "W" were used as a means of protecting the subjects' GPAs. By withdrawing, the subjects avoided poor or failing grades.

As each woman re-assumed the role of student, she also had to accept the requirements established by the University to complete a degree. In coming to the University Cherlisha claims she did not experience what Becker, Geer, and Hughes

describe as a sense of “subjection” by all the rules and policies that create the fabric of the academic situation (1995). Indeed she urged

...as soon as you hit the door you automatically know you’ve got to try to do your best. You’ve got to. Because that’s what’s expected of you. They expect only the best from you, not halfway, kind of-sort-of, or what you feel like. They expect you to work hard for your grades because the school has a standard and they expect for their students to have standards.

It can be assumed that the “they” Cherlisha refers to in her statement is the faculty. Cherlisha also mentioned that she is accustomed to a structured environment, meaning on-the-job working in correctional facilities, and that she functions better in a structured setting with rules, policies and clearly defined parameters and outcomes.

Dannell simply referred to subjection as the “controlling factor.” In fact it was Dannell who when asked about the issue of subjection, explained

To me that was a given. When you go to school, you know that school is structured where you have to follow the guidelines of the instructor or the institution or whatever. I mean, it’s a given. I knew as an adult what I was going into when I decided to come back to college I knew.

Each of the five women accepted the fact that the “subjection” which Becker and associates describe is simply an aspect of the academic situation they found themselves in and dealt with it by working within the structured policies and demands made of them.

The acceptance and ability to change within the academic situation were critical in their ability to persevere.

The independence and pride that these women brought to the academic situation may also have implications for how they perceive themselves coping with the academic demands of degree completion. Since grades are the rewards for their efforts in pursuing their degree and meeting the academic challenges, they pride themselves in keeping a good grade point average. Because they were a reinforcing symbol of each woman's self worth and proof of her ability to succeed, grades became a motivating factor for each woman. Becker emphasizes the importance of grades: "Students work very hard to get grades and consider them very important, both for their immediate consequences and as indicators of their own personal ability and worth" (1964, p. 45). In addition the University as an institution, through its social structure virtually demands that students accept that grades are important, because within the reality of this social institution grades are important. For adult learners (as for all students) adequate grades are required to pass to the next course, to earn the credits necessary to graduate, and are mandatory to maintain enrollment in the institution. Adult learners do not debate these aspects of academic culture.

When Cherlisha was asked how important grades were to her and her ability to cope with the academic situation she found herself in, she said

They are important to me. I always wanted to get an 'A', always. But then I also know my limitations and I'm realistic about it. If I can't get an 'A', then I will settle for a 'B'. But I don't want to repeat anything. I also know that if I didn't work as hard as I should have then the grade that I got was

what I probably deserved because I know when I'm not doing well.

Cherlisha also indicated that “your grades reflect how much effort you’ve put into what you’re doing”. Cherlisha’s senior cumulative grade point average is 2.98 on a 4.0 grading scale. She claimed it makes her “feel good” when she gets above average grades (“I love getting A’s”). And when she does not receive the grade she would like, she notes that “I feel kind of bad about it.” However, Cherlisha did not let her average grades affect her attitude about school or deter her from her goal of completing the degree. When asked how she recovered from receiving a grade she felt was not up to her standards, she explained

I work harder to get an ‘A’ the next time and I even go over the work that I messed up. Even though it might be the last test and I might not be able to do anything about it, but I want to go back and see what I did wrong because I still understand I might use it out there. See that’s policing yourself and you have to do that.

Cherlisha received failing grades in a series of five Novell Courses because she could not pass the Novell certification examinations. These examinations are developed by the Novell Corporation and must be passed meeting the corporation’s standards. Credit is only assigned in these Novell courses if the student passes the certification examination pertaining to the course material the student has just completed. Cherlisha would not be allowed to graduate without these major course requirements, which were dependent on passing the Novell examinations. It was at this point that she was forced to decide

whether to continue or drop out of her degree program. Fortunately, she was able to make an accommodation with the chairperson of the Computer Information Systems Department. Cherlisha changed her major from a Novell program to a Web Management program, and was thus allowed to graduate. This situation in Cherlisha's academic career could have kept her from completing the baccalaureate degree. She describes the situation:

Well actually the whole Novell Program almost prevented me from finishing my degree. I didn't know that you had to pass the certifications in order to get your degree, and that's why I ended up being here an extra year.

When asked if the Novell crisis was an institutional policy that created a problem for her which she wasn't aware of, Cherlisha responded:

When you sign up for the Novell, at the orientation they don't tell you that. It's not until you've paid all your money and taken like four or five classes, and then they say 'you know, you have to have your certification or you're not going to get your grades and then you're not going to graduate.' So I was at the end.

When asked how she felt about this situation, Cherlisha continued:

Well, I was pretty upset about it. I said 'so what am I supposed to do?' They said 'you just wouldn't graduate.' That was Mrs. ----- I was talking to. I

asked her was there any other alternative. It just so happened that at the time this happened to me they added the web site Management classes, otherwise I don't know what would have happened.

Cherlisha felt this was an equitable resolution to the problem and changed her major to the new Web Management program. Had Cherlisha not been so goal-directed in pursuing her degree, she might have dropped out and never finished the baccalaureate degree that she will be receiving in June 2001.

Jewel also felt that grades were very important. As a senior, she has a 3.11 on a 4.00 grading scale. The majority of her grades were above average. However, Jewel remembered several classes in which she struggled and received C's or C-'s. When asked how important her GPA was to completing her degree, Jewel indicated that it was "very important." She explained the importance of the GPA by adding that

Even though I had a couple classes that I was having a hard time with and there were some things happening, between work and home and I just couldn't put my all into it, and I was very disappointed with the grade I received. It wasn't a bad, bad grade, but it was just not me. It kind of hurt a little bit. So I would strive on, trying to keep it up or I'll pull it up in the last year. It was very important. It tells something about you. It tells about your initiative, your strive, or how important you think education is.

The adult learners who re-enter colleges and universities with previous experiences in higher education can find these previous experiences having a positive or negative effect

on their ability to persist. In Jonella's case it was her previous experiences with mathematics that held her back from considering pursuing her education once she finished the associate's degree. Jonella remembers being overcome by fear after finishing her associate's degree at the independent community college and looking forward to continuing her education. She recalls "the thing that scared me was the algebra classes. I would not come back to school to take those algebra classes."

It was only in Jonella's second quarter that she attempted her first algebra course, a beginning level class. She received a "D" in this course, but this experience did not impede her progress or affect her level of motivation. She rationalized this as only one grade of many she would receive during her tenure at the University. In her-own words, "I didn't stop. I said, well, okay, that's just one D. I'll see what I can do." After all, she did pass the Algebra course.

In the next quarter, Jonella attempted an introductory accounting class, which she also feared since she viewed it as a quantitative course similar to algebra. But she received a grade of A. This experience was very motivating for her because other students mentioned how difficult accounting was for them and she did very well. "I had accounting and it was a whiz. It was so easy for me." This grade encouraged her to attempt other required algebra and accounting courses in which she did progressively better with each successive course.

In her interviews, Jonella described her attitude concerning grades and her GPA in defining her as a person and how she adjusted to her level of performance.

The grade point average didn't mean anything to me, but now it does now. It didn't at first. I just said whatever it's going to be, I know I learned

something. I think people put too much on grades. But then, they do represent something you learned in the class. The only reason why it means so much to me now is because I want to go to graduate school, and you need a 2.5, some places, you need a 2.0. I just think I really want to do this. It really didn't mean too much. It doesn't represent how smart you are. It's just, I don't know, I look at it as if you want to get into a good graduate school, you want to get into a good school, you need a great grade point average. But it's a stigma that's saying that okay, because you got a 2.0, you're average.

Not all of the five women were intensely driven to maintain high grades and GPAs. Dannell did not seem as intent on striving for high grades and GPA:

You know, I'm not really big on grade point averages. I'm really not. If I get a C out of a very hard class, and my grade point average has fluctuated because of that, I don't let it bother me. I ran into students who must, must, must, must get a 4.0 every quarter. No, to me that's too much stress. You already have enough to deal with on a daily basis. Why stress yourself out trying to get an A out of every class? No, no. Some classes are easy A's. I don't worry myself about a grade point average. No.

Yet it was Dannell, who after completing a term with four courses and working full-time, was excited that she had earned a 3.08 GPA on a 4.00 grading scale:

I was really impressed by my grade point average last quarter, because

at that time I carried four classes, and my grade point average was 3.08.

That's the first I ever really was concerned about my grade point average. I wanted to see if I could really do this, you know, and see what the outcome was going to be for that quarter, and 3.08, and I thought that was darn good. Four classes and working full-time. Actually I was working 40+ hours per week, and I managed to do that on top of it. I thought that was great.

She explained further how she felt. "I felt real good. I was telling everybody. As a matter of fact, I still have my report card at work. I was showing folks, see, see, see, look what I did."

Each of the five subjects in the study had a different viewpoint concerning grades and what Becker calls the GPA perspective. When Wonita was asked how important grades and GPA were to her persisting to degree completion, she said that they were "Relatively important. I didn't want to come out with anything less than a 3.0, that's for sure. But within reason, I wanted to keep it." She was then asked, "You mean above average", and she answered, "Yeah, above average."

Wonita also mentioned that there were certain instances when her feeling positive or motivated by her performance was augmented by grades that assessed her performance in the classroom. "When I did good on a test? You feel good, you feel satisfied. You feel like your effort was worth it."

However, there were courses that challenged Wonita and caused a certain amount of frustration and anguish:

...math was the most challenging for me, my algebra classes. I didn't do very

well in these classes. I took Algebra I and Algebra II and I got 'Cs' in these classes. At the time of my algebra I class, I wasn't even working. I was laid off, and this was like a foreign language to me. At first I thought I was doing well. But when I got the grade for my first test, it was awful. I'm like, what is it that I'm not getting?

Eventually Wonita overcame her fear and anxiety about her algebra requirements and completed Algebra II with a B. She then went on to complete the two statistics courses that were required to complete her degree program.

Each woman was resilient enough to alter her standards concerning grades and GPA in situations where performance did not meet expectations. Each woman gave the impression that she accepted the responsibility not only to improve herself, but also the fact that her actions resulted in certain outcomes. This is an example of Becker's reference to assessing performance in a situation effectively in order to make the adjustment. This resiliency to accept one's performance, even though it did not meet one's expectation, enabled these women to maintain the commitment necessary to attaining their goal of degree completion.

The review of these subjects' transcripts indicated that they all had difficulty with math, economics and accounting courses. The University's grade distribution data supports the fact that many students receive lower grades in these course areas. The University admits at least 60% of its new students with deficiencies in mathematics or English. Students who display deficiencies through testing are required to take remedial courses in either one or both subject areas.

These women were able to deal with the pressures of grades and GPAs by adjusting their perceptions of independence and their achievements in comprehending the course material. Cherlisha mentioned that she knew when she did not understand concepts or terminology. “You know within yourself if you’re not doing well”. To her such deficiencies meant more study time with the material or working with established study groups or individuals within the study group to gain confidence in her understanding of the material covered in class. When Cherlisha was asked how she assessed her academic performance, she replied

When I got my grades, when I turned in my assignments and my tests. If I did poorly on a test, that meant I had to really work hard and I’ll get the extra credit and I would do that too to bring them up. When they offer extra credit. That’s how you gauge how your performance is. You already know if you’re not doing well. You know that within yourself that you can do better.

At this point in the interview, Cherlisha was asked how she knew she was not doing well and her response was that,

Because, if [an instructor] is talking about a concept and you don’t have a clue what she’s talking about, and she’s been talking about it for the last three weeks and you still don’t know what she’s saying, then obviously you’re not paying attention or you’re not doing the extra work to make yourself understand.

In an attempt to understand further how Cherlisha felt about her performance and understanding of concepts introduced in class, she was asked specifically what feelings she experienced when she grasped a concept.

Confidence and achievement. Because that's what she's giving you. The instructor wants you to understand this concept. They keep referring back to it, and every time she mentions it, and you still don't understand what it fully means or how it's applied. You can remember a definition, but if you don't know how to apply it, what good does it do you? You can recognize the word, but if they say well I need you to do like this program and use arrays in it, but if you don't know how to create an array or what you have to declare in order for the array to work, what good does it do you. You know that an array is something to do with something else.

Jewel referred to an experience she had in one of her classes that indicated her attitude about grades and course demands.

It's too much to drop a class. I have a problem. I'll fight it out. In that particular class, I mean, so many people were dropping out. My first grade in the class, the first test I took, it was like a C-. The second test, it was a D. I thought, oh, this is terrible. And everyone had to have done bad. So [the instructor] threw that one out (meaning the grade). So he was going to take the two tests and put them together, and however he did it. There was like quite a few that dropped out after that second test. There were a lot of

students who said I'm just dropping, a lot of them. I tried to talk to someone about it because I was going to help them. But she just did. She dropped it. I was determined. No, I'm not dropping this class. I didn't want to repeat this. I have a thing about repeating. So, I got my book. I had three calculators. This was my Algebra III class so we could use a calculator. For some odd reason, the one calculator wasn't doing all the functions that the book said it could do so I had three calculators. I was determined to pass and I did. I passed that class with a B because I aced the test. I refused. And it wasn't on his teaching. I was not repeating that class, and I wasn't failing that class.

In Jewel's case the idea of refusing to drop and repeat a class was related to her attitude about the expense of education. To Jewel it was unacceptable to drop a class after spending the time and money she had invested in it. She felt she had to leave the situation with the grade and credit hours she needed to complete her degree.

Jewel loved to write and thought her writing skills were adequate for her personal use, which meant writing poetry and short stories in her journal. However, when she took University composition classes that are required for degree completion, Jewel learned that her writing skills were not adequate to meet the performance levels required in these courses. Jewel reflected on one instructor she had for an English composition course.

I love to write, I've always written. But I felt he was a little bit hard on some of my writing. He critiqued it a little bit too hard. He said it sounded pretentious. He knew I was good at what I did because of the words I used and the way that I did, but my grammar and things were just incorrect. I never

had a teacher tell me that. I thought he was just being unfair, and he was like picking on me. Every paper, he just tore it up. But it didn't discourage me. It just gave me what I needed to say uh-uh. He's wrong I can do it.

When asked if she learned from this experience, Jewel explained

Of course I learned. I learned to take my time. My biggest problem was I wrote and I didn't always proofread it. I had to learn to find out what I was doing wrong and correct the situation so now I'm learning to proofread what I write. Even though I was proofreading it, I wasn't reading it, and I had to learn to proofread it out loud because I was reading it to myself, and it sounded good to me. So when I started reading it out loud and started stumbling, I would say 'oh, something's missing.' I could feel it. It wasn't flowing. When I was reading it out loud at that time I could hear it. Before I couldn't hear it, so I didn't see what I was saying.

In order to persevere and meet the demands of degree completion, each of the women in the study learned to be flexible in terms of GPA and dealing with issues of grades. Developing this ability to be flexible allowed these women to overcome challenges and setbacks that may have broken their determination to reach their goal of degree completion.

When Wonita was asked how she dealt with not receiving an outstanding grade in a course, she gave the following response.

Well, I'm a perfectionist, don't get me wrong, but I think I may not be a typical perfectionist. I will put forth my very best effort when I do something. Almost anything I do, I'm going to put forth my very best effort, but there comes a point where your best is not enough.

Wonita was then asked how she adjusted when her performance in a course didn't meet her own expectations or standards.

At least I know that I tried hard. I know I tried hard. It didn't get me an A. but I know I tried, and that satisfies me. Of course you know, you want an A. Adult students want A's and B's, truly. They want those A's and B's. But, you can't be good at everything. You can't get an A and B in everything. Sometimes it's not even a matter of your effort, it's a matter of being distracted by other things. I had one class like I said, writing classes are easy for me, I like those classes. I had one Advanced Report Writing class, and that would have been an easy A for me. But I had so much going on at work at the time, and I had to be satisfied with a C from that class, and that would have been an easy A. That was an easy A class, but that was the best I could do considering the circumstances. So you just live with it.

When Jonella was asked if she felt that her grades and GPA reflected upon her as a person, she answered,

Yeah, I feel that, well my aunt and I were discussing, a 2.0 or 2.5, is just saying that you're just an average person. Well, everybody's just average. There are some people who are obsessed about being above average, and there are some people who are just average or just good at what they do. When I thought of it in those terms, I thought, okay, I am average. I don't expect anything less than a 2.5 and I'll just accept it like that. It bothered me at first, but now I'm getting close to the end and it doesn't. At first it did, when I first started, like in January. Okay, I got to have a 3.00. I just got to have it if I want to get into a graduate school. But now, okay, especially if they take grades at 2.5, so that doesn't make you less of a person because you have a 2.5. It's just that you're an average person. At 2.0 you're just average. There's nothing wrong with being average. I've accepted it and moved on.

Dannell was more methodical in her approach to assessing performance and dealing with grades and GPA. In her words it was a matter of determining what elements comprise the overall grade and confirming these elements with the instructor.

I was there every time. I stayed all the way through the class. I listened. I took notes. Things like that gave you a feeling that I'm doing okay here. I'm getting through this. Sometimes I would go back and look at my scores on my exams. I would make sure my scores were the same as what the instructor had also. Sometimes talking with the instructor can sometimes determine how well you're doing in class. Making sure I turned in all my assignments or whatever. That's it. Sometimes it tells how well you're doing in class.

All five of these women were obviously successful in adjusting to the grading and GPA requirements of the University. Grades were a defining element in each woman's tenure at the University. Grades were also a motivating factor that augmented each woman's ability to persist. They meet the challenges of the academic situation through their resiliency in adjusting to outcomes that did not meet their expectations, and dealt with issues of grades and grade point averages that were critical in achieving their ultimate goal of earning a baccalaureate degree.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

The voices of adult learners, who have become the majority of college enrollments nationally, need to be heard and taken into consideration when researchers look to develop theoretical constructs addressing the problems of persistence.

This study of persistence among five female African-American adult learners borrows from Howard S. Becker's construct of situational adjustment, which argues that adults change and adjust to new situations they confront. Through the interview process, each woman reflected on factors that were instrumental in aiding her to persist and complete a degree. Motivational factors and learning to assess performance that led to degree completion were discussed during the interview sessions. A review of these factors follows which adds to the knowledge base that higher education can use to implement institutional change that could effect the rates of persistence to degree completion among female African-American adult learners.

PROFILE OF SUCCESS ORIENTED TRAITS

Established Goals

The women in this study are success stories who achieved their goal of degree completion. Each woman was goal directed and remained committed to finishing her degree. They did not allow family, friends, co-workers, or the challenges of the academic situation to deter them from this goal. This recognition of individual motivations and goals that are brought to the academic situation varies from Becker's original construct of situational adjustment, which views what the individual brings to the situation as unimportant. Each of the five women made a conscious decision to enter and complete

her degree program. This goal directed behavior, coupled with the desire for career advancement and improvement in quality of life, was a major factor in their persisting to degree completion.

Thus, a crucial motivational factor that can influence persistence is a well defined career goal (Lenning, Beal and Sauer, 1980; Bean and Metzner, 1985; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991). Thus it would seem that immediate career counseling and goal setting during the student's initial term of attendance should be encouraged. At the university in which this study took place no specific career guidance was offered other than the master student course that had a limited component devoted to career choices and goal setting. And even this course, which is similar to many first-year experience courses offered by colleges and universities nationally, is not required of all students at the University. In fact, transfer students who enter the University with at least 15 semester hours of transfer credit are exempt from the master student (Resource Development, RD 100) course.

The data was consistent in the fact that each subject interviewed for this study had a definite career goal established prior to entering the University. Jewel, Cherlisha, and Dannell were seeking to advance themselves to management positions within their respective occupational areas, while Wonita and Jonella sought to change their careers from secretarial to management level positions.

Since well-defined career goals have been positively correlated to persistence, colleges and universities must take a more proactive stance in dealing with career counseling and work with students who are undecided or lack definite career goals. Such counseling should be mandatory for all incoming freshman or transfer students, even if they have already indicated a career choice. A realistic career goal that takes into account

a student's talents, interests, and aspirations, can be an essential element in a student's ability to adjust to the academic situation leading to a degree, and thus his or her ability to persist.

Independence and Pride

The five women in this study displayed marked traits of independence and pride in themselves, their ability to support themselves and their children, maintaining a household, and taking on the challenges of earning baccalaureate degrees. This noticeable consistency in the data concerning pride and independence was also reflected in these subjects' desires to achieve above average grades and maintain above average GPAs. However, there were instances when this independence and pride created tensions that each woman experienced in academic situations that resulted in lower than expected performances. This tension between performance expectations and less than desired performance on exams, class projects and written assignments could have easily caused each of the subjects in this study to not succeed.

There were also instances in which a subject's fear of a particular academic discipline, such as mathematics, altered the outcome of a course. Four of the five women had difficulty with the mathematics requirements of their chosen curriculum. They received grades of C, or lower in Jonella's case, in either the algebra or statistics courses. However, these less than expected course outcomes did not diminish their levels of motivation or dissuade them from their goal of degree completion. The ability to be resilient enough to accept a less than desired grade gave these four women the continued commitment to persist and earn the necessary credits required to graduate.

Resiliency

The stories of these five women are proof that they possessed the resiliency

to overcome life-changing events to become successful. These life-changing events ranged from divorce, physical impairment, single parenthood and becoming the single head of house-hold, to adding the burden of becoming a student. It was their ability to face and adjust to these dramatic events that also enabled them to adjust to the academic rigors and circumstances that encompass the degree completion process.

Resiliency has been defined by Richardson, Neiger, and Krumpfer as “the process of coping with disruptive, stressful, or challenging life events in a way that provides the individual with additional protective and coping skills than prior to the disruption” (as cited in Milstein and Henry, 2000, p.11). Each of these five women bounced back from adversity and became stronger and more focused on their individual goals of self-improvement and the betterment of their quality of life. The traits that these women possessed, such as the propensity for learning, independence and pride and the commitment to their established goals are all consistent with the characteristics that promote resiliency. The linkage of the concepts of situational adjustment and resiliency within the context of the academic situation that leads to degree completion, not only makes the cases of the five women in this study more understandable, but could add a new dimension to how persistence is viewed in many educational settings.

LEARNING TO BE SUCCESSFUL

Learning Institutional Rules

In learning the rules of the University each of the five women in this study took a different approach to uncovering the right and wrong techniques to accomplish tasks that were essential to each woman’s persistence. Some students used straightforward approaches such as reading the University catalog. Others found it much easier to depend on their fellow students to guide and direct them to the appropriate completion of

an administrative task or the resolution of an institutional policy issue. However, each woman indicated that the process of trial and error resolved certain issues or situations.

Selecting the appropriate mix and number of courses to take while working full-time was in every subject's case a process of trial and error. Without the advice and counsel of professional academic advisors each quarter, each of the five women indicated specific terms in which she suffered both academically and emotionally due to the pressure of a three-class course load. Since grades are the reward system for academic achievement, this trial and error approach to class selection and course loads resulted in negative outcomes that could traditionally have affected these subjects persistence.

The trail and error method of determining the most efficient method for resolving simple issues such as the most efficient method of paying tuition, how does one get extra help with class assignments, and which class combinations are best suited for busy adults, can be frustrating and detrimental to student persistence. Three of the women in the study indicated that they did not attend a new student orientation. This omission placed Jonella, Wonita and Cherlisha at a disadvantage. All of the processes associated with registration, class selection and withdrawal, as well as various institutional services were explained during the orientation process. A considerable body of research (Banzinger, 1986; Rothman and Leonard, 1967; and Wilkie and Kuckuck, 1989) supports the premise that effective orientations do improve persistence rates. According to Pascarella and Terenzini, (1991) the most effective orientation programs are those that last for an entire semester or quarter and are offered as a course with an assigned faculty member. This arrangement would be similar to the master student course offered by the University to incoming freshman.

Dealing with time constraints

While adult learners are faced with the daunting tasks of dealing with the academic demands of higher education, they also must deal with various adult roles outside of academia. The conflicts that arise can pose an extremely difficult time management problem. Each of the subjects in this study related the fact that she was forced to schedule time between work, home, and school demands. Study-time was the most difficult task to schedule. When these subjects attempted full-time enrollment status (three classes 12-quarter hours of credit), they found there was not enough time to complete reading assignments and prepare for examinations. This disparity posed a frustration for all five women who wanted to achieve above average grades and maintain an above average GPA. Haphazardly scheduled classes can clearly add to a student's burden of time constraints. Properly scheduled classes allow for less stress in the management of class assignments and mastery of material when juggled with the student's roles and duties outside of the academic situation. Finding the most effective time to study when each subject was most effective in reading and comprehending the course material was always a challenge. As Jewel put it, "Before I had ridiculous hours." She learned not only to schedule her time but her three children's time as well in order to reach her goal.

Attention needs to be paid to teaching time management skills as a tool that all students can employ in order to cope with the multiple tasks that three or more courses can impose on them. It is even more important to impart such time management skills to adult learners who are already frequently overburdened with work, home and community related responsibilities.

The master student course offered by the University does have a time

management component. But most transfer students, like all the five subjects in this study, are not required to take this course if they transfer in with a full semester's or quarter's worth of credits. All students, whether they be freshman out of high school or adult transfer students, could benefit from seminars or workshops dealing with time management issues and skills.

External Support Groups

The data from this study indicated that there were both positive and negative aspects of each subject's dealing with external relationships. These relationships were family oriented or stemmed from an employer or fellow employees who either supportive or non-supportive and negative of the subject's academic efforts. Such matters as financial support, caring for children while the student attends classes, or transportation to and from classes are obvious mechanisms that allow the student to make the necessary adjustments that lead to degree completion. Institutions of higher education must become more aware of the external contexts within which their students function while they attempt to complete degree programs.

Wherever possible, colleges and universities need to offer services to adult learners that make the burden of attending classes while working and caring for family responsibilities more manageable. Day care services have been offered during daytime hours but in some cases not during evening hours. More convenient class scheduling would make it easier for adult learners to select and attend classes without the pressure of rushing from work to class. Distance delivery of courses has been a beneficial to adult learners who now can complete courses from their homes without the struggle of commuting to a traditional campus-based classroom setting.

Learning to Deal with Grades and their Effect on Performance

The higher education establishment is often so intent on teaching students specific course content, basic liberal arts knowledge and skills that teaching students how to be successful in the academic situations that arise is ignored. Institutions of higher education often treat all students under the same rubric ignoring that fact that adult learners nearly always bring to the academic situation the additional burdens of family, work, social commitments, and an established life outside the academic world of classrooms, courses, examinations, degree requirements, and tuition burdens. If academia intends to address the problem of student persistence, a concerted effort must be made to teach all students the performance techniques that will give them greater chances to succeed.

Each of the five subjects indicated her desire to achieve above average grades and maintain an above average GPA. Bonita maintained a 3.27 GPA, Jewel a 3.21, Dannell a 3.11, Cherlisha a 3.01, and Jonella a 2.76. All of these women indicated in their interviews that they had consistently striven for above average grades. The divergence from this expectation occurred when they took classes in which their final grades were less than what they expected. At this point each woman had not only to adjust to this lower level of performance but also to accept and learn from her inability to assess the requirements of the particular academic situation, whether it took the form of examinations, class projects, written assignments, or ultimately, final grades.

In order to persist, these women had to balance their pride and independence against the demands of academic life by being resilient and adjusting to variances in their performances. The women in this study were able to deal with the frustrations that occurred when they delivered less than favorable performances and they adjusted to these

shortcomings. Typically, this kind of resiliency enabled Jonella to overcome her first negative experience at the University, when she received a “D” in her first algebra course, and allowed her to overcome her disappointment and persist. Each of the five women interviewed had situations in which she did not perform up to her own expectations. After receiving five failing grades in major courses, Cherlisha reached the point where she was told she could not graduate. Wonita received lower than expected grades in English courses that she felt were, as she put it, “easy A’s”.

All too often many African-American females, who lack this resiliency, may not be able to persist in this new academic situation called degree completion. Such failings may be attributed to their inability to meet the demands required of them motivationally and academically, their inability to learn what performances are required to persist, and, finally, their inability to deliver the performances required in meeting the established criteria of degree completion.

The five African-American females in this study had already assumed more dominant, white, middle-class cultural values in pursuing their goal of earning a degree. This aspiration to earn a degree fostered the tension experienced by all of the women in this study between themselves and their family members, friends and co-workers who have not completed college degrees.

Two of the five women in this study were considered underprepared students and were required to take remedial course work in mathematics before entering collegiate level mathematics courses. The declines in traditional, middle-class, college-aged students during the 1970s and 1980s caused a shift in recruitment efforts toward populations of underserved, less prepared high school graduates who normally did not seek entrance into higher education. More minority students, both African-American and Hispanic, were

targeted for recruitment into colleges and universities to offset demographic declines in the dominant, white, middle-class applicant pool, which dwindled through the mid-1990s. This shift in recruitment toward underserved and underprepared college-age and adult learners drew attention to how higher education dealt with this type of student. Astin (1988) explains that

Traditionally, efforts to educate underprepared students have been guided by two radically different philosophies. The elitist philosophy is to let them sink or swim, with the expectation that most of them will sink. This philosophy was at one time common in some of the large mid-western state universities that practiced open admissions. In effect, a high dropout rate was considered a mark of excellence in these institutions. The second philosophy holds that by admitting underprepared students the institution has implicitly agreed to provide whatever educational programs and services are necessary to help them reach their degree objectives. This philosophy, in essence, expresses a talent development view. It regards the underprepared student as an educational challenge rather than as a liability. It is, I might add, an active philosophy, as opposed to the basically passive sink-or-swim approach. Under the sink-or-swim philosophy, the educational institution presents itself as a kind of academic obstacle course, and students are expected to negotiate the course without any particular assistance or special treatment (p. 107-8).

The University at which the study took place takes a position on underprepared students that falls between the sink-or-swim and the talent development philosophies.

There are remedial mathematics and English courses available for underprepared students who test below 12th grade level competencies in either subject. However, these courses are currently taught in a self-paced format within which students read through content areas on their own and solve problems or answer questions independently. If problems arise, students ask for assistance from available instructors in the classroom concerning concepts and skills they cannot master. This classroom format relies on the student's initiative and self-directed behavior to be successful. Unfortunately, most underprepared students are not self-reliant; and, in many cases they have experienced negative classroom experiences which will prohibit them from voluntarily seeking help from an instructor. This current classroom format needs to be examined and altered to create a more supportive environment that will enable those students who need remediation to be successful.

Institutional research done by the University indicates that underprepared students who take one or more of the remedial courses, in conjunction with the master student course, show higher rates of persistence than students who do not take these combinations of courses (Stingel, 2000). Occasionally, underprepared students opt to defer the master student course to a later term, and the course is often waived for transfer students.

Another factor that would have exerted a positive influence on the subjects of this study would have been effective academic advising. Two of the subjects in this study received insufficient academic advising after they passed the remedial course work they were assigned. All of the subjects of this study mentioned that they felt they learned the process of selecting the number and types of course they took by trial and error. Carrying three classes and working more than forty hours per week can be a nearly impossible task

for students like these subjects. Each of the five women recalled at least one term in which she carried three classes and became overwhelmed by course work and job related pressures that caused her grades to suffer.

Effective academic advising forewarns the student of the hazards of overloading credit hours and taking the wrong combinations of courses. Historically, academic advisement has been either ignored or overlooked by the majority of students in higher education (Lenning, Beal, and Sauer, 1980). Much of the research on retention done by Bean and Metzner (1985) uncovered a wide range of disparate views concerning the effectiveness of academic advising. However, Bean and Metzner (1985) suggested that if an institution plans to retain older students, academic advising is an essential element in their persistence to degree completion, more so than with traditional 18-24 year old students. Unless academic advisement is made a mandatory element of the registration or class selection process, many students who think they are knowledgeable concerning course demands, course content, and time management skills, will simply ignore this service. For those students who are underprepared or at risk, systematic advisement must become an integral part of their matriculation process, until they have adequately learned the skills of class scheduling and time management.

Since persistence has become a significant topic within the academic community, it becomes more crucial to determine which theoretical constructs and types of research will best suit the population of students most at risk. The major difference between the most popular retention theory, that of Vincent Tinto, and Becker's situational adjustment construct lies in Tinto's emphasis on the student's integration into the academic and social aspects of college life as opposed to Becker's emphasis on adjustment and change within the individual. In the Tinto Student Integration Model, college departure is an

outcome of the student's inability to integrate himself or herself into the academic and social environment of the institution. Becker's situational adjustment construct, as employed in this study, would explain college success in the form of degree completion as an outcome of the student's ability to adjust to the academic situation. Thus it would seem that adult learners who are able to assess and deliver the appropriate performances required tend to persist and complete their degrees.

The use of the situational adjustment construct solely focused on the academic aspects of college life will be seen by some as too narrow to completely explain the success of students in higher education. However, the intent of this study has been to determine persistence among African-American adult learners who have navigated the requirements and demands of degree completion and have succeeded. By narrowing the focus, yet allowing for the inclusion of both external and internal experiences that related to the academic situation in which these five women found themselves, a better understanding of their adjustments and changes has been gained.

Since grades and GPAs are the rewards for performance within the overall academic situation that many students face, failing to meet minimal standards and the subsequent loss of academic credit has a decidedly direct effect on persistence. Despite such setbacks, these five women displayed a level of resiliency that sustained their commitment to achieving their goal of degree completion. Their commitment was also sustained by such motivating factors as having an established career goal, their personal independence and pride and a propensity for learning. The demands of course work became less burdensome because these women considered learning a positive element in their lives.

**BACCALAUREATE DEGREE PERSISTENCE AMONG ADULT LEARNERS:
THE CASE OF FEAMLE AFRICAN-AMERICANS**

APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol

Motivational Aspects:

1. Explain to me the reason you came back to school at the time you did?
2. Tell me about your first year here. Did anything happen that made you feel you might not finish your degree?
3. Did anything happen that first year that made you feel you could finish your degree?
4. Explain to me what motivated you to come back and to stay in school?
5. Tell me about any members of your family who helped you to finish your degree.
6. Tell me about any people at work who helped you either to start or finish your degree.
7. Were there any people at the University who helped you start or finish your degree?
8. Were there important social connections you made at the university and how important were they to you finishing your degree?
9. Were there any study groups that formed during classes that you took, and how long did they last?

Learning Aspects:

10. Tell me what you learned about being a student that helped you to finish your degree.
11. Tell me how important the things that you were learning in class were to you?
12. Explain how important these things you learned in class were to you professionally?

Appendix continues

APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol

13. Tell me how you really felt about the topics and material you were exposed to in class, were these things important to you or just something you had to cope with?
14. Explain the things you learned about being a student that were important to you?
15. What things did you learn about working with and interacting with instructors that helped you to finish your degree?
16. Tell me how you learned to deal with issues related to grades and grade point average?

Performance Aspects:

17. How did you come to understand the academic rules of the University?
18. Explain to me how important was your GPA to your getting through to complete your degree?
19. Tell me how you assessed your performance as a student in order to complete your degree?
20. Explain how important grades were in telling you how well you were doing?
21. Were examinations an important factor in knowing how well you were doing?
22. Was class participation important to you assessing your performance in classes you took?
23. How would you define persistence from your own experiences now that you are finishing your degree?
24. What do you think makes students persist to complete their degrees?

APPENDIX B

Subject Release Agreement

You are being asked to participate in a research study that deals with adult learners persisting to the completion of a baccalaureate degree. This study attempts to determine the influence of specific factors, such as motivation, learning, and performance on the ability of adult learners to continue and complete the academic requirements of the baccalaureate degree.

Nick Fleezanis is conducting this study in fulfillment of a doctoral program he is completing at Michigan State University within the school of education and the department of educational administration.

You will be allowed to ask questions concerning your participation in this research study and can withdraw from the study at any time with no negative consequences.

The length of each interview planned and the number of interviews that will take place are as follows: an initial one-hour (60 minutes) interview, followed by a second one-hour (60 minutes) interview, both to be conducted at a mutually agreed upon location at the University. Your anonymity will be protected throughout the entire study and any family member(s) or associates will not be specifically referred to in this research or any of the reports or documents that will result from this study.

You may contact Nick Fleezanis at 313-561-2668 or 313-581-4400 ext. 392 if you have any questions, doubts, or concerns about this study. You may also contact Dr. Steven Weiland at 517-355-2180 if you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject.

Subject's Signature

Date of Review and Agreement

APPENDIX C

Document Release Form

You are being asked to participate in a research study that deals with adult learners persisting to the completion of a baccalaureate degree. This study attempts to determine the influence of specific factors, such as motivation, learning, and performance on the ability of adult learners to continue and complete the academic requirements of the baccalaureate degree.

By signing this form you give Nick Fleezanis permission to obtain your academic documents such as: academic transcripts, examinations, essays, research papers, faculty comments and notes, as well as administrative comments and notes. These documents will be obtained and held by the researcher and will not be released to any other person during and after the research study is concluded.

By signing this form you are agreeing to allow Nick Fleezanis to obtain the above-mentioned documents as a means of determining your adjustment to the academic requirements in the completion of your baccalaureate degree.

Subject's Signature

Date of Review and Agreement

APPENDIX D

Public Institution Dropout Rates by Highest Degree Offered and Admission Selectivity

Degree Selectivity	Year	1983	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992
<u>PHD</u>										
Highly Sel		13%	13%	13.8%	12.4%	12.1%	11.1%	10.7%	11.4%	10.4%
Selective		22%	23%	22.6%	19.6%	19.6%	19.4%	19.2%	19.0%	19.9%
Traditional		27%	28%	28.9%	29.1%	28.1%	28.8%	28.2%	28.4%	27.5%
Liberal		33%	32%	31.7%	32.1%	32.5%	31.5%	32.6%	30.7%	28.4%
Open		31%	34%	35.5%	34.5%	36.9%	37.8%	34.3%	32.3%	35.1%
<u>Masters</u>										
Highly Sel		15%	30%	24.5%	16.3%	14.7%	16%	14.5%	15.8%	14.3%
Selective		25%	24%	22.5%	23.5%	24.7%	22.6%	22.6%	23.5%	22.4%
Traditional		27%	25%	27.3%	28.4%	28.4%	28.7%	28%	27.8%	27.8%
Liberal		34%	34%	34.8%	35.1%	38%	39.1%	38.8%	36.7%	36.1%
Open		37%	39%	41.8%	40%	40.8%	41.5%	39%	41.3%	43.1%
<u>Bachelors</u>										
Highly Sel		21%	19%	17.1%	17.7%	19.6%	17.4%	17.2%	15%	12.8%
Selective		16%	18%	16.4%	15.3%	14.6%	13.8%	13.9%	15.7%	15.6%
Traditional		24%	23%	23.1%	24.4%	29%	29.8%	30.3%	29.1%	29.2%
Liberal		30%	35%	36.8%	39%	34%	29.8%	28.2%	30.4%	34.6%
Open		44%	45%	43.3%	43.4%	43.5%	41.6%	42.8%	42.2%	43.9%
<u>Associate</u>										
Highly Sel		na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na
Selective		na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na
Traditional		na	na	na	na	33%	30.1%	30.4%	43%	38.3%
Liberal		na	na	na	na	40.5%	41.5%	41.6%	43%	42.6%
Open		na	na	na	na	48.8%	48.9%	48.9%	48.6%	48.7%

From ACT data files. Self reported dropout rates. 1983 to 1997: Freshman Class: % of last year's freshman class who enrolled this fall. 1998 to present: Freshman class: % of last year's first time/full-time freshman who enrolled this fall.

Appendix continues

APPENDIX D

Public Institution Dropout Rates by Highest Degree Offered and Admission Selectivity

Degree
Selectivity

Year	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
<u>PHD</u>									
Highly Sel	9.7%	10.5%	9.2%	9.7%	8.8%	9.8%	9.0%	8.8%	8.4%
Selective	19.6%	20%	20.1%	20.5%	20.2%	19.9%	19.5%	19.8%	19.6%
Traditional	27.5%	27.6%	28.3%	28.3%	28.8%	28.4%	27.6%	27.7%	28%
Liberal	25.9%	31.4%	30.1%	33.9%	33.3%	32.3%	32.4%	31.6%	31.8%
Open	39.2%	40%	36.9%	36.5%	37.4%	37.1%	35%	34.3%	36%
<u>Masters</u>									
Highly Sel	6%	6%	9%	11.7%	10.3%	10%	10.3%	10.3%	11.5%
Selective	22.9%	22.3%	23%	22.9%	21.6%	22.6%	21.4%	21.9%	21.8%
Traditional	28.2%	29.2%	29.7%	29.9%	30.2%	30.3%	29.1%	29.2%	28.6%
Liberal	36.7%	36.7%	37.3%	38.3%	36.8%	25.8%	34.1%	33.1%	34.6%
Open	42.2%	38.8%	38.7%	40.9%	42.3%	43%	43%	43.3%	45.1%
<u>Bachelors</u>									
Highly Sel	12.8%	14%	15.7%	12.4%	13.4%	14%	11.8%	11.5%	11.4%
Selective	16.8%	16.8%	17%	16.9%	15.9%	18%	20.6%	22.4%	22.4%
Traditional	34.5%	32.4%	33.7%	36.4%	34.2%	30%	30.3%	29%	28.5%
Liberal	31.5%	32.5%	34.7%	33.1%	33.6%	32.7%	34.4%	31.6%	32.8%
Open	40.2%	42.5%	42.5%	43.8%	40%	42.9%	43.9%	43%	44.7%
<u>Associates</u>									
Highly Sel	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na
Selective	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na
Traditional	38.4%	37.6%	38.6%	25.7%	27.7%	28.1%	27.7%	37.5%	42.3%
Liberal	41.6%	41.5%	40.5%	40.9%	43.8%	44.2%	45.6%	47.4%	45.1%
Open	48.8%	48.3%	48.5%	48.3%	48.3%	48.5%	48.1%	48.1%	48.4%

From ACT institutional Data Files: Self reported dropout rates. 1983 to 1997:
 “Freshman class: % of last year’s freshman class who enrolled this fall”. 1998 to present:
 Freshman class: % of last year’s first time/full-time freshman class who enrolled this fall.

APPENDIX E

Private Institution Dropout Rates by Highest Degree Offered and Admissions Selectivity

Degree Selectivity

Year	1983	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992
<u>PHD</u>									
Highly Sel	8%	8%	7.8%	7.9%	7.2%	9.2%	7.9%	8.3%	7.3%
Selective	16%	16%	16.5%	16.5%	16%	16.9%	15.4%	15.5%	16.1%
Traditional	21%	23%	23.4%	23.1%	21.5%	23.7%	24.2%	23.8%	24%
Liberal	27%	23%	28.3%	28.4%	31.7%	30.4%	30.9%	31.7%	30.6%
Open	15%	20%	20%	20%	19.3%	28.6%	21.2%	20.3%	20.3%
<u>Masters</u>									
Highly Sel	11%	8%	8.5%	9.4%	9.3%	6.1%	8.1%	7.3%	7.1%
Selective	17%	17%	17.3%	16.6%	17.3%	14.2%	16.8%	17%	17.5%
Traditional	22%	23%	23.4%	23.2%	24.1%	25.2%	23.8%	24%	24.7%
Liberal	29%	28%	28.5%	28.9%	30.3%	32.1%	29.9%	30.4%	28.8%
Open	24%	28%	26.8%	30.2%	28.6%	37.8%	30%	27.5%	27.6%
<u>Bachelors</u>									
Highly Sel	7%	7%	6.3%	6%	5.9%	8.0%	6.1%	6%	6.2%
Selective	15%	16%	15.5%	15.7%	15.1%	7.5%	14.4%	15.3%	15.9%
Traditional	24%	25%	26.2%	26%	25.1%	26.9%	25.4%	25.4%	26.1%
Liberal	31%	31%	33.3%	32.7%	32.3%	30.9%	33.4%	34%	32.8%
Open	35%	36%	36.8	40.6%	37.3%	28.8%	39%	38.9%	37.7%
<u>Associates</u>									
Highly Sel	na	na	na	na	4%	8%	14%	na	na
Selective	na	na	na	na	7%	7.5%	6.7%	6.7%	5%
Traditional	na	na	na	na	25.2%	26.9%	27.9%	25.6%	24.9%
Liberal	na	na	na	na	32.1%	30.9%	30.8%	29%	28.8%
Open	na	na	na	na	29.2%	28.8%	29.3%	29.8%	28%

Data compiled from ACT institutional data files. 1983 to 1997: "Freshman class: % of last fall's freshman who enrolled this fall". 1998 to present: Freshman class: % of last year's first time/full-time freshman class who enrolled this fall.

Appendix continues

APPENDIX E

Private Institution Dropout Rates by Highest Degree Offered and Admissions Selectivity

Degree Selectivity

<u>Year</u>	<u>1993</u>	<u>1994</u>	<u>1995</u>	<u>1996</u>	<u>1997</u>	<u>1998</u>	<u>1999</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>2001</u>
<u>PHD</u>									
Highly Sel	6.7%	6.8%	6.9%	7%	7.3%	7.4%	7.4%	7.6%	7.7%
Selective	16.8%	15.9%	15.3%	15.9%	16.2%	15.2%	14.6%	14.9%	14.9%
Traditional	23.6%	23.7%	23.6%	24.2%	24.6%	23.9%	22.8%	22.2%	22.9%
Liberal	32.3%	33.7%	35.3%	37.7%	40.4%	34%	34.6%	34.7%	34.9%
Open	18.2%	21.5%	22%	43%	30.3%	36.5%	17%	17%	na
<u>Masters</u>									
Highly Sel	8.4%	10.6%	10.4%	10.4%	9.6%	10.1%	9%	9%	10.2%
Selective	17%	17.6%	18.3%	19.1%	18.7%	18.7%	18.5%	19%	18.3%
Traditional	25.3%	25.5%	25.2%	26.1%	25.9%	25.8%	25.7%	26.3%	26.4%
Liberal	30.1%	30.4%	31.9%	33.6%	31.6%	30.4%	30.1%	29.8%	28.8%
Open	27%	27.1%	29.3%	31.3%	30%	29.2%	32.2%	32.8%	36.1%
<u>Bachelors</u>									
Highly Sel	6.3%	7.4%	8.3%	8.4%	8%	8%	7.7%	6.9%	7.3%
Selective	17.1%	17.7%	17.9%	17.5%	18%	18.4%	18.4%	18.3%	18.2%
Traditional	26.1%	28%	28.5%	28.9%	29.1%	28.9%	29.2%	28.7%	29.5%
Liberal	32.3%	35.8%	35%	36.3%	39.1%	37.3%	36.6%	36.1%	36.7%
Open	38.4%	36.8%	40%	42.8%	40.7%	39.5%	35.8%	35.8%	36.5%
<u>Associates</u>									
Highly Sel	na	8%	8%	na	na	na	na	na	na
Selective	5%	9%	4.3%	6.7%	10%	11%	7.3%	26.5%	28%
Traditional	23.4%	24.3%	23.8%	26.4%	25%	28.5%	22.8%	24.7%	27.3%
Liberal	28.7%	29.3%	30.3%	30.7%	31.1%	30.3%	32.1%	31.3%	32.3%
Open	29.3%	31.1%	34.7%	36%	37.7%	36.3%	35.8%	38.8%	38.2%

Data complies from ACT institutional data files, 1983 to 1997: "Freshman class: % of last fall's freshman who enrolled this fall". 1998 to present: "Freshman class: % of last year's first time/full-time freshman class who enrolled this fall.

APPENDIX F

Total Undergraduate Fall Enrollment 1969 to 1997 (In thousands)

Year	Total	Men		Women	
		Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time
1969	6,664	2,952	1,056	2,039	837
1970	7,376	3,097	1,157	2,183	939
1971	7,743	3,201	1,217	2,311	1,014
1972	7,941	3,121	1,308	2,367	1,145
1973	8,261	3,135	1,403	2,445	1,278
1974	8,798	3,191	1,574	2,535	1,498
1975	9,679	3,459	1,798	2,710	1,712
1976	9,429	3,242	1,660	2,788	1,739
1977	9,717	3,188	1,709	2,906	1,914
1978	9,691	3,072	1,694	2,895	2,030
1979	9,998	3,087	1,734	2,993	2,185
1980	10,475	3,227	1,773	3,135	2,340
1981	10,755	3,261	1,848	3,188	2,458
1982	10,825	3,299	1,871	3,184	2,470
1983	10,846	3,304	1,854	3,210	2,478
1984	10,618	3,195	1,812	3,153	2,459
1985	10,597	3,156	1,806	3,163	2,471
1986	10,798	3,146	1,871	3,206	2,575
1987	11,046	3,164	1,905	3,299	2,679
1988	11,317	3,206	1,931	3,436	2,743
1989	11,743	3,279	2,032	3,562	2,869
1990	11,959	3,337	2,043	3,639	2,940
1991	12,439	3,436	2,135	3,786	3,082
1992	12,538	3,425	2,158	3,820	3,135
1993	12,324	3,382	2,102	3,797	3,043
1994	12,263	3,342	2,081	3,827	3,013
1995	12,232	3,297	2,105	3,849	2,982
1996	12,259	3,304	2,107	3,907	2,942
1997	12,298	3,330	2,075	3,976	2,917

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics, Higher Education General Information Survey (HEGIS), "Fall Enrollment in Colleges and Universities"; IPEDS "Fall Enrollment" surveys, prepared July 1999.

APPENDIX G

Subjects' Grades by Quarter Attended

Jewel			Wonita					
Fall 98	Eng132	C+	Fall 82	DP198	C	Spr 95	Hum440	A-
	Mgt 221	B		Law362	B		Mgt220	A
	Mth095	P		Sec2E9	B			
Win 99	Eng231	B	Fall 87	Psy140	A	Win 97	Eco271	B-
	Mth192	A-		Soc245	A		Eng431	C+
	Soc201	A	Win 88	Eng132	B	Spr 97	Hum443	B+
				Sec1A8	A		Mgt228	A-
Spr 99	Eng330	B+	Spr 88	Eng231	B	Win 98	Acc212	A-
	Mgt326	A+		Eng330	B			
	Mth193	C+				Spr 98	Acc213	A
Sum 99	Ind488	B	Fall 88	Acc211	C	Sum 98	Acc310	B
	Mth194	B		Sec3W1	B			
	Psy342	A-	Win 89	Eco272	B	Spr 99	Fin350	B+
Fall 99	Mkt280	A		Sec104	B	Sum 99	Mth192	C
	Mth393	C		Sec2R1	A			
	Mth394	B+	Spr 89	Mgt221	B	Fall 99	Mth193	C
Win 00	Eng431	A-		Sec2W5	A	Win 00	Mth194	W
	Mgt228	B+		Sec2W6	A			
	Mkt385	C-	Fall 89	Acc212	W	Spr 00	Mth194	B
Spr 00	Acc211	B		Eco271	W			
	Eco271	B+	Fall 93	Cis1C1	B	Fall 00	Mth393	C
	Eco272	B		Ind 488	B+	Win 01	Mth394	A
Sum 00	Acc212	B+		Psy342	A-			
	Law361	C	Win 94	Mgt227	A			
	Mgt227	A-		Mkt280	A-			
Fall 00	Acc213	B	Spr 94	Mgt320	B			
	Mgt202	B		Mgt421	A-			
	Mgt320	B+	Fall 94	Law361	B+			
Win 01	Cis101	A		Mgt323	A			
	Mgt426	A	Win 95	Mgt 325	B			
Spr 01	Fin353	A-		Mky322	A-			
	Mgt220	B						
	Mgt499	B						

Appendix continues

APPENDIX G

Subjects' Grades by Quarter Attended

Dannell			Jonella					
Fall 97	Acc 211	B	Spr 98	Cis 101	C+	Fall 00	Fin353	D-
	Eng 330	B-		Law 361	C		Hsa213	B
	Soc 201	B		Soc 201	A		Hsa450	B
							Mth194	C-
Win 98	Cis182	B+	Sum 98	Cis182	A	Win 01	Mth393	C+
	Acc212	B+		Mth192	D		Mth394	C+
	Hsa101	A					Hsa305	B
Spr 98	Mgt202	W	Fall 98	Acc210	A		Eng431	B-
	Mkt280	W		Eco271	B	Spr 01	Fin456	B
	Ois240	B-		Eng098	P		Hsa300	B
Fall 98	Eco271	C+	Win 99	Acc211	B		Hsa445	B
	Ois215	B-		Eng131	D		Hsa498	B+
	Ois225	B-		Mgt221	B			
Win 99	Cis208	A	Spr 99	Acc212	B+			
	Eco272	C		Hsa250	A-			
	Mkt280	A		Mgt202	B-			
				Psyl40	C-			
Spr 99	Mgt202	B+	Sum 99	Acc213	B			
Fall 99	Acc213	C+		Eng132	C			
	Hum440	A-	Fall 99	Hsa245	B+			
	Ois350	W		Hsa275	B			
	Ois499	A-		Hsa252	B+			
Win 00	Fin353	B	Win 00	Mkt280	B			
	Mgt227	B+		Mth193	D			
	Mgt320	A		Hsa251	A-			
	Sph233	W						
Spr 00	Cis209	C+	Spr 00	Eng330	B			
	Eng431	E		Hsa260	B+			
	Ois350	W		Hsa440	B-			
				Mth194	W			
Fall 00	Cis205	C+	Sum 00	Hsa215	B+			
	Mgt421	A-		Hsa320	B			
	Ois220	B+		Hum440	B			
	Sph233	B						
Win 01	Eng431	B	Fall 00	Fin353	D-			
	Ois226	B+		Hsa213	B			

Appendix continues

APPENDIX G

Subjects' Grades by Quarters Attended

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Fall 96	Acc211	B+	Fall 99	Cis487	A-
	Cis101	A		Eng431	B+
	Soc245	A			
Win 97	Acc212	B	Win 00	Cis488	B
	Cis182	A		Mkt280	A
				Sph233	B+
Spr 97	Eng131	B+	Spr 00	Acc213	C
	Mth096	P		Cis271	A
	Soc201	B		Cis308	C
				Cis499	A-
Sum 97	Cis171	A	Sum 00	Cis208	B+
	Eng132	A		Eco271	D
Fall 97	Cis172	A-		Eng231	B
	Eng330	A		Fin353	C
	Mth192	B			
Win 98	Eco272	A-	Fall 00	Cis309	B-
	Mth193	B+		Jpn151	A
	Cis204	A	Win 01	Cis311	A
				Cis381	A
Spr 98	Cis213	C			
	Cis305	C			
	Mth194	C			
Sum 98	Cis205	A			
	Cis220	E			
Fall 98	Cis317	E			
	Mgt202	B+			
Win 99	Cis306	C			
	Cis322	E			
	Mth393	C+			
Spr 99	Cis307	C+			
	Cis325	E			
	Law361	A			
Sum 99	Hum443	B			
	Mgt221	A			

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