

EXPECTATIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF OLDER COLLEGE
STUDENTS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TWO-YEAR
AND FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS OF
HIGHER EDUCATION

By

KRISTA S. MOORE

Bachelor of Science
Oklahoma State University
Stillwater, Oklahoma
1979

Master of Arts
Trinity University
San Antonio, Texas
1981

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Thesis Approved:

Gene Acuff

Thesis Advisor

George Elquist, Jr.

Lan Selatorich

Patricia Bell

Norman N. Dunham

Dean of the Graduate College

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM OF OLDER COLLEGE STUDENTS

Introduction

Colleges and universities have traditionally been the domain of the young. They are supposed to be what Chase (1981) called "survival factories," places where all the accumulated knowledge of the world is passed on to the next generation. This next generation is ever changing, ever young. The question is then raised: what are older persons doing in this environment? Persons over 50 years of age have already "survived" and made contributions to the world. What can college offer them?

There are many answers to this question, but when older adults are asked why they attend college many of them reply that it is for reasons connected with employment. Others attend college to learn more about particular interests and personal satisfaction. It may not matter as to why the older adults want to attend college. The fact remains that they are enrolling in courses in slowly increasing numbers. They are not creating a revolution; they are not taking over college campuses. Instead, they are quietly slipping into seats, taking exams, sharing a few experiences, and then silently returning to "their" world.

When increases in the population of older adults began to make an impact (in the 1950's), a few researchers discussed the potential that

existed in opening up colleges to older persons (Donahue, 1955). Extremely few adults ventured into this sacred domain of the young. As time passed, however, older adults began to believe that life did not end at 40 or 50 and that the world was open to them. During the 1970's a few more daring persons decided to invade the college campus. Over the past fifteen years, gray headed students stopped being a novelty and began to be a research topic.

The sparsity of older students on campuses has led to little research. Most of the current knowledge in this field was gathered at the college or university where the researcher was employed. Therefore, it consisted mainly of studies conducted on single campuses with no comparisons to other types of college located in various areas. The present research project, in focusing on the differences between older students at different types of colleges, has begun to fill a void in the literature. The research presented in these pages was conducted with older students at ten different colleges. Half of these colleges were community colleges (also referred to as two-year colleges and junior colleges) and the other half were ones which offered at least a bachelor's degree to their students (four-year colleges or universities). This research also considered the location of the colleges. Five of the colleges, two of which were also community colleges, were from non-metropolitan areas. The other five were located in standard metropolitan statistical areas of over 50,000.

Older students may also be faced with problems that younger students do not have. They often have surprises in store for them on campus and may encounter a kind of culture shock. These problems and surprises possibly differ according to the type of college the student

is attending and the location of that college. The research presented here considered whether these differences existed. It also examined what the overall effect of college was on these adults and whether the type and location of college had an affect on the impact of college.

The research literature is filled with information on the demographic compositions of various colleges and has also concentrated on the reasons that older adults return to college. While these findings provide a basis for other research, new steps in the research program need to be taken. One of the questions connected to "why" older adults decided to attend college was the ambiguity of expectations. Questions concerning the enjoyment, challenge, usefulness, or difficulty of coursework were social psychological "rehearsals" which were believed to be important. These older adults who had begun to attend college may have had fears to overcome. When leaping the bounds of age stratification they probably seriously considered their breach of age norms.

Expectancy theory is based on the hypothesis that people have detailed prior expectations of various aspects of their lives. If these expectations are strong and of a positive nature, then a negative experience is going to create frustration. Older adults facing an experience with college, an unusual experience since they are breaking out of age norms, will have defined expectations of this new environment. They might expect college to be very difficult or easy or boring or enjoyable. These expectations will be changed once the older adult begins college and has actual experiences as an older student. The present research concentrated on these questions. The older students were asked to rate their remembered prior expectations of

college life on 21 items. Concurrently, they were asked to rate how they experienced these items after they began to attend college as an older adults.

This study examined the differences between expectations of college and their actual experiences. It was important to consider whether differences were positive or negative. If the differences were negative (expectations were higher than experiences) then the issue centered on whether the differences were associated with the problems that these students encountered or with insalubrious surprises?

Contributions of the Study

The results of this study will add to the general literature concerning older adults on campus. But, hopefully, it will do more than that. After 25 years of increasing student enrollment universities and colleges are experiencing some fluctuation in their numbers. Many are searching for innovative ways to continue to fill the classrooms. One of these ways is to encourage older adults to attend college. Before colleges undertake this strategy they must know what the older student is going to expect out of college and what problems will confront the older student. Some colleges are attempting to bring in large numbers of non-traditional students. Subsequently, they may have many unhappy older students because the college expected the older adult to conform to the norms set by the young students. This is unrealistic; the present study may be used by colleges and universities to circumvent some of these latently dysfunctional practices.

There is another practical usage of the research presented. There is an unknown number of older adults who would like to attend college

but are prevented because of unrealistic expectations. Perkins' (1981) study showed that many older adults had no interest in college, but a small (7) percentage of his sample were interested. These people had little past experience with college and felt insecure on college campuses. They had stated a desire to attend college for their own personal interest but were dissuaded by concerns over the difficulty of exams and feeling out of place on campus. It is hoped that the findings of this study can be used to reassure such older persons that they can "make it" in college. If they view college as less threatening then they might enroll and discover whether they want to invest their time taking courses.

This research also provides a basis for future studies concerning older students. There are many areas that social research could address with applied benefits. For example, the differences of the college experience for older men and older women, the feelings of being out of step with their cohort, and how life experiences of older students interact with course work are just a few of the areas open to further research.

The world is constantly changing and one of the recent changes is older adults breaking with traditional age bonds by becoming a part of the college milieu. Since this is a new phenomena, it is important to understand the interactions and relationships that are taking place. There is the potential of larger numbers of older adults attending college and if this happens, the institution of higher education may have to make some major changes.

Organization of the Study

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter II presents an overview of the research literature on higher education and older adults. The chapter first covers the literature on the characteristics of older students, then it turns to the barriers that prevent older adults from attending college. Next it considers available research on motives for older adults returning to college and the older students' preferences for locations of educational activities. This chapter also presents information on administrative and tuition issues.

Chapter III focuses on theoretical foundations of this study. Social gerontological and social psychological theories are discussed, as well as social cognition theory. The predominant theory utilized for the research to be presented is expectancy theory. A review of this theory will be covered, as well as its application to the study of older college students.

Chapter IV discusses the methodological issues of this project. It begins by covering the issues involved with surveys and their design. The operationalization of key variables was covered next since they were important in designing the questionnaire. The following section considered the stratified random sample from which the data presented were taken and included the response rates from the various colleges involved. This chapter closes with a discussion of the statistical techniques that were utilized.

The research findings are found in the fifth chapter. It covers the demographic differences of older students attending different types and locations of colleges, as well as these students' educational

characteristics. The educational characteristics are separated from the other demographic characteristics because they merit special attention. The chapter then focuses on differences among older students who are attending colleges with varying proportions of older students. The college expectations and experiences of older students, and the scales developed for the study, follow. The differences between expectations and experiences is presented along with the relationships of these differences to problems which older students encounter.

The final chapter discusses the implications of the research findings and draws some final conclusions. Chapter VI is organized similarly to Chapter V, first addressing the demographic differences of older students and then moving on to their expectations and experiences. It then discusses the implications of past college experience, college problems, expectations and experiences of older college students. A discussion of the general effects of college attendance is then included, followed by a general summary of this study. This chapter ends with a discussion of the limitations of the study and ideas for further research that emanated from this research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON OLDER ADULTS AND EDUCATION

Those who dare to test themselves in formal classrooms discover for themselves and illustrate to others that learning is a joy and a fulfillment, that age enhances rather than inhibits learning, and that the existential state of being that includes discovering and growing can and should continue through the entire extent of one's life. (Jacobson, 1977, p. 53)

The topic of the older student's role in education was first discussed by Donahue in 1955. This paralleled the increasing proportion of older adults in the United States and the development of gerontology as a specialized area of study. Donahue discussed problems dealing with finances and the attitudes of administrators, younger students, and older students. For twenty years, however, there was only speculation on the topic with few studies to back up the intuitive beliefs of Donahue. Eklund (1969) wrote of the same problems: stereotypes of the elderly, no financial incentives, problems of having to deal with older students. Yet, research in the area did not become common until the mid-1970's when several events interacted with one another to trigger an interest in older adults as students. The peak of the baby boom was in college at the time but researchers realized that they would soon be gone and that the succeeding cohort would be significantly smaller. Because of the baby boom cohort colleges and junior colleges had sprung up in small towns as well as cities and the existing ones had

dramatically increased in size. The post World War II G.I. Bill had enabled the fathers of the baby boomers to attend college and these men were coming closer to retirement age. Since people were living longer and retiring earlier, there was a sizable population with leisure time to attend college. The turbulent 1960's had loosened the age norms so that there was more flexibility for older adults. In 1976, Congress officially recognized the educational needs of older adults by including the following passage to the amended Higher Education Act of 1965:

". . . lifelong learning is important in meeting the needs of the growing number of older and retired persons" (Public Law 94-482, Section 131).

Explanations of the social processes of aging have also been changing in the past thirty years. According to Riley (1971), American society was stratified according to age as well as social class. Educational institutions have helped to define and differentiate age strata by institutionalizing conceptions of life-cycle stages (Parelius, 1975). The process also provided socialization experiences which move age cohorts to new levels of development at particular chronological points in the life cycle. These latent functions of education have inhibited older adults from participating in higher education. But with the rise in the proportion of older Americans, this dimension of age will dramatically change.

In the past the role of "older person" consisted of taking leadership positions within the institutions. Older adults were expected to organize, lead, and control activities. Older persons were supposed to be the deacons of the church and leaders of the community and administrators of the schools. But the role of older person has

become increasingly differentiated and many have decided to leave the responsibilities of administration to others and become beneficiaries of active participation. It is common for people in their sixties and seventies to ride bicycles, jog and ski. It is also becoming more common to find them in advertising, making news reports and lobbying politicians.

[Many persons believe that it is essential for older persons to become involved in some form of education in order to conclude their life with meaning. Education has the possibility of alleviating certain problems of older persons, disseminating information that will lead to prevention of other problems, and enriching their lives through personal growth (Peterson, 1981; Russ-Eft & Steel, 1980). Blau (1981) states that " . . . self-understanding requires an appreciation of the social and historical conditions that mold and constrict us. Only then can we begin to separate what is the historical constraints imposed upon us" (p. 171). Many older persons, however, believed that living is learning and that they do not need formal education (Houle, 1961). Others saw formal education as a positive factor to be added to the experiential learning. "With learning and reflection, along with the experience of living, can come greater autonomy, greater self-understanding, and greater compassion for others" (Blau, 1981, p. 171).]

In the past the first phase of life was the learning age (Covey, 1981). After the age of 25 the adult was supposed to put away learning activities and begin employment activities. (Several researchers (Birren and Woodruff, 1973; Foner, 1986) have stated that lifelong learning should become prevalent in American society for two reasons. The first reason was based on the increase in life expectancy, providing

individuals with more time to experiment with different aspects of life, including educational activities. Secondly, societal changes, whether they are technological, spiritual, or social, provided a world with opportunities to learn new ideas or skills, as well as keep current with older ideas. Neugarten and Datan (1973) have discussed whether the rhythm of the life cycle has changed due to societal changes. If so, persons living longer might use education as a means to reorient themselves to the world surrounding them.

Characteristics of Older Students

The main determinant of participation of older persons in education has been found to be the number of years of previous formal education. "University education begets university education" (Hooper & March, 1978, p. 322). In 1985, of those persons over the age of 65, 48 percent had attended high school and 9 percent had completed at least 4 years of college (Facts on Aging, 1986, p.9). As more educated persons grow old, there should be an increase in the population of older students.

Other characteristics that are associated with college attendance at later ages were all related with upper-middle-class status. These persons were generally more active in their community, they read more, and were more gregarious (Peterson, 1981). These individuals were more prepared than most older persons for the role transitions that occur in old age (Price, 1981). Those likely to participate were white, own their car and home, have either taken early retirement or are in later stages of work life, and had better health than other persons their age (Bynum, Cooper, & Acuff, 1978; Conter & Schneiderman, 1982; Heisel & Anderson, 1981; Hooper, 1981). The "old old" and socio-economically

disadvantaged were much less likely than other older adults to attend college (Heisel & Anderson, 1981).

Older persons who have participated in college have usually been persons living in metropolitan areas (Price, 1981). It was generally believed that rural persons did not value higher education, and that the older rural persons were the least likely to attend college. Recent studies have demonstrated, however, that rural farm persons valued higher education as much as their metropolitan counterparts (Lowe & Pinhey, 1980) and were willing to overcome transportation and time problems that arose when attempting to participate in higher education (Hausafus, Ralston, & DeLanoit, 1985).

There are major problems in attempting to discover the exact number of older persons involved in education. Some senior citizens centers and public housing units sponsor classes in their own facilities that are not tied to any formal educational structure. Even when the students are taking classes on campus, the universities and colleges are not uniform in their record keeping. Some do not count students on tuition waivers or students enrolled in on-campus programs that have their classes separate from younger students, such as Elderhostel (80,000 participants, 1983/84). Therefore, any reports on the number of older adults participating in educational activities are not likely to be representative.

Barriers Preventing Older Adults Participation in Higher Education

There were four basic areas that deter older adults from returning to formal educational activities; these are the institutional,

emotional, physical, and mental. Some of the institutional barriers were based on various ideas that were antithetical to the return of older persons. According to Covey (1981), there were four assumptions to education. One can only succeed through performance (meritocracy) and the performance must be of a certain level in order to continue learning (competition). At the same time there was the opportunity for all to try to learn (equality of opportunity) as individuals (persons are evaluated on their own performance). True learning, however, was not necessarily based upon these principles and elderly persons may not feel the need to "jump through the hoops" in order to have the opportunity to learn. The older student may be more interested in actual learning than performing.

Training and integration of the young into society was considered to be one of the dominant goals of education. Education is an agent of socialization for the young student with little consideration for the non-traditional student. Just as education is used for socialization of the young it also has the potential to be used as a socialization agent for older persons. The land-grant universities were especially founded for the benefit of all state residents not solely for the young.

Maintaining existing roles and creating new roles is possible through education. In addition, education can help the older adult keep up with societal and technological changes. "Besides the implicit assumption that older people cannot learn, there exists the assumption that individuals can learn enough in their youth to last a lifetime" (Covey, 1981, p. 376). In recent years, "educated" persons have found that they have trouble with modern technological advances, thus feeling "uneducated". Even though the education gap is closing, there will

continue to be an information gap (Heisel & Anderson, 1981). If persons wish to remain "educated" they will have to become lifelong learners.

Some of the emotional deterrence can be found in real or imagined fears and previous negative experiences. The emphasis upon the young in education and the idealization of youth in our culture has created a fear for many older persons. "It appears that one of the barriers to the enrollment of more mature adults in college is fear of feeling out of place with the younger students and being denigrated by them" (Tindall & McCarter, 1981, p. 196). Many of those currently old have been academically and socially unprepared for college course work. They did not believe that they can learn and they underestimated their academic abilities (Romaniuk, 1984). Those that have had negative experiences with education in childhood were unlikely to attempt what they view as more difficult material in an alien atmosphere. Therefore, a combination of fear of inabilities, fear of failure, and fear of environment discouraged elderly persons from attending educational institutions (Goodrow, 1975; Papalia-Finally, 1981; Peterson, 1981; Pritchard & Tomb, 1981; Tindall & McCarter, 1981).

The physical barriers to education were in the form of administrative and transportation problems. Older students have often complained about the hassels involved in registration and enrollment. They tire waiting in long lines and find little help from the adminstrators. Since many do not want programs developed for younger students they had "red tape" problems in taking courses they need to fulfill their own personal goals. Elderly students also had difficulty walking long distances across campus when they cannot find close parking. Other older adults did not have their own cars to drive to

campus and, therefore, had problems in getting to the campus (Perkins & Robertson-Tchabo, 1981; Peterson, 1981; Pritchard & Tomb, 1981).

Whether or not older persons were mentally capable of competing in class has been questioned. In the past, cross-sectional studies have shown a drop in intelligence as persons grow older; however, many longitudinal studies have found intelligence to be stable over the lifetime (Botwinick, 1978). Nesselroade, et al. (1972) reported that intelligence consisted of several dimensions; some of these changed with age, some did not, and some actually improved with age. Studies on learning have found contradictory results; however, most older individuals have been found to learn as effectively, if not as efficiently, as the young (Botwinick, 1978). The retrieval function in memory tended to cause the most problems, yet for individuals who had remained mentally active throughout their lives there was not much problem (Atchley, 1985). Research has shown that older students did perform academically well in mixed classrooms. The presence of some "star" older adults often provides incentives for younger students to work hard. Although a few older adults found the rigor of college too demanding, the majority were able to keep up with the class (Long, 1983; Versen, 1986).

Graney and Hays (1976) studied the types of barriers that older adults stated as preventing them from attending higher education. They found that those who expressed an interest in college gave institutional and physical barriers as the primary reasons they did not pursue their interest. Those who expressed emotional or mental barriers generally did not have a commitment to attend college.

Motivations for Attending College at Later Ages

A unique perspective on the needs and motivations of older students has been presented by Leclerc (1985). Using an existential framework for his analysis, he found the following reasons older adults attend college. They wanted to learn how to: 1) make friends, 2) age well physically, intellectually, and morally, 3) live in harmony with oneself, 4) cope with changes in society, 5) develop a good philosophy and psychology on aging, and 6) gain confidence in oneself.

More traditional researchers have used Houle's (1982) learning orientations to study the motives of older college students. They have found that those persons who are goal oriented have used self-education, those persons who are activity oriented used formal education, and those that are learning oriented used a variety of educational tools (Dickson & Clark, 1975). Other researchers have developed different types of needs that motivate older persons to attend education courses. McClusky (1974) specified five types of needs: 1) coping, 2) expressive, 3) contributive, 4) influence, and 5) transcendence. Persons from the lower-middle and lower class tended to specify coping needs, whereas upper-middle class elderly attended college more for contributive, influential, and transcendent needs. Those from the upper class returned to college to learn less practical and more liberal arts type of knowledge (Covey, 1980; Daniel, 1977; Marcus, 1978). Persons from the lower-middle and lower class preferred courses that dealt with the problems of aging (Ralston, 1981). These persons also were found to have a higher need for stimulation (Sadowski & Schill, 1979). The older students that attend community colleges were still very career oriented

(Morstain & Smart, 1977). Females returned to college for more self-enrichment and humanities courses while men were more interested in health and career (Daniel, 1977; Morstain & Smart, 1977; Papalia-Finally, 1981). Those persons attending Edlerhostels have done so for the novel experience and interest in particular courses (Romaniuk & Romaniuk, 1982).

The decision to attend college may, however, be due to negative motives rather than positive ones. "Often the decision to attend school is the result of dissatisfaction with present life style and a desire to do something about it" (Kingston & Drotter, 1983, p. 400). This dissatisfaction may be in the home or at work, but the more intense the dissatisfaction, the more likely they are to seek learning experiences in the attempt to cope (Zemke & Zemke, 1981). "The person who is loved, has an active social life and finds satisfaction at home or with close friends may be less likely to take on the challenge of enrolling in school" (Kingston & Drotter, 1983, p. 401).

The motives for attending college did not differ for older and younger students, according to one study (Wolfgang & Dowling, 1981). The study found that there was no significant differences between age groups on the following reasons for enrollment: professional advancement, social welfare, and escape/stimulation. This contradicted previous studies which have found younger adults to be more interested in social relationships and expected their college attendance to have more impact on their external lives, rather than internal (Morstain & Smart, 1974; Okun, Kardash, & Janiga, 1986). Older students have also been found to value the quality of education more than younger students.

It is believed that those persons attending college at later ages

were most likely to have attended at younger ages. These persons were interested in personal growth, wanted to remain mentally and physically active, and were pursuing a particular academic interest (Perkins & Robertson-Tchabo, 1981). They felt "safe" on the college campus, whereas those that have never attended college were uncomfortable on the campus and desired more informal locations for educational courses (Hooper & March, 1978).

Location of Educational Services

Some studies have shown that more older persons would be more likely to become involved in educational courses if they were in senior centers (Hiemstra, 1972). The relaxing and familiar atmosphere was less threatening to older persons, while there was also less competition and fewer transportation problems (Arbeiter, 1977; Heisel & Anderson, 1981). This finding has been confirmed by research in Japan where older adults were more likely to prefer a community center or library facility (Sekiguchi, 1986). Several junior colleges and universities have attempted to use "portable" programs taking the classroom to the senior center. On the whole these have been very successful (Lifelong Learning, 1980). One community college with a strong commitment to serving the whole community developed nine gerontology courses, three retirement planning seminars, 50 off-campus courses for the elderly, and 35 continuing education seminars, forums, and conferences for the elderly. Due to the intense interest of this college, 9% of their student body are persons over 65 years of age (Demko, 1982).

While off-campus courses were valued by some, others saw the college as the prime location for bringing older persons together and

distributing information about aging, retirement, widowhood, and finances (Edelson, 1978). If the college had a good reputation for providing high quality lectures on aging, the older person was more likely to attend (Peterson, 1981). The college can also be a place where young meet old and learn that aging is not as tragic as many young people believe. In most inter-age classrooms there has been more discussing, whispering, and laughter than in same-age classrooms (Kay, 1983). Some studies have shown that when older and younger students live together and participate in classes together their attitudes about one another improved (Steichen & Arquitt, 1975). Others have found that younger students had more positive outlooks toward elderly students than they do toward their own peers (Tindall & McCarter, 1980). While age-segregated classes lessened the fear concerning competition for older adults, it also lessened the opportunity for understanding between generations.

Community colleges appear to be the leaders in the effort to attract older students. They are more attuned to serving the needs of those in the community and more concerned with attracting the non-traditional students than larger state and private universities. Community colleges are also more flexible, thus more able to adjust their course offerings to the needs of the community (Kingston, 1982). Others argue that community colleges provide "cooling out" processes to keep "undesirable" students from attending four-year colleges and universities (Alba & Lavin, 1981). Community colleges are "social buffers" to protect the baccalaureate from low status students. If this process does exist, then it is not surprising to find larger percentages of older students (who are low status when compared to young students)

at community colleges.

Colleges that have a relatively large percentage of older students on campus provided an easier transition to college life than colleges with few older students (Benjamin & Levy, 1979). A larger proportion of older adults on campus provided an easily identifiable support group to help older students adjust to college life. Those non-traditional students attending colleges with a young population of students were troubled by their lack of "intuitive knowledge" that comes out of discussing courses, term papers, exams, and instructors with other students.

Educational Issues Concerning Older Students

Administrative Issues

According to most estimations, only 20 percent of the labor force needs to have college degrees, which would mean that half of current students should drop out (Glenny, 1980). However, colleges do not advertise this fact; instead they retain the image of certifiers for societal needs. They do not recognize that there are other functions of the university, such as creating new and different educational opportunities based on the desire for knowledge rather than the desire for a certificate (Chase, 1980). There are some colleges that view themselves as part of a whole community where they are responsible for disseminating knowledge to all persons. These colleges work through networks of older persons to provide skills and knowledge enabling them to act on their own behalf and retain their independency (Demko, 1982).

Ruth Weg commented on university administrators' lack of commitment to life-long learning.

Conservatives among educators and researchers in gerontology are still assigning older persons to 'extension', the 'extracurricular', as if in fear of damage to the 'professional image', the mode of excellence and the solid scientific approach. Under current pressure of vocationalism and professionalism, there is the reinforcement of the natural 'conservator' role of the institutions of higher learning" (1974, p. 449).

Four-year colleges and universities appeared to be the least flexible in considering non-traditional students, yet they were experiencing a large decline in traditional students (Glenny, 1980). It was not unusual to find that university students were more positive to having older students enrolled than university administrators (Steichen & Arquitt, 1975).

The lack of educational participation by older adults has been partially attributed to ageist attitudes by administrators. Some argue that administrators gave credence to the myths of aging incompetence, therefore, they did not encourage older adults to attend their college (Rebok, 1981). Others stated that administrators do not want to deal with the needs of non-traditional student. "But the underlying issue -- whether re-entry students are a special group, privileged to be allowed to have an education and only desired if they make no special demands -- is not yet really out on the table for discussion" (Daniels, 1979). These assumptions concerning administrators attitudes toward older adults as students was not borne out, however, in a recent study on this topic (Nidiffer & Moore, 1985). The study was conducted using 35 administrators of continuing education programs as the sample. The Kogan Old People Scale was used to indicate favorable or unfavorable attitudes about older persons. While the education administrators had favorable views of older persons, the scale did not address the issue of older persons as students. Therefore, it was still unclear as to whether education administrators view older students favorably.

Tuition Wavers

The question of whether or not older students pay for college credit has been under hot debate. There were over 27 states that allow free credit to students over 65 years of age (Long, 1980). Those that support it say that the elderly person has more of a desire for "real" courses (business and liberal arts) than the arts and crafts courses they receive in senior centers. The proponents of tuition wavers argued that older students perform as well as younger students and, therefore, did not slow down the classes. The university obtained positive public relations with the community and also fulfilled its role as socializer of the young, as the younger students learned more about the processes of age from older students (Long, 1980).

Those opposing tuition wavers did so, not on a moral ground, but for practical reasons. In times of budget cuts, administrators were not as willing to give free credit hours to any students. One study considered the lack of incentive for administrators to give tuition wavers (Romaniuk, 1983). The colleges were not reimbursed for their costs and yet, resources were being used. In addition, the older adults attending college were usually not poor and could have afforded to pay for courses. (Romaniuk (1983) questioned whether tuition wavers were effective ways to encourage older adults to attend college.)

The colleges that did allow older adults to take courses without charge usually had strong support groups for older adults. They also usually had one "champion" who was totally committed to programs for older students and this person pushed administrators into providing equal opportunities for older adults (Romaniuk, 1980; Pritchard & Tomb, 1981; Chelsvig & Timmermann, 1982).

Summary

Research on older students in higher education generally began in the 1970's. College students were studied in the 1960's with the campus protests, but as the fervor died down social researchers realized that many of the students on campus were older. Higher education had traditionally been filled with young adults, sometimes even referred to as "youth ghettos." With the advent of older students, the age stratification of education began to break down. College is still considered to be a youth environment but the normative prohibitions against older adults have fallen.

Education has sometimes been viewed as preventative medicine for old age. Some writers appear to say that with education, the problems of older people will be alleviated. This, of course, is an exaggeration, but education can be effectively utilized in teaching persons of all ages about how to alleviate and prevent problems that occur as persons age. The older person may also find education to aid in self-actualization and self-understanding.

Past studies have found older college students to be active, financially secure, metropolitan, white, female, and in good health. One of the predominant predictors of attendance as an older adult is past experience with higher education.

The number of older adults who would like to attend college but are dissuaded from doing so is unknown. Social scientists have found four major barriers that older adults must overcome before attending college. The institutional barriers consisted of an educational ideology which focuses on the needs of the young. Emotional barriers were reinforced by self-doubts and fears of not fitting in or being

accepted by young students or instructors. Long walking distances and long lines partially made up physical barriers. Fears of intellectual competition comprised the mental barriers. These barriers were overcome by an increasing number of older adults. It is expected that the percentage of older students will double by the year 2000, from 3.5 percent to 7 or 8 percent (Crimmins & Riddler, 1985).

Persons who did transcend the barriers were often motivated to do so by employment reasons, but other older adults often attended college to learn about aging or about specific topics of interest to them. The following is a partial list of some of the reasons that older adults gave for attending college: to make friends, for mental stimulation, to be around young people, and to learn more about the world.

Many elderly preferred to learn in casual environments, like senior centers, which provide them comfort and security. Others enjoyed going to the campus rather than bringing the campus to them. Community colleges have been at the forefront of seeking older students. Some attributed this to the attempt of community colleges to be in touch with their community, while others viewed it as a way of keeping minorities, lower status, and older people out of four-year colleges. The proportion of older students on campus did seem to ease the college transition of older adults.

Many researchers have accused administrators of being insensitive to the needs of older students. Education administrators have also been accused of not wanting older adults on campus. This may be true, but too little research has been conducted on this topic to ascertain the truth or falsity of the accusations.

In the past 10 years many state legislators have attempted to open

higher education to older adults by providing free tuition. This action has caused controversy since many states have encountered smaller budgets. Those in favor of tuition waivers for older students pointed to the resulting good public relations and the abilities of older students. Persons against tuition waivers stated that older students can generally afford to pay tuition and that the lack of financial resources was not the reason that few older adults attend college.

Research concerning the co-joining of education and older students is increasing in popularity as the number of older adults participating in education increases. Some social scientists called for the older person to adapt to the college environment, others asked the college to adapt to the older person, and some researchers asked for a change in education ideology for the benefit of all age groups.

Finally, we need to redefine education not only as a life-long process but as something which is useful and beneficial to society as well as to the individual at any age. This means placing lesser emphasis on the traditional functions education performs for society and more emphasis on the individual benefits that make for a more human society. We should return to the classic notion of learning for the sake of learning. The interest that older people have in learning whatever they choose is reason enough for us to allow them to be students whether or not it serves society directly (Covey, 1981, p. 381).

CHAPTER III

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this chapter is to present the theoretical underpinnings of the research project. There are a variety of theoretical perspectives that would be useful when studying older students on campus. One of these perspectives is the age stratification model which provides a framework for understanding the older student's social context (Riley et al., 1972). This theory concentrates on the position of age groups in a particular social context and transitions that occur over the life cycle because of social definitions of age. In the past the role of student was only allocated to young persons. By attending college older students are forcing the social system to allocate new roles to older adults. This is partially due to cohort flow, which is another element of Riley's model of age stratification. The persons now in their 50's and 60's were affected, as a cohort, by the 1930's depression, World War II, and the G.I. Bill which opened up higher education to different social classes. These people had a unique worldview, one in which higher education was viewed as an opportunity for success and a remedy for problems. These persons also had more education than past cohorts, which increased their age-related abilities and effects their views toward college. Although education is still highly stratified by age, it is more flexible than in past years. This flexibility may be due to changes in power relations between groups and

changes in socialization patternings.

Exchange theory focuses on power relationships and social interactions of individuals and stratified groups. Basic exchange theory states that in all actions and interactions humans attempt to gain rewards with minimal costs. Rewards and costs, whether they be physical, emotional, psychological or social, are dependent upon power resources (Dowd, 1980). The rule of distributive justice states that when profits received are proportional to investments, the exchange is fair (Homans, 1961). Power, however, can be used to attain a disproportionate amount of profit. Older persons are at a disadvantage in most power relationships for two reasons: they lose power through retirement (loss of resources) and because the resources they do have are considered less valuable (simply because they are possessed by older persons). Therefore, older adults have less power, which forces them into a dependent, subordinate, compliant position. When resources are limited and an unequal power relationship exists, there is the potential for conflict (Blau, 1964).

The inclusion of older students into an environment previously reserved for young adults can lead to conflict. The resources given to older adults are often at the cost of the young. The fact that older students are beginning to receive resources is due to a shift in the power relationships. With the decline in number of college-age persons, older students have become more valuable to the administrations. A dramatic increase in older, non-degree seeking students could result in adverse exchange relationships. Students not interested in college credentials might attempt to change the educational system to suit their needs. This would then conflict with the needs of those students

(usually younger) who attend college for credentials and job skills. Although this conflict situation does not appear to be imminent, it is a future possibility based on exchange theory.

In contrast to the power relationships of exchange theory, continuity theory is concerned with the stability of persons' behavior patterns, throughout their lives. Other perspectives discuss the stages of life, whereas continuity theory focuses on the continuous socialization processes that exist throughout these stages. There is an overall predisposition toward maintenance of lifestyle and life patterns. Some older adults have periodically attended college for years. These persons are called "life-long learners" and college attendance is an important activity in their lives, thus they continue this activity as they age. The act of attending college after retirement creates stability in their retirement, since it is an activity that is consistent with their previous behavior. This is in opposition to disengagement theory, which would posit a mutual withdrawal of older student and higher education.

As adults age, according to disengagement theory (Cumming & Henry, 1961), they withdraw from the social system and the system withdraws from the older adult. This disengagement from society may be initiated by either the individual or others in the social system, but it is considered inevitable and functional. According to this theory, life-long learners stop attending college, either because they wish to do so or because higher education no longer accepts them. It is functional for the society for older adults to stop attending college since they do not produce goods or services for the society (according to the theory). The older student takes up time and space that is better utilized by

younger students, who have more to give to the society.

Disengagement theory may provide clues as to why more older adults do not attend college, but it does not explain the gradual increase in older students. While colleges and universities did not encourage attendance by older adults in the past, they are increasingly viewing older adults as a viable student population. Instead of disengaging from older adults, higher education is becoming more engaged with them. Some might argue it is a forced symbiosis (economic) rather than a real desire (ideological) on the part of educational institutions.

Some would say that the increased engagement between older adult and higher education can be explained by activity theory. Activity theory purports that more active older adults are more satisfied with their lives (Havighurst, 1963). As older adults disengage from some roles and activities, they engage in substitute ones. They may drop some that take greater investment of resources and reinvest in existing ones (family, for example). Therefore, some of the older adults attending college may be doing so because they have lost other roles and the role of "student" seems like a meaningful functional alternative.

(This new engagement in college life might also be a way of increasing competency. The social reconstruction syndrome, based on community psychiatry and labeling theory, considers the individual and their social system (Bengston, 1973). If the social system labels an older adult as deficient or incompetent it may result in the social breakdown syndrome. The social breakdown syndrome considers the effects of negative social labeling of older adults. If older persons accept the negative labeling, they become more dependent upon others and, over time, less competent. These individuals will need "inputs" to

reconstruct their social lives and increase their competence (or belief in their competence). College attendance may be an "input" that can liberate the older adult from self-identification as inadequate and re-identification as adequate.

The social breakdown/reconstruction syndrome is based upon the labeling perspective. Labeling theory states that self concepts are partially based upon how others view the individual. People are often placed into a category (such as old, young, smart, rich, deviant), and other people react to them on the basis of that category. The way others act toward an individual then affect that individual's self concept and behavior. Older adults enrolled in college may enjoy being labeled as "student," because the student label, although subordinant, is a generally positive label. As a student the older person may be viewed as a more active, intelligent, confident person. Therefore, older adults may be seeking the label as much as they seek the knowledge that college has to offer.

It is important to remember that these labels have roles attached to them and for the older adult these may be new roles. Becker (1964) comments that successful and continued performance within new roles and settings requires individuals to turn themselves into the kind of person the situation demands. The older college student has to adjust his/her behavior to maintain the role, which can be problematic. Accurate expectations of college life might make this less problematic. Mead (1934) observed that settings call out different selves. When people build their expectations on one form of self-presentation, difficulties can arise in other settings when other selves emerge. The older student must present a self that is conducive to the college environment, which

is different from past environments (and past selves). Once again, accurate expectations of college life would provide the older student with a better basis for their presentation of self. Person/environment theories also address these issues when they discuss how behavior settings select and shape the behavior of people who inhabit them (Barker, 1968; Walsh, 1975). Every professor has observed the distinct change in many freshmen between their first and second semester of college. It is assumed that new students with more accurate expectations of college will go through fewer changes and encounter fewer problems than those students with inaccurate expectations.

These expectations are built upon past life experiences. Since older adults have more life experiences, it is possible that they have a different cognitive composition than younger persons. Some social scientists believe that increased life experiences lead to "cognitive maturity." This maturity allows the older adult to recognize that events do not "just happen," but are modulated by subjective, as well as, external sources (Blanchard-Fields, 1986). This provides the older student with social understanding -- the way self, others and the environment are perceived and understood (Roodin, Rybash & Hoyer, 1986; Kramer, 1986).

The adult learner, with greater cognitive maturity, may be able to make accurate predictions of college life. This would prevent problems or negative attitudes that might result from discrepancies between college expectations and experiences. In addition, the social cognitive ability of older adults might enable them to absorb expectation-experience discrepancies with minor disturbances to their social world. Although social cognition theory was not tested in this research, it

might be useful in explaining older students' expectations of college and their actual experiences of college.

Expectancy Theory

Older adults accurate perception of college environment prior to attendances seems critical. One of the predominant focuses of this study was the older students' expectations of the educational setting and how these related to actual experiences. It was believed that college expectancies would have significant effects on the adaptation process of the older adult. These expectations rely upon past experience with college and may lead to self-fulfilling prophecies.

Research on the concept of expectancy has been conducted mainly in the area of work and motivation. It has been used to predict the following variables: job effort, job performance, job satisfaction, occupational choice, and leadership behavior and effectiveness (Wahba & House, 1973). Eran and Jacobson (1976) also used it to consider the preference of older workers to remain employed or to retire. They found that expectations of retirement did affect the older workers retirement decision. When older workers had firm, realistic expectations, they were more likely to make successful decisions. Complete predictability has led to avoidance of new situations due to expectations of boredom (Pervin, 1964). The ability to totally predict future actions has also led to the avoidance of highly threatening situations; more knowledge about fearful situations has not made them any less fearful or threatening. This was due to expectations of boredom in situations that were totally predictable. Therefore, realistic expectations of institutions of higher education would be beneficial for the older

student.

Expectancies toward major institutions have only been a peripheral concern in areas such as anticipatory socialization, identification of the situation, and self-fulfilling prophecy. According to Sears (1981) expectancy was "an intervening variable used to account for the directing of action or thought toward specific goals and for providing force or instigation to such action" (p. 408). Expectations are our predictions about the consequences and appropriateness of different behaviors in a given situation. There are several functions to expectancies. The first function is to act as a stimulus to direct thought and action toward a goal. The second function is to increase the motivation toward the actions initiated either by the expectancy itself or by some other instigative system (Sears, 1981).

As expectations are not fulfilled in the manner desired, problems, stress and frustration arises. It was believed that more intense expectations led to greater problems and negative attitudes when the expectations were unfulfilled (Carlsmith & Aronson, 1963). If an expectation was unrealistic then problems were more likely. Therefore, it was useful to discover what older students expected of college in order to aid in the fulfillment or adjustment of those expectations.

Because expectations were built upon experience, one of the most important dependent variables was the amount of previous experience that the older adult had with college. Some older adults had been "life-long learners," meaning that they had attended college off and on for years. Other older students had much less experience with college; therefore, their expectations were less likely to match the actual college experience they had as older students. General hypotheses, derived

from expectancy theory, are stated more explicitly below.

Research Objectives

There were two major objectives of the research presented. The first objective was to discover the demographic differences between older adults attending different types of colleges located in various areas. Demographic characteristics provide general information of the people involved in an activity or area. Knowing age, income or educational differences allows researchers and administrators to make broad generalizations about the group. For example, the finding that older students tend to have attended college earlier in life might influence an educational administrator to provide a short course for returning students on the changes that higher education has encountered in the past 50 years. If, on the other hand, the majority of older students had never attended college prior to their current attendance, the administrator might want to provide a "seniors' orientation" course on how to adapt to the college environment. Therefore, it was important to understand the characteristics of the older student population.

As presented in Chapter II, much of the knowledge about older student characteristics is based upon single studies with little comparative research on different types of colleges located in different areas. This research project compared two-year and four-year colleges located in metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas. The proportion of older students on campus is also considered to be important since it may provide a potential support system affecting the expectations and experiences of the older adults.

The hypotheses concerning the type and location of college were as

follows: 1) older students attending four-year colleges would be significantly different than those attending two-year colleges on the following variables: age, sex, education, income, employment, marital status, race and past college experience.

2) older students attending metropolitan colleges would be significantly different than those attending non-metropolitan colleges on the variables listed above.

3) older students attending colleges with higher proportions of older students would have fewer problems and better experiences than those attending colleges with low proportions of older students.

The second objective was to discover the expectations of older students and their college experiences. Any change might be related to problems and negative attitudes, therefore discrepancies between expectations and experiences was an important focus. This study also concentrated on the relationships between past experience with college, problems of older students, proportions of older students on campus, college type and location, and college expectations/experiences.

The hypotheses concerning expectations and experiences of college were as follows: 1) there would be significant differences between older students' college expectations and experiences.

2) there would be significant differences between constructs drawn from the expectation and experience scales.

3) the differences in constructs would be related to the following variables: problems the older student had attending college, frustrations and stress the older student experienced, and past experience with college.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the methodology as well as the reasoning of the methodology used in the study. The chapter is divided into five areas of discussion. The first is an overall look at the research design that was believed to be most effective. The second concerns the operationalization of variables in the study and the third section is a discussion of the design of the questionnaire. The fourth is a description of how the sample was obtained, a discussion of the response rate, and a general look at the respondents. The last section discusses the statistical analysis used in the study.

Research Design

The purpose of this research was twofold. First to examine and identify the differences between older college students attending two-year and four-year institutions of higher education located in metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas. A second purpose was to test the effects of older students' expectations of college and their actual experiences. In order to answer the research questions effectively it was decided to draw a sample of older students from community colleges, four-year colleges, and universities in Oklahoma and mail self-administered surveys to each of them. Surveys enable researchers to discover characteristics of large populations (Babbie, 1986). In

comparing the different types of colleges, it is useful to determine the demographic characteristics of the older students. The use of surveys not only enabled many students to be reached, but also made it possible to ask many detailed questions of these students. By using a sample survey, all respondents were asked the same questions in the same manner which led to uniformity. The respondents were able to answer the questions at their own pace and not that of an interviewer (Wallace, 1954). Surveys tend to be reliable because all respondents have a standardized stimulus, thus eliminating biases the researcher might have through observations (Babbie, 1986).

Survey data do have limitations, as do all types of research. They are less likely to be valid because of the artificiality of the survey format. Few respondents are likely to have thought of college in the same terms as the survey. Even if they had, they probably did not always have a definite opinion on an item and yet the survey prods them to give an answer. It must be remembered that the survey is attempting to get approximate indicators of expectations and experiences and not absolute answers. There is a risk of respondent bias when a low percentage of those mailed questionnaires return them (Fowler, 1984). There is also an inability of the survey to get a feel for the total situation. To obtain more information about the life of older students, ten older students were interviewed on the telephone. One student was randomly chosen from each college involved in the study. The student was telephoned and answered open, broad questions concerning his or her college experiences and feelings.

In adding the long general interviews even with only a few students, it was believed that depth was added to the study. Therefore,

the study was able to: obtain information from a large number of people about their experiences; have many detailed questions answered; have generalizability to a large group of people; and maintain validity of what "really" exists in the world of the older student.

Although this study was concerned with the difference between individuals' expectations of an institution and the experience of it at a later time, it was infeasible to have two times of measurement. There were, of course, time and financial constraints placed on the study, but beyond this, there was the problem of identifying students prior to their attendance of college. At the inception of the study the State Board of Regents was contacted, and through them, the thirty institutions of higher education in the state were asked for lists of students past the age of 50 enrolling for the first time. The registrars' offices responded en masse that there was no way of doing this short of looking at each student's file. Therefore, the researcher was unable to obtain the actual expectations of college by older adults prior to the time when they attended college. This flaw (having only one time of measurement and relying upon the older adult to remember what their expectations were prior to their attendance) is probably the weakest methodological flaw of the study. It is unfortunate that it could not be avoided.

Operationalization of Key Variables

The first purpose of this research was to observe the differences that existed between older students attending different types of colleges and the locations of those colleges. In order to fulfill this purpose it was important to identify and define the different types of

college. The two-year colleges discussed in this research were those which offered lower level courses to high school graduates. The students may receive a certificate or may transfer their credit hours to a four-year college. In the past these colleges were called junior colleges, but have recently argued that community or two-year college is a more appropriate term. The four-year colleges in this study were those in which a student may receive a bachelor's degree. These colleges may also offer graduate degrees but for the purpose of this study all colleges offering bachelors degrees were placed in the same category. Those colleges located in Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas (SMSA) were considered metropolitan colleges and the others were defined as non-metropolitan colleges. The SMSA is any area that has a population over 50,000 and contains one or more cities and suburbs. This research considered the demographic differences between metropolitan two-year colleges, non-metropolitan two-year colleges, metropolitan four-year colleges and non-metropolitan four-year colleges. It also considered differences in reasons for attending college, problems at college, importance of college in their lives, relationships with others on campus, and support of college for each of the four types.

The second purpose of this study was to test expectations and experiences of older students attending college. This required students to answer detailed questions on these two subjects. The scale used to do this is discussed later in this chapter; it provided specific, numeric data on a variety of feelings toward a variety of college categories. Discrepancies between expectations and experiences of college were discussed in relation to students' problems, surprises,

importance of college attendance, and encouragement of other older adults to attend college. One of the most important variables in looking at discrepancies between expectations and experiences of college was the amount of past experience that the individual had with college. For example, if the person had attended college for years then there should not be any discrepancy between expectation and experience of college. The amount of educational experience was divided into four categories. The first were the experienced students who had attended college off and on all their lives. These students are often called life-long learners. They may have as many as three or four hundred credit hours and may or may not have attended college as a young adult but they have been enrolled in the past ten years. The next category was that of past experienced students who had one who attended college as a younger adult, but had not attended college for at least ten years. The vicarious experienced students who not attended college until recently but had family members and close friends attend college. These students had a general idea of college from what their significant others have told them. The last category of students were the inexperienced. These were persons who had not attended college until recently and did not have close relatives or friends to prepare them, informally, for college. Their ideas of college had been picked up through the media and other general forms of information gathering. To operationalize the educational experience variable it was necessary to ask a number of questions concerning past college experience and, based on the answers, place each respondent into one of the four categories.

The most important independent variables in this study were type of

college, location of college, expectations prior to attendance of college, experience of college prior to current enrollment, and the usual demographic variables. The most important dependent variables were current experiences with college, problems incurred at college, reasons for attendance of college, surprises that occurred at college, and feeling comfortable on campus. Some of these variables were clearly nominal levels of data, for example type and location of college, while others were measured in ways to obtain interval level data such as expectations of college and current experience with college.

Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire consisted of several separate areas (see Appendix). It began with questions relevant to the study instead of demographic questions which were at the end of the questionnaire. The placing of questions in this manner was based upon the belief that persons will be more likely to respond if they saw questions relevant to the topic on the first page of the questionnaire (Fowler, 1984). A combination of open and closed questions were used. Within each topic area, the open questions came before the closed questions. This was done with the intention of having the respondents answer the open questions in their own words before being influenced by the structured questions on the topic.

The first questions referred to the respondents' educational experience. Not only were questions asked concerning their own educational experience but also the educational experience of immediate family members. This was done to obtain more accurate information on past experiences with college. All questions concerning education were

taken together to make up the "educational experience" variable for each respondent. Questions concerning reasons for their attendance, estimations of their ability, and grade expectations were the next set of questions.

In order to determine the students' expectations and experiences of college a semantic differential scale was developed. The scale used was a modified version of one that was pre-tested on older college students in 1985. College expectations were split into six areas, identified as: instructors, other students, grades, classes, college related recreation, and college in general. Each area contained several dimensions of experience which were defined in terms of polar opposites; for example, useless-worthwhile, unimportant-important, unfriendly-friendly. The main problem of semantic-differential scales, according to Kerlinger (1964), is the selection of appropriate and relevant concepts. Through the use of the pre-test conducted in 1985 the scale was modified and the final product was believed to be a useful tool for determining expectations and experiences of college. Past research (Snider & Osgood, 1969) demonstrates that thinking in terms of opposites is "natural" to the human species. Students were asked to rate themselves along the continuum from one polar adjective on the scale to the opposite adjective. If the student expected instructors to be unfriendly they would circle a number closer to that end of the scale. The students were first asked to think back on the time prior to their attendance of college as older adults and rate themselves along the scales according to their remembrance of their expectations. Later on in the questionnaire they were requested to rate their answers according to their current experience of college.

This resulted in two scales, one for expectations prior to attendance and one for current experiences of college.

The next section of the questionnaire consisted predominantly of open ended questions concerning their experience as older students. Questions concerning problems they had experienced, the importance of college, and whether they would encourage other older adults to attend college were asked. The last section of the questionnaire consisted of demographic questions. The entire questionnaire was six pages long and would take an average of 25 minutes to complete. It was mailed with a cover letter that requested the students' participation, explained the reason for the survey, and assured confidentiality. The cover letter, as well as the questionnaire, are included in the Appendix.

Sample

A stratified random sample was taken from institutions of higher education in a southwestern state. After permission for the study was granted by the State Board of Regents, the registrars' offices of all community colleges, four-year colleges and universities were asked to cooperate in the study. Twenty of the thirty institutions of higher education agreed to provide a list of students over the age of 50 who were currently enrolled at the college. The age of 50 was chosen because colleges group all students over the age of 50 and, thus, are unable to distinguish between the older age groups. A stratified sample of colleges was taken based on the type of educational institution and the location. There were five community colleges chosen and five four-year colleges. Of the five community colleges, three were from metropolitan areas and two from non-metropolitan. Two of the

four-year colleges were from metropolitan areas and three were from non-metropolitan locations.

A random sample from each of the chosen colleges was taken by numbering the students from each college and using a random number table to determine which ones would be involved in the study. About 40 percent of the older students at each college were chosen. That percentage provided about 700 possible respondents for the study. Based upon past research, it was believed that there would be few older students who had never attended college. This belief necessitated a fairly large sample size to ensure representation from this group. Follow-up post cards were sent to each of the subjects who had not returned the questionnaire within three weeks of the original mailing. The original mailing list which had each questionnaire number next to the name was then destroyed. There were 419 responses from the 714 mailed questionnaires. Unfortunately 9 of the responses were not useable resulting in 410 questionnaires used in the analysis. While the overall response rate was 57.4 percent the rate from community colleges was much lower than that of four-year colleges, 50.6 percent and 69.1 percent respectively, as shown in Table 1.

It was believed that part of the reason for the large discrepancy was due to the familiarity that those attending four-year colleges have with questionnaires. It was more likely for students at four-year colleges to have been a part of research projects and to have taken courses that discuss methodology. Therefore, those students are familiar with surveys and feel more comfortable completing them than those at community colleges. Another possible reason for the difference in response rates could be that some students at community colleges did

not fully understand the questions on the survey, especially the scale. There is no indication that this occurred, but due to their possible unfamiliarity with questionnaires, they may have found it to be too complicated. If this did occur, it will have biased the sample in favor of older students with survey acumen. It is believed, however, that a response rate of 50 percent is adequate and that there is only a moderate chance of response bias (Dillman, 1978).

TABLE I
RESPONSE RATE FOR COLLEGES BY TYPE AND LOCATION

College Type & Location		Questionnaires Mailed	Questionnaires Received	Response Rate
Community Colleges:				
Metropolitan:	A	13	7	53.8%
	B	205	111	54.1%
	C	39	17	43.6%
Non-metropolitan:	D	171	78	45.6%
	E	<u>21</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>66.7%</u>
Sub-total		<u>449</u>	<u>227</u>	<u>50.6%</u>
Four-Year Colleges				
Metropolitan:	F	7	5	71.4%
	G	95	63	66.3%
Non-metropolitan:	H	31	24	77.4%
	I	56	37	66.1%
	J	<u>78</u>	<u>54</u>	<u>69.2%</u>
Sub-total		<u>265</u>	<u>183</u>	<u>69.1%</u>
Total		714	410	57.4%

The age of the respondents ranged from 50 to 82 years of age. The largest proportion of respondents was between the ages of 50 and 59,

with 42.2 percent between 50 and 54 and 27.0 percent between 55 and 59 years of age. Those respondents 60 to 64 years of age made up 14.7 percent of the sample and those 65 to 69 were 8.5 percent of the total. This left 7.8 percent of the sample over the age of 70, with 3 percent being over the age of 75. Since no college system keeps track of the age of their older students (other than placing them in a category for those over 50) it is not known how well this sample mirrors the population. There was, however, little reason to doubt that it was representative of all college students over the age of 50.

Since the sample tends to be on the young end of the age range it was not surprising that 51.7 percent were fully employed. Those retired from paid employment accounted for 18.5 percent of the sample, however, it must be noted that often women who have not been employed outside the home often do not think of themselves as "retired." There was 14.1 percent of the sample that considered themselves homemakers; it is not known how many of these were married to retired spouses.

Almost three-fourths of the sample were female (73.7 percent). Once again, it was impossible to determine what proportion of all older college students was female but in most of the studies cited in Chapter II a majority of their samples were female. This may seem to contradict the finding that college attendance at a younger age begets attendance at an older age because most of those persons who attended college in the 1930s and 1940s were male. Therefore, most of the older adults attending college should be male according to this logic. But those women who did attend college at earlier ages most probably married college men who could provide them with an income that did not require the women to work. This left an educated group of females with the time

and finances to pursue college as a leisure activity. Many of the women who attended college in their youth also became teachers and are now required to continue taking college courses occasionally to brush up their skills. There is also an increase in college attendance by women of all ages. Women live longer giving them more opportunity to attend college. All of these reasons probably contributed to the number of older women on campus. It was the researcher's belief that there was another reason that contributed to the majority of older students being female. In American culture it is most common for females to spend more time with younger persons than males. This may lead to older females feeling more comfortable around younger adults and more willing to be in an environment surrounded by the young. Males are not only less likely to spend large amounts of time around young persons but are also taught to be competitive. This may lead to older males feeling less comfortable around younger adults and feeling more threatened in what they may perceive as a competitive situation. While it is not known exactly why older women are more likely to attend college than older men it would be an interesting topic to research.

Since this was a relatively young, employed sample it was not unusual to find that 72.4 percent were married and only 15.4 percent were widowed. It was also not surprising that 92.7 percent were white and that 84.6 percent were affiliated with protestant religions. The sample was much more diversified regarding places of residence and income. Persons in the sample lived in isolated areas as well as in moderately large cities. Some had very limited incomes (12.4 percent with less than \$10,000) and others had very comfortable incomes (15.7 percent between \$50,000 and \$100,000).

The majority of older adults in the sample believed that they had good health, 79 percent reporting that they have good or very good health. Another 18.3 percent stated that they had average health. The spouses of the college students were also in good health with 67.7 percent in good or very good health and 20.3 percent in average health, as rated by the college attending spouses. These findings are consistent with most measures of self-reported health.

Statistical Analysis

The 410 responses were coded and typed into the computer. The fifteen open-ended questions presented a time-consuming coding task. About 100 of the responses were randomly read for each open-ended question and categories were created to fit the responses. The researcher coded each open-ended question on each questionnaire according to the categories. After this was completed, two persons familiar with the research process randomly checked the researcher's coding to prevent coder bias. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences programs were used for the analysis.

Frequencies, means and standard deviations were computed for each variable. These statistics were used to obtain a general understanding of the data and were also useful for describing the different categories of colleges. While descriptive statistics give a basic overview of the data they do not provide information on whether a difference between groups is statistically significant. Cross-tabulations between categories of colleges and demographic variables were computed to provide more information. Chi-squares were performed to determine if there were significant differences between the college categories. The

chi-square test is appropriate for nominal variables in stratified random samples. It is a test of independence which is based on a comparison between the frequencies that are observed in the cells of cross-tabulation tables and those that would be expected if the null hypothesis of independence were true (Blalock, 1979). The variables involved in answering the first research question concerning differences between types and locations of colleges were all nominal, with the exception of a few demographic variables.

The first step in regard to the second research question concerning expectations and experiences of college was to determine whether there were significant differences between the means. A modified z-test was used to determine the difference of means. This test is useful for interval level data with large sample sizes ($N \geq 30$). The formula provides a value which is then determined to be significant or not significant in the usual manner (Agresti & Agresti, 1979). The dimensions of the semantic differential scales also needed to be determined. Each scale consisted of 21 distinct items along which each respondent rated expectations or experiences. It was believed that most of the 21 items probably clustered around a few distinct dimensions. Several factor analyses were conducted in order to discover those dimensions since factor analysis determines the number and nature of underlying variables among large numbers of items (Cattell, 1978). In factor analysis, the mean of each of the 21 variables is expressed in terms of a linear function of statistically independent artificial variables called factors. The factors are created through the variables and the Pearson correlation of each variable with each factor is called its loading (Agresti & Agresti,

1979). In order for the scales to be factorially "pure" they must load on one factor to a much greater degree than they load on any other factor. Variables that load highly on one factor but not on any others make up one dimension of expectations of college.

Conducting a factor analysis on the expectation items and another one on the experience items (these are the same items, but at one time the respondents were to rate their expectations of college while later in the questionnaire they were to rate their experiences) tested whether the meanings of the items remain the same from expectation to experience. If the loadings for the two analyses were the same or similar then it would add to the internal validity of the study. Essentially it means that, although the scores on each item might change, the construct of the item has not changed.

Once the factors were determined the item scores for each factor were added together to make up the dimension score. Then Pearson product moment correlations were computed between these dimensions and other interval level data such as income and age. These tests discovered any relationships between the variables. The dimensions or constructs that were created by the factor analysis were compared with one another to determine whether there were discrepancies between expectations of the dimension and actual experiences. When discrepancies were discovered cross-tabulations were conducted between those discrepancies and the variables that dealt with problems, surprises, and importance of college. The discrepancies were the independent variables that determined whether there were feelings of frustration, disappointment, or uncomfortableness on campus.

CHAPTER V

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of this chapter is to report the findings of the study and discuss the implications of these findings. The chapter begins with a description of the demographic and educational differences between older students attending different types of colleges. It first presents the demographic differences or similarities of older students at community and four-year colleges. The chapter continues with further differentiation of college type, focusing on demographic differences between colleges located in non-metropolitan and metropolitan areas. The first section concludes with a presentation on colleges with varying proportions of older students on campus and how the older students on each of these campuses differ demographically and educationally.

The chapter proceeds with the findings concerning the second research question which dealt with expectations of older students and their experiences on the college campus. The factor analysis of the expectation and experience items is presented and compared. The scales that result from the factor analysis are discussed. Then the computed differences between expectations and experiences are considered and the implications of those differences are explained.

One of the objectives of this research project was to test whether discrepancies between expectations and experiences of college would interact with positive or negative expressions concerning college life.

This is the focus of the third section. Data concerning discrepancies between college expectations/experiences and the problems and surprises that older students encountered on the college campus are discussed, followed by a presentation of supporting information.

Demographic and Educational Differences of Older
Students Attending Colleges of Different
Types and Locations

Two-Year and Four-Year College

Demographic Differences

Table II shows demographic differences between older students who attended community colleges and those who attended four-year colleges. About three-quarters of the college students were female. This held true for both types of colleges; however, there were slightly more males attending four-year colleges. But this difference was not significant enough to distinguish between the two types of colleges. These findings supported some of the past research reported in Chapter II on the current trend of higher college attendance by females at all ages. Close to three-quarters of the students were also married at both types of colleges. There was little difference between community colleges and four-year colleges in regards to all aspects of marital status. The majority were married with about 15 percent widowed and 9 percent divorced. This finding was also similar to that of other studies. Married older persons have consistently been found to be more active than those not married and may have greater access to fiscal resources, transportation, and other services that support college attendance. The fact that 72 percent of the sample was married may be partially due to

TABLE II
DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS BY COLLEGE TYPE

	Type of College		Total
	Community College	4-Year College or University	
Sex:			
Male	24.2% (55)	29.0% (53)	26.3% (108)
Female	75.8% (172)	71.0% (130)	73.7% (302)
	100.0% (227)	100.0% (183)	100.0% (410)
Marital Status:			
Married	72.7% (165)	72.1% (132)	72.4% (297)
Widowed	16.3% (37)	14.2% (26)	15.4% (63)
Divorced/Separated	8.8% (20)	10.9% (20)	9.8% (40)
Single	1.8% (4)	2.7% (5)	2.2% (9)
	100.0% (227)	100.0% (183)	100.0% (410)
Age:			
50-54	36.6% (83)	49.2% (90)	42.2% (173)
55-59	20.3% (46)	35.5% (65)	27.1% (111)
60-64	16.7% (38)	12.0% (22)	14.6% (60)
65-69	13.2% (34)	2.2% (4)	8.3% (38)
70-74	7.9% (14)	1.1% (2)	4.9% (16)
75 +	5.2% (12)	.0% (0)	2.9% (12)
	100.0% (227)	100.0% (183)	100.0% (410)
Chi Square = 48.32 significance = .0000			
Race:			
White	95.2% (216)	89.6% (164)	92.7% (380)
Black	1.3% (3)	4.6% (8)	2.7% (11)
Native American	3.1% (7)	5.5% (10)	4.1% (17)
Other	.4% (1)	.5% (1)	.5% (2)
	100.0% (227)	100.0% (183)	100.0% (410)
Income:			
- \$10,000	17.2% (39)	6.6% (12)	12.4% (51)
\$10,000-19,999	22.0% (50)	11.5% (21)	17.3% (71)
\$20,000-34,999	26.4% (60)	34.4% (63)	30.0% (123)
\$35,000-49,999	20.7% (47)	26.8% (49)	23.4% (96)
\$50,000-99,999	12.3% (28)	18.6% (34)	15.1% (62)
+ \$100,000	1.3% (3)	2.2% (4)	1.7% (7)
	100.0% (227)	100.0% (183)	100.0% (410)
Chi Square = 22.51 significance = .0004			
Employment Status:			
Full time	39.6% (90)	66.7% (122)	51.7% (212)
Part time	10.6% (24)	12.0% (22)	11.2% (46)
Retired	27.3% (62)	7.7% (14)	18.5% (76)
Homemaker	18.1% (41)	9.3% (17)	14.1% (58)
Other	4.4% (10)	4.3% (8)	3.4% (18)
	100.0% (227)	100.0% (183)	100.0% (410)
Chi Square = 41.15 significance = .0000			

the general youth of this older sample.

There was a significant difference between the college types on the age variable. Table II clearly shows that those students attending four-year colleges were younger than those attending community colleges. There was about a 13 percent difference between the college types of those aged 50 to 54. This pattern continued throughout the age groups, with 97 percent of the four-year college students under the age of 65 compared to 73 percent of the community college older students. Over five percent of the community college students were over the age of 75, whereas none of the four-year college students, in this sample, were over 75. This age difference may be partially due to reasons for attendance of college and educational backgrounds of students. These issues are discussed later in this chapter.

The sample was predominantly white, with about a six percent difference between the two college types that was not significant. As was discussed in Chapter II, it was generally believed that the greatest predictor of college attendance at an older age was attendance at a younger age and non-whites had not had easy access to higher education in their youth. Therefore, it was not surprising to find that minority elderly did not attend college at older ages.

The difference between income levels of the two college types was significantly different, with a Chi Square of 22.51 and significance at the .0004 level. It was not surprising to learn that older adults attending four-year colleges were better off financially than those attending community colleges. It was more likely that those attending four-year colleges also attended them at a younger age and were possibly reaping the financial benefits of a college degree. Conversely, those

who attended community colleges might be less likely to have gone to college at a younger age. The difference between the older students attending different types of college was clear at all levels of income. Thirty-nine percent of the students at community colleges had an annual income of below \$20,000 compared to only 17 percent of those attending four-year colleges. While 21 percent of older students at four-year colleges had incomes of over \$50,000, only 13 percent attending community colleges had incomes that high.

There were also significant differences between the employment status of older students attending different types of colleges. Those at four-year colleges were much more likely to be fully employed (67 percent compared to 40 percent of those at community colleges). Older students at two-year colleges were more likely to be retired (18 percent) than those at four-year colleges (8 percent). There were also more students at community colleges who were homemakers, with 18 percent in that category in comparison to only 9 percent of older adults at four-year colleges. This may be due to the large number of teachers, basically a female occupation, who must return to college for supplemental educational courses throughout their career. These teachers would have to attend a four-year college in order to enroll in the appropriate courses; therefore, this would increase the number of females who primarily considered themselves as employed persons rather than homemakers at four-year colleges.

Overall, it appeared that a description of a typical community college older student was someone female, married, white, in her fifties, with a middle-class income. The typical older adult at a four-year college was also female, married, and white, probably younger,

wealthier, and more likely employed than her community college counterpart. It was interesting to note the difference that the location of the college made in considering the "typical" older college student.

Demographic Differences by Type and
Location of College

Table III also presents demographic information on older students by college type but splits each college type up by whether it is located in a metropolitan area or a non-metropolitan area. There were some significant differences between these colleges; the older adult attending a metropolitan community college was often more similar to four-year college students than to non-metropolitan community college students.

There was no significance difference between college types on the question of gender. When location was taken into consideration, however, major differences arose. There were significantly more men attending college in metropolitan areas than would have been thought by just looking at college types. Non-metropolitan community colleges were overwhelmingly female (85 percent), but metropolitan four-year colleges had a sizeable proportion of older men in attendance (38 percent). Community colleges in metropolitan areas follow the four-year college trend, with 30 percent of its older adult students being male. Therefore, on the question of gender, the location of college cannot be overlooked, since it had a dramatic impact.

There was no significant difference among the college categories on marital status. But it was interesting to note that people attending

TABLE III

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTIC BY COLLEGE TYPE AND LOCATION

Demographic Variable	Type of College				Total
	Community College		4-Year College or University		
	Non-metropolitan	Metropolitan	Non-metropolitan	Metropolitan	
Sex:					
Male	15.2 (14)	30.4% (41)	23.5% (27)	38.2% (26)	26.3% (108)
Female	84.8% (78)	69.6% (94)	76.5% (88)	61.8% (42)	73.7% (302)
	100.0% (92)	100.0% (135)	100.0% (115)	100.0% (68)	100.0% (410)
Chi Square = 12.44 significance = .0060					
Marital Status:					
Married	71.7% (66)	73.3% (99)	71.3% (82)	73.5% (50)	72.4% (297)
Widowed	21.7% (20)	12.6% (17)	16.5% (19)	10.3% (7)	15.4% (63)
Divorced/Separated	4.3% (4)	11.9% (16)	9.6% (11)	13.2% (9)	9.8% (40)
Single	2.2% (2)	2.2% (3)	2.6% (3)	2.9% (2)	2.2% (9)
	100.0% (92)	100.0% (135)	100.0% (115)	100.0% (68)	100.0% (410)
Age:					
50-54	26.1% (24)	43.7% (59)	48.7% (56)	50.0% (34)	42.2% (173)
55-59	17.4% (16)	22.2% (30)	33.0% (38)	39.7% (27)	27.1% (111)
60-64	17.4% (16)	16.3% (22)	13.0% (15)	10.3% (7)	14.6% (60)
65-69	17.4% (16)	10.4% (14)	3.5% (4)	.0% ()	8.3% (34)
70-74	15.2% (14)	3.0% (4)	1.7% (2)	.0% ()	4.9% (20)
75+	6.5% (6)	4.4% (6)	.0% ()	.0% ()	2.7% (11)
	100.0% (92)	100.0% (135)	100.0% (115)	100.0% (68)	100.0% (410)
Chi Square = 77.63 significance = .0000					

TABLE III (Continued)

Demographic Variable	Type of College				Total
	Community College Non-metropolitan	Community College Metropolitan	4-Year College or University Non-metropolitan	4-Year College or University Metropolitan	
Race:					
White	94.5% (87)	95.6% (129)	88.7% (102)	91.2% (62)	92.7% (380)
Black	1.1% (1)	1.5% (2)	3.5% (4)	5.9% (4)	2.7% (11)
Native American	3.3% (3)	3.0% (4)	7.8% (9)	1.5% (1)	4.1% (17)
Other	1.1% (1)	.0% ()	.0% ()	1.5% (1)	.5% (2)
	100.0% (92)	100.0% (135)	100.0% (115)	100.0% (68)	100.0% (410)
Income:					
- \$10,000	26.1% (24)	11.1% (15)	8.7% (10)	2.9% (2)	12.4% (51)
\$10,000-19,999	28.3% (26)	17.8% (24)	10.4% (12)	13.2% (9)	17.3% (71)
\$20,000-34,999	22.8% (21)	28.9% (39)	39.1% (45)	26.5% (18)	30.0% (123)
\$35,000-49,999	15.2% (14)	24.4% (33)	25.2% (29)	29.4% (20)	23.4% (96)
\$50,000-99,999	7.6% (7)	15.6% (21)	16.5% (19)	22.1% (15)	15.1% (62)
+ \$100,000	.0% ()	2.2% (3)	.0% ()	5.9% (4)	1.7% (7)
	100.0% (92)	100.0% (135)	100.0% (115)	100.0% (68)	100.0% (410)
Chi Square = 55.84 significance = .0000					
Employment Status:					
Full time	30.4% (28)	45.9% (72)	69.6% (80)	61.8% (42)	51.7% (212)
Part time	9.8% (9)	11.1% (15)	7.8% (9)	19.1% (13)	11.2% (46)
Retired	34.8% (32)	22.2% (30)	7.8% (9)	7.4% (5)	18.5% (76)
Homemaker	19.6% (18)	17.0% (23)	10.4% (12)	7.4% (5)	14.1% (58)
Other	5.4% (5)	3.7% (5)	4.4% (5)	4.4% (3)	4.4% (18)
	100.0% (92)	100.0% (135)	100.0% (115)	100.0% (68)	100.0% (410)
Chi Square = 58.13 significance = .0000					

non-metropolitan colleges were more likely to be widowed than those at metropolitan colleges. This held true across college types. Although the trend was clear it was not significant. This may have been due to the fact that non-metropolitan colleges were more accessible to older adults with transportation difficulties (older widowed persons have been found to have more problems with transportation than older married persons). For older students attending community colleges in non-metropolitan areas, the larger number of widowed persons may have interacted with the older age of these students. As age increased the chances of being widowed increased and those at the less metropolitan community college were significantly older. Twenty-one percent of this sample at non-metropolitan community colleges were over the age of 70, compared to only 7 percent of those at metropolitan community colleges over 70. Two percent of non-metropolitan four-year college students over that age, and none of those at metropolitan four-year colleges over the age of 65. This dramatic finding has not been discussed in other studies of older college students because they did not contain different types and locations of colleges. This difference could be caused by several factors. As discussed in Chapter II, community colleges are more apt to tailor their programs for the community. This tailoring may be more likely to occur in a less metropolitan area where the community is more unified and the college can focus on specific groups on which to target programs.

The trend for community colleges to have a slightly higher percentage of whites than four-year colleges held true even when the location of the colleges was considered. Once again, only about 5 percent of community college older students were minority persons while

about 10 percent of four-year colleges were the same. It was interesting to note that there was a slight difference among minorities at four-year colleges. The metropolitan four-year college was more likely to have blacks and the non-metropolitan was more likely to have native Americans attending their colleges. The ecological distribution of minorities in relation to college attendance was not investigated.

Older students attending different types and locations of colleges was significantly different. As with age, the metropolitan community college resembled the four-year colleges more than it did the non-metropolitan community college. Fifty-four percent of older students attending community colleges in non-metropolitan areas had a yearly income of less than \$20,000. The corresponding percentages for metropolitan community colleges, non-metropolitan four-year colleges, and metropolitan four-year colleges were 28 percent, 19 percent, and 16 percent, respectively. The seven individuals in the sample with incomes of over \$100,000 all attended metropolitan colleges, as did the majority of those with incomes over \$50,000. Most research in this area has found that the majority of older persons attending college have middle class to upper-middle class incomes. The present study demonstrated that there were actually wide ranges of income of older students and that the type and location of college was tied to older students' annual income. It is misleading to state that all older students have middle-class incomes since there was considerable variation, with 25 percent of one category and only 3 percent of another with less than \$10,000 a year.

Non-metropolitan community colleges were more likely to have retired older students. For all other categories of colleges, the

predominant employment status was fully employed. The difference between colleges was significant at the .0000 level, with a Chi Square of 58.13. Since community colleges, as a whole, had more retirees than four-year colleges, it appeared that the location of the college was less important than the type of college. Only 7 to 8 percent of older students attending four-year colleges listed themselves as retired, irregardless of location of the college.

Two-Year and Four-Year College

Educational Differences

Since the concern of this study was older students, it was believed that there should be several measures of educational status. Table IV presents information on three educational variables. The first one was the student's current status as a student; the second variable focused on the older student's amount of formal education, prior to their attendance as an adult; and the last variable was concerned with the amount of experience that a student had with higher education. There were significant differences between types of college for all three variables.

The majority of older students attending community colleges stated that they were "special" students. This category usually meant that they were not degree seeking students or that they did not have the qualifications to be degree-seeking students and were working on proving their worthiness as a student. In contrast, the older students attending four-year colleges and universities, were predominantly graduate students (55 percent) with a sizeable number as special students (19 percent). Once again, this demonstrates the distinct

TABLE IV
EDUCATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS BY COLLEGE TYPE

	Type of College		
	Community College	4-Year College or University	Total
Year in College:			
Freshman	8.8% (20)	4.4% (8)	6.8% (28)
Sophomore	14.5% (33)	3.3% (6)	9.5% (39)
Junior	6.2% (14)	7.7% (14)	6.8% (28)
Senior	1.8% (4)	10.9% (20)	5.9% (24)
Graduate	12.8% (29)	54.6% (100)	31.5% (129)
Special	55.9% (127)	19.1% (35)	39.5% (162)
	100.0% (227)	100.0% (183)	100.0% (410)
	Chi Square = 122.52 significance = .0000		
Education Prior to Attendance as Adult:			
High School or Less	39.7% (90)	29.0% (53)	34.8% (143)
Some College	35.3% (80)	25.7% (47)	31.0% (127)
College Degree	7.0% (16)	13.1% (24)	9.8% (40)
Graduate Work	18.1% (41)	32.2% (59)	24.4% (100)
	100.0% (227)	100.0% (183)	100.0% (410)
	Chi Square = 36.18 significance = .0000		
Educational Experience:			
None	32.6% (74)	16.9% (31)	25.6% (105)
Vicarious Experience	10.1% (23)	5.5% (10)	8.0% (33)
Past Experience	30.0% (68)	16.9% (31)	24.1% (99)
Experienced	27.3% (62)	60.7% (111)	42.2% (173)
	100.0% (227)	100.0% (183)	100.0% (410)
	Chi Square = 46.25 significance = .0000		

difference between older students at different types of colleges.

Considering the results from the previous variable, it was not surprising to find that those students at four-year colleges were more likely to have college degrees and to have done some graduate work prior to their attendance as an older adult. The students attending community colleges were more likely to have only had a high school diploma or less prior to their attendance as an older adult (40 percent). But a surprising number of four-year college students also fell into that category (29 percent). Overall, 71 percent of older students at four-year colleges stated that they had attended college prior to their attendance as an older adult and 60 percent of older community college students said the same. The difference between the college students at the two types of college were large enough to warrant a Chi Square of 36.18, which was significant at the .0000 level.

The difference in overall higher education experience was also significant. The students answered a variety of questions on their education history and their families' and friends' history. These answers were considered together and the student was placed in one of four categories: no previous experience with college (not only no experience by the older student, but also no attendance by their close family or friends), vicarious experience (attendance of college by close family or friends), past experience (usually attending college at a younger age), and experienced (someone who has attended college off and on all their adult life). As expected, there was a much larger number of students with no experience attending community college (32.6 percent) than at four-year colleges (16.9 percent). While older students at community colleges were more likely to be fully represented

in all four categories, four-year college older students were much more likely to be in the experienced category. This may be partially due to the predominance of teachers who must periodically return to college for refresher courses. Most of the students who are in the experienced category were probably graduate students who have been working on various degrees over a number of years.

Educational Differences by Type and
Location of College

Table V essentially supports Table IV's findings, with a few modifications. It appears that about 20 percent of those older students at non-metropolitan community colleges have done graduate work over the years and are experienced students. On the other hand, about 40 percent had not attended college and had no personal experience with college. Those at community colleges located in metropolitan areas were more likely to have attended college in the past and, therefore, were familiar with the college experience. Students at metropolitan four-year colleges were more likely to be graduate students than those at non-metropolitan ones and they were also more likely to have been life-long college students than those at non-metropolitan four-year colleges. There was a general trend of older students at metropolitan four-year colleges and universities having the most experience with college and those at non-metropolitan community colleges having the least amount of college experience. Non-metropolitan four-year college older students had more experience than metropolitan community college students but less than metropolitan four-year college students.

The findings in this section showed that although many older

TABLE V
EDUCATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS BY COLLEGE TYPE AND LOCATION

Educational Variable	Type of College				Total
	Non-metropolitan	Community College Metropolitan	Non-metropolitan	4-Year College or University Metropolitan	
Year in College:					
Freshman	5.4% (5)	11.1% (15)	4.3% (5)	4.4% (3)	6.8% (28)
Sophomore	10.9% (10)	17.0% (23)	1.7% (2)	5.9% (4)	9.5% (39)
Junior	7.6% (7)	5.2% (7)	10.4% (12)	2.9% (2)	6.8% (28)
Senior	1.1% (1)	2.2% (3)	13.0% (15)	7.4% (5)	5.9% (24)
Graduate	17.4% (16)	9.6% (13)	47.0% (54)	67.6% (46)	31.5% (129)
Special	57.6% (53)	54.8% (74)	23.5% (27)	11.8% (8)	32.5% (162)
	100.0% (92)	100.0% (135)	100.0% (115)	100.0% (68)	100.0% (410)
	Chi Square = 142.98 significance = .0000				
Education Prior to Education as Adult:					
High School or Less	43.5% (40)	37.0% (50)	33.0% (38)	22.1% (15)	34.8% (143)
Some College	27.2% (25)	40.7% (55)	27.8% (32)	22.0% (15)	31.0% (127)
College Graduate	6.5% (6)	7.4% (10)	13.9% (16)	11.8% (8)	9.8% (40)
Graduate Work	22.9% (21)	14.8% (20)	25.2% (29)	44.1% (30)	24.4% (100)
	100.0% (92)	100.0% (135)	100.0% (115)	100.0% (68)	100.0% (410)
	Chi Square = 57.64 significance = .0000				
Educational Experience:					
None	40.2% (37)	27.4% (37)	19.1% (22)	13.2% (9)	25.6% (105)
Vicarious Experience	12.0% (11)	8.9% (12)	7.0% (8)	2.9% (2)	8.0% (33)
Past Experience	27.2% (25)	31.9% (43)	17.4% (20)	16.2% (11)	24.1% (99)
Experienced	20.7% (19)	31.9% (43)	56.5% (65)	67.6% (46)	42.2% (173)
	100.0% (92)	100.0% (135)	100.0% (115)	100.0% (68)	100.0% (410)
	Chi Square = 55.23 significance = .0000				

students did have past experiences with college, there were many others who had begun to attend college in their later years with no prior experience. This finding is at odds with the research presented in Chapter II which states that the greatest predictor of college attendance at later ages is college attendance at younger ages. Differences between older students attending colleges in different locations, as well as different types, have been demonstrated. Next, the question of proportion of older students on campus will be considered.

Proportion of Older Students on Campus and Demographic Differences

The question of whether older students feel comfortable on campus was discussed in Chapter II. Earlier research suggested that one of the main reasons that older adults did not return to college was due to the large number of younger students (Tindall & McCarter, 1981). In order to determine whether there were demographic differences between older students attending colleges with different proportions of older students on campus, the ten colleges in the sample were divided into three groups. The colleges were grouped according to their percentage of students over the age of 50. The first group consisted of colleges with very low percentages, .56 percent to 1.12 percent of their total student body over the age of 50. This group contained four colleges, each different from the others either by location (metropolitan or non-metropolitan) or type (community or four-year). The three colleges in the second group were either community colleges or four-year colleges and were all located in non-metropolitan areas. The percentage of

students over the age of 50 ranged from 1.67 percent to 2.80 percent. The third group also consisted of three colleges. They were all community colleges, with one located in a metropolitan area and their percentages of students 50 plus were between 5.27 and 9.63.

There were several significant demographic differences among older students attending colleges with different proportions of students 50 plus (see Table VI). There was a higher percentage of females attending colleges in the middle range (1.67 to 2.80 percent). Male older students made up a larger proportion of older students attending colleges in the low range. There were also significantly more students over the age of 60 at the high proportion colleges. This may be due to the fact that these colleges were community colleges or possibly more persons over the age of 60 attend community colleges because that is where they find a larger percentage of persons in their age group.

There were also significant differences by income and employment status. These mirror those findings presented previously concerning the demographic differences between college types and locations. The colleges with higher percentages of older students had older students with lower incomes and their older students were more likely to be retired. Once again, it was unclear whether these differences were due to the percentage of older students on campus or the type of college represented in this category (community colleges).

Educational Differences by Proportions of Older Students on Campus

As proportion of students over the age of 50 increased, so did the proportion of older students that consider themselves freshmen,

TABLE VI

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS BY PERCENT OF STUDENTS 50 + ON CAMPUS

Demographic Variables	Percent of Students 50 + on Campus			
	Low	Medium	High	Total
Sex:				
Male	36.6% (41)	15.2% (14)	25.7% (53)	26.3% (108)
Female	63.4% (71)	84.8% (78)	74.3% (153)	73.7% (302)
	100.0% (112)	100.0% (92)	100.0% (206)	100.0% (410)
	Chi Square = 11.99 significance = .0025			
Age:				
50-54	46.4% (52)	52.2% (48)	35.4% (73)	42.2% (173)
55-59	42.0% (47)	26.1% (24)	19.4% (40)	27.1% (111)
60-64	9.8% (11)	14.1% (13)	17.5% (36)	14.6% (60)
65-69	.9% (1)	5.4% (5)	13.6% (28)	8.3% (34)
70-74	.0% (0)	2.2% (2)	8.7% (18)	4.9% (20)
75 +	.9% (1)	.0% (0)	5.4% (11)	2.9% (12)
	100.0% (112)	100.0% (92)	100.0% (206)	100.0% (410)
	Chi Square = 58.30 significance = .0000			
Income:				
- \$10,000	4.5% (5)	15.2% (14)	15.5% (32)	12.4% (51)
\$10,000-19,99	8.9% (10)	15.2% (14)	22.8% (47)	17.3% (71)
\$20,000-34,999	30.4% (34)	39.1% (36)	25.7% (53)	30.0% (123)
\$35,000-49,999	30.4% (34)	18.5% (17)	21.8% (45)	23.4% (96)
\$50,000-99,999	22.3% (25)	12.0% (11)	12.6% (26)	15.1% (62)
+ \$100,000	3.6% (4)	0% (0)	1.5% (3)	1.7% (7)
	100.0% (112)	100.0% (92)	100.0% (206)	100.0% (410)
	Chi Square = 32.79 significance = .0003			
Employment Status:				
Full time	64.3% (72)	64.1% (59)	39.3% (81)	51.7% (212)
Part time	14.3% (16)	9.8% (9)	10.2% (21)	11.2% (46)
Retired	7.1% (8)	8.7% (8)	29.1% (60)	18.5% (76)
Homemaker	8.9% (10)	12.0% (11)	18.0% (57)	14.1% (58)
Other	5.4% (6)	5.4% (5)	3.4% (6)	3.4% (18)
	100.0% (112)	100.0% (92)	100.0% (206)	100.0% (410)
	Chi Square = 47.76 significance = .0000			

sophomore, or special, as Table VII shows. Unfortunately, the category of "special" student is ambiguous, sometimes referring to students who are not "degree-seeking" and sometimes referring to those who are completing requirements needed before becoming a freshman or a graduate student.

Colleges with lower percentages of students over the age of 50, not only had more of their older students as graduate students, but they also had fewer students who had not received some college education prior to their attendance as an older adult. Such colleges also had a much higher percentage of their older student who were very experienced with college. While only 15 percent of their older students had no experience with college, approximately 30 percent of older students attending colleges in the medium or high range had no prior experience with college life. From these findings it was possible to speculate on the interaction between the type of college and the older students that attend it. Older students with extensive college experience were more likely to be on campuses with few older students. These students may not be intimidated by the low number of persons their age due to their extensive experience. Alternately, those with less college experience may gravitate to colleges where they see and meet with more persons their own age thus reducing their fear of being out of place.

While it is important to understand the demographic differences between students attending different types and locations of colleges, as well as colleges with differing percentages of older students, it is also important to understand the college expectations and experiences of those students. The interactions of expectations/experiences with college related problems, surprises, and educational experience follows.

TABLE VII

EDUCATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS BY PERCENT OF STUDENTS 50 + ON CAMPUS

Educational Variables	Percent of Students 50 + on Campus			
	Low	Medium	High	Total
Year in College:				
Freshman	2.7% (3)	7.6% (7)	8.7% (18)	6.8% (28)
Sophomore	7.1% (8)	7.6% (7)	11.7% (24)	9.5% (39)
Junior	4.5% (5)	12.0% (11)	5.8% (12)	6.8% (28)
Senior	8.0% (9)	12.0% (11)	1.9% (4)	5.9% (24)
Graduate	60.7% (68)	34.8% (32)	14.1% (29)	31.5% (129)
Special	17.0% (19)	26.1% (24)	57.8% (119)	39.5% (162)
	100.0% (112)	100.0% (92)	100.0% (206)	100.0% (410)
	Chi Square = 109.47 significance = .0000			
Education Prior to Attendance as Adult:				
High School or Less	23.2% (26)	41.3% (38)	38.3% (79)	34.8% (143)
Some College	25.9% (29)	28.3 (26)	35.0% (72)	31.0% (127)
College Degree	13.4% (15)	9.8% (9)	7.8% (16)	9.8% (40)
Graduate Work	37.5% (42)	20.6% (19)	18.9% (39)	24.4% (100)
	100.0% (112)	100.0% (92)	100.0% (206)	100.0% (410)
	Chi Square = 46.52 significance = .0000			
Educational Experience:				
None	15.2% (17)	30.4% (28)	29.1% (60)	25.6% (105)
Vicarious Experience	5.4% (6)	5.4% (5)	10.7% (22)	8.0% (33)
Past Experience	13.4% (15)	21.7% (20)	31.1% (64)	24.1% (99)
Experienced	66.1% (74)	42.4% (39)	29.1% (60)	42.2% (173)
	100.0% (112)	100.0% (92)	100.0% (206)	100.0% (410)
	Chi Square = 43.29 significance = .0000			

Expectations and Experiences of Older Students

The students chosen for this study were presented with 21 items that dealt with college. These items were broken down into six categories: instructors, other students, grades, classes, college recreation, and college in general. As described in Chapter III, each category was divided into two to four bi-polar adjectives which were placed at the ends of a seven point scale. Respondents rated their expectations of categories according to the adjectives. For example, they were to remember whether they expected instructors to be hard or easy; if they expected instructors to be very hard they would circle a 1, if the respondent expected instructors to be moderately easy they might circle a 5 or 6. A higher score meant a more positive expectation, like friendly, helpful, challenging, interesting, or useful. Later in the questionnaire students were asked to rate their experiences with college on the same categories and adjectives. In order to obtain a general idea as to the direction of changes from expectations to experiences, mean differences were computed.

Table VIII shows each item's mean and standard deviation for the expectations and experiences of the older students. It also presents the modified Z test to determine whether there are significant differences between the means of the expectations and experiences. There were three adjectives used to describe expectations and experiences of instructors; easy/hard, friendly/unfriendly, and helpful/not helpful. There were significant differences at the .001 level for all three of these bi-polar adjectives. In all three cases the average rating increased from expectation to experience.

TABLE VIII

DIFFERENCE IN MEANS OF EXPECTATION AND EXPERIENCE VARIABLES

Variables	Expectation		Experience		Modified Z Test	Significance
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation		
Instructors:						
easy/hard	2.804	1.285	3.994	1.456	11.05	.001
friendly/not	4.897	1.308	5.757	1.269	8.45	.001
helpful/not	4.757	1.572	5.785	1.240	9.19	.001
Other Students:						
friendly/not	4.598	1.536	5.866	1.139	11.85	.001
smart/not	5.012	1.227	4.938	1.189	.78	NS
responsible/not	4.894	1.295	4.975	1.369	.77	NS
conservative/not	4.115	1.338	4.542	1.101	4.41	.01
Grades:						
important/not	5.773	1.552	5.586	1.703	-1.45	NS
easy/hard	2.981	1.605	3.940	1.785	6.79	.001
Classes:						
challenging/not	5.829	1.339	5.523	1.353	-2.73	.01
interesting/not	5.657	1.492	5.536	1.385	-1.07	NS
easy/hard	2.990	1.463	3.813	1.435	6.79	.001
useful/not	5.766	1.403	5.545	1.359	-2.02	.05

TABLE VIII (Continued)

Variables	Expectation		Experience		Modified Z Test	Significance
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation		
College Recreation:						
important/not	2.716	1.923	3.377	1.986	4.29	.01
fun/not	3.159	1.783	3.963	1.504	6.18	.001
too few/many	3.785	1.299	3.779	1.114	- .06	NS
for young/everyone	3.312	1.947	3.838	1.788	3.56	.01
College, in general:						
worthwhile/not	6.352	1.145	6.302	1.145	- .55	NS
easy/hard	3.037	1.528	3.857	1.547	6.75	.001
interesting/not	5.890	1.354	5.822	1.295	- .65	NS
fun/not	4.760	1.309	5.268	1.216	7.15	.001

Therefore, older students found instructors to be easier, friendlier, and more helpful than they had expected. The largest difference was on the easy/hard item. On the average, each student's easy/hard score increased by a little more than one point on the seven point scale. Instructors, overall, were viewed more favorably than had been expected by the older students.

The second category, other students, consisted of the following bipolar adjectives: friendly/unfriendly, smart/not smart, responsible/irresponsible, and conservative/radical. Older students expected other college students to be moderately friendly and experienced them to be a little more friendly than they expected. The average score increased 1.268 points on the scale and the difference was significant at the .001 level. On the question of other students' intelligence, there was little change between expectation and experience and what change occurred was not significant. There was also little change on the item concerning the responsibility of other students and it was not significant. Other students were, however, slightly more conservative than the older students expected them to be. The shift was small (.427 on the average), but was significant at the .01 level. Other students were found to be more friendly and conservative than expected, but the older students' expectations concerning their intellectual ability and world view were accurate.

Older students expected grades to be fairly important and difficult to obtain. These were the only two items that were considered concerning grades. There was a very slight negative shift with grades, meaning that they were not quite as important as the older students had expected them to be. This shift was not significant, however, so

conclusions are challengeable. There was a significant difference between the older students' expectations that grades would be fairly difficult to earn (they averaged a 3 on this item), and what they experienced. Respondents, on the average, rated their experience with earning grades to be in the center of the scale, meaning that grades were neither easy nor difficult to earn.

The items concerning classes were: challenging/not challenging, interesting/boring, easy/hard, and useful/worthless. These students expected their classes to be fairly challenging with an average rating of about a 6. They experienced the classes to be a little less challenging, with only a .306 drop, but it was significant at the .01 level. Their experience concerning the interest of the class did not differ significantly from their expectation. But they did find the classes to be a little easier than they had previously expected. Their scores increase about a point, on the average, for a .001 significance level. Older students, unfortunately, found the classes to be slightly less useful than they previously conceived them to be. Their scores decreased by .221, on the average and this change was significant at the .05 level. On the whole, classes were slightly less challenging, less useful and not as difficult as these older students had expected them to be prior to their attendance as an older student.

The fifth category was college recreation. Although it was not expected that this would be a category that older students had considered much prior to their return to college, it has been important to many of the full-time students on campus. The bi-polar adjectives that the students rated themselves on were: important/not important, fun/no fun, too few activities/too many activities, and only for the

young/for everyone. Overall, most of the scores rose slightly. Recreational activities were a little more important, a little more fun, and a little more for everyone than was expected. These scores only rose about .6 points, but they were significant changes. Their expectations of the number of recreational activities did not change at all after they experienced college as an older adult.

The last category was college, in general. It was believed that a general category was needed to provide a larger view of the older students' expectations of college and their experiences. Worthwhile/worthless, easy/hard, interesting/boring, and fun/no fun made up the items on which students rated themselves. There was a minute negative change on the worthiness of college, but it was not significant. There was also an insignificant miniscule change on the interesting/boring item. Students did find it to be significantly easier, from an expectation of 3 to the experience of close to 4 on the 7 point scale. They also found it to be more fun than they had expected; a .508 change with a significance level of .001. While students were most accurate in the previous perception on how worthwhile and interesting college was, they also experienced it to be easier and more fun.

The full implications of these findings are discussed in the next chapter; however, it is important to consider these findings in view of past literature. It has been believed that one of the predominant deterrents of older adults returning to college is the expected difficulty of college. The students reporting in this study have not found college to be as arduous as they expected. In fact, overall they have found the people to be more friendly and helpful and the

coursework to be easier. It could be argued that the students currently enrolled in college are the successful ones, that the older students that had difficult times in college dropped out. No question on the survey asked the students' current enrollment status. Several of the students indicated on their questionnaires that they were not currently enrolled. These students had been enrolled in the previous semester but were not enrolled in college at that time. Therefore, an unknown proportion of the respondents were not students at the time they filled out the questionnaire. It should also be considered that not all the responses were positive. The findings previously presented were based on means; the average score of all respondents. While some of the students had dramatic changes in their scores, others did not change at all. These scores have been averaged together to present a composite view of the expectations and experiences of college of students over the age of 50. Therefore, some of the students had glowing reports of college life, while others had hostile views of college. Another argument might be that these students were experienced with college and felt comfortable on campus. While some students were very experienced, over 25 percent of this sample had little or no previous college experience prior to their attendance as an older adult. Many had only high school diplomas that they had earned 30, 40 and 50 years ago, yet they attempted a new and unknown environment. These students are probably different from some older adults because of their willingness to try new experiences. However, willing spirits are not bought or sold; they can be created within each person, regardless of age, education, or income.

Expectation and Experience Scales

While it is important to consider the individual differences of items measuring expectations of college and experiences with college, it is equally important to take these college items and determine whether they create a scale uncovering more information on older students' expectations and experiences. It was decided to include all 21 items and compute a factor analysis on the older students' expectations. A similar factor analysis was conducted on the students' experiences with college and a final factor analysis was done on both expectations and experiences, which meant factoring 42 items. The factor analysis for expectations will be presented first, then the analysis of experience and finally the factor analysis for all of the items used to determine older students' expectations and experiences of college.

Tables IX and X show the pertinent factor loadings for the factors used in this analysis. There were other factors separated out by the analysis but the items did not load as strongly nor were they of a unified nature that is essential to scale building. Table IX presents the data for older students' expectations of college. The first six variables loaded highly on the first factor and did not load very well on any of the other factors. The second set of variables, seventh through tenth, loaded highly on the second factor and the last three variables loaded highly on the third factor.

In order to create a scale out of factor loadings the researcher must consider the items that factored together and discover a common denominator that is the basis of the loading. The first expectation

TABLE IX

FACTOR ANALYSIS FOR EXPECTATION ITEMS (ROTATED FACTOR MATRIX)

Variables	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Challenge of classes	.73011	-.22504	.12711
Classes usefulness	.72096	-.10186	.02178
College interesting	.70767	-.06312	.13081
Classes interesting	.65925	-.17001	.16501
College worthwhile	.64341	-.20556	-.06144
College enjoyable	.44857	.25675	-.01042
Classes difficult	-.19410	.85895	.00284
College difficult	-.20510	.83907	.07795
Grades difficult	.00771	.78075	-.08447
Instructors difficult	-.22924	.62350	.01887
Other students intelligent	.08143	-.04738	.81243
Other students responsible	.02702	.23237	.58989
Other students conservative	.20559	-.22834	.56730

TABLE X

FACTOR ANALYSIS FOR EXPERIENCE ITEMS (ROTATED FACTOR MATRIX)

Variables	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Classes useful	.77936	-.11940	-.00393
Classes interesting	.77791	-.14570	-.02501
Instructors helpful	.74296	.03886	.19329
College interesting	.72529	-.12814	.04531
Instructors difficult	.67625	.10109	.28546
Challenge of classes	.68866	-.25505	.13601
College enjoyable	.52082	.07378	.15976
Grades difficult	-.05424	.86438	.02145
College difficult	-.09491	.83922	-.05410
Classes difficult	-.08947	.78267	.01200
Instructors difficult	.01731	.72582	-.00306
Other students responsible	.13643	.04621	.74443
Other students conservative	.16458	.03253	.65928
Other students intelligent	.09491	-.18584	.60634
Other students friendly	.23963	.04707	.57152

factor was determined to be the "challenge of college" factor. This was because the adjectives that clustered together were the challenge (or lack of challenge) of classes, the usefulness (or worthlessness) of classes, the general interest/boredom of college, the interest/boredom of classes, the general worthiness of college, and the difficulty of classes. Although there were several different descriptors that loaded together, there was a general theme of challenge. While the clusterings on this factor were not outstandingly high they were adequate and they loaded on this factor more than twice as high as any other factor except for the difficulty of classes item which loaded on the second factor to a modest extent.

The second factor was comprised of the difficulty of classes, the overall difficulty of college, the difficulty of grades, and the "difficulty" of instructors. This factor was concluded to be one concerning difficulty. The loadings of each item was fairly high on this factor, with two of them loading to the .8 level. And the items did not load well on any other items. The third factor had one high and two moderate loadings. All the items dealt with the older students' expectations of other students - intelligence, responsibility, and conservative nature. Therefore, the factor was simply called the "other students" factor.

Table X demonstrates that the factor analysis for experiences of older students concurred with the expectation loadings. The first factor, with moderate loadings, contained all the items that the first loading of the expectation analysis did, with the addition of enjoyment of college. Once again, there are several adjectives represented in this loading (useful, interest, helpful, challenge, fun) but almost all

of them have a general feeling of challenge. The second factor was also identical to that of expectations of college. All of the items dealt with the difficulty of college in various ways. The clustering of variables were in a little different order, just as the loadings on the first experience factor was marginally different than the loadings on the first expectation factor, but there was still the same predominant theme - difficulty. The loadings on the second experience factor were also slightly higher than those of the second expectation factor, but once again, that had no effect on the similarity of the findings. The third factors also match, with the addition to the experience analysis of the friendliness of other students item. This addition strengthens the argument that the older students who responded to the questionnaire considered all other students as a general theme.

Snider and Osgood (1969) discussed the uses of factor analysis for semantic differential scales such as the one used in this study. They stated that factor analysis would be especially good in creating semantic differential scales. They proposed that researchers should create a scale through one set of data and then determine whether the scale remained true to its factorings by including it in another and conducting another factor analysis. If the items loaded similarly at both time periods (as well as additional testings) then it would advance current knowledge about the usefulness of semantic differential scales. The present study was conducted similarly to the way Snider and Osgood suggested, but the presentation of the items to be included in the scales was done at one time rather than at different time periods. This may, in fact, be a problem with the current study because it is dependent upon the older students to remember a past time period rather

than obtaining only current impressions. The data may be tainted by inaccurate memories or an attempt not to appear dissimilar in their answers to the two sets of college items. While keeping these problems in mind, it is still useful to notice the similarity of the clusters of loadings on the expectation and the experience college items. With only one or two differences, the same items factored, essentially, in the same manner for experiences with college and expectations. The fact that the items cluster in the same manner demonstrates that the respondents thought of the items in the similar ways. There was construct validity not only because the constructs were built out of various items that clustered together but it was done on two separate loadings.

Table XI shows the loadings when both the expectations and experiences items were included together. Six different factors are shown here, although there are six more that were not unified under one theme. The first factor on Table XI was essentially the same as the first factor on Table X with the same items loading similarly. The only exception was the item concerning the helpfulness of instructors that also loaded on the factor analysis for experiences with college. This item did appear to be non-congruent with the other items that clustered together and it was decided that the "experience of challenge" scale would be created from the other six factors, leaving the helpfulness of instructors out of the scale.

The second factor loading on Table XI was identical to the second factor on Table X. All four of the items were combined to create the "experience of difficulty" scale. The third factor consisted of the same items as the second factor on Table IX. This factor was called the

TABLE XI

FACTOR ANALYSIS FOR ALL EXPECTATION/EXPERIENCE ITEMS (ROTATED FACTOR MATRIX)

Variables	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6
Experience:						
Class usefulness	.79464	-.09495	-.05501	.11922	.02030	.03444
College interesting	.75674	-.11398	-.07540	.17090	.12693	.20387
Class interesting	.73848	-.11481	-.11553	.13849	-.03943	.03860
Class challenging	.70586	-.26043	.03847	.08547	.18998	-.04800
College worthwhile	.53004	-.00334	-.16971	-.01025	.21472	-.14527
College enjoyable	.52428	.04450	.16930	.22196	.17286	.15606
Experience:						
Grades difficult	-.08360	.84323	.13048	-.08690	.03035	.04769
College difficult	-.05770	.80102	.18018	-.07748	.01301	.02729
Class difficult	-.13402	.77548	.14427	.08884	-.01310	-.06440
Instructors difficult	-.06803	.73297	.07473	-.01867	-.07224	-.05036
Expectation:						
Class difficult	-.13773	.14820	.82447	-.15044	-.03448	-.09161
College difficult	-.05410	.24411	.77088	-.18171	.00028	-.02089
Grades difficult	.02435	.23194	.65637	-.10232	.06917	-.10242
Instructors difficult	-.03909	.07409	.58453	-.20234	-.06283	-.17713

TABLE XI (Continued)

Variables	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6
Expectation:						
Class interesting	.09122	-.06757	-.14100	.69692	.12218	.08485
Class challenging	.15673	-.09736	-.24678	.69597	.03786	.00124
College interesting	.13795	.00448	-.05237	.68639	.07271	.23201
Class usefulness	.23717	-.00751	-.20132	.63444	-.02441	-.09048
College worthwhile	.30042	.09545	-.33008	.41784	.15823	-.0958
College enjoyable	.31876	.13878	.33012	.36055	.18434	.16709
Experience:						
Other students intelligent	.12243	-.19878	.05485	.13626	.74820	.09838
Other students responsible	.08429	.04063	-.02239	.04364	.71427	-.06591
Other students friendly	.33536	.09065	-.09494	.06955	.63939	.01448
Expectation:						
Other students conservative	.07588	-.06004	-.24049	.16266	.08563	.74029
Other students intelligent	.14431	.02058	-.10331	.03283	.06916	.72924

"expectation of difficulty" scale. The fourth factor on Table XI was similar to that of the first factor on Table IX which consisted of items concerned with the "expectation of challenge." The fifth factor was almost identical to the "experience of other students" factor on Table X, except that it left out the conservativeness of other students factor. And the last factor was similar to that last factor of Table IX, also concerning other students. When the items loaded on the Table XI factor analysis, it did not include the item concerning other students sense of responsibility. This factor was called the "expectation of other students" factor.

It was decided to use the factor clusterings as they existed in Table XI to create the scales, partially due to the fact that the items loaded a little higher when were all included together and there were few discrepancies between the three tables. Table XI reinforces the position that while the items loaded in very similar ways, there is a distinct difference between the expectations of college and the actual experiences with college by older students.

These scales were useful to discover some of the constructs that older students used when thinking of college. But the development of the scales and the resulting constructs were more useful for finding differences between older students' expectations and experiences. The temporal differences give as much information about the older student as the constructs.

Differences Between College Expectations and Experiences Scales

The next section of this chapter concerns the scales and the

differences between the expectation scales and the experience scales. Once it was clear as to which items to combine to create scales, the selected items were added together and an average was taken. For example, each respondent's ratings for the expected difficulty of grades, classes, instructors, and college, in general, were added together and divided by four. This gave the respondent one score which conveyed how the respondent felt about the expected difficulty of college. This was done for all 410 respondents. Table XII gives the frequencies of each of the scales.

By closely studying Table XII one can see a marked difference between the expectations of college and the experiences. For example, 106 older students scored an average of 2.00 on the expectations of difficulty items, while only 54 older students scored an average of 2.00 on the experience of difficulty scale. While 2 scored 6.00 on expectations of difficulties, 23 scored the same on experiences of difficulties. These findings were not surprising because they were based on the same data as the information presented in Table VI which showed the differences in mean scores of expectations and experiences. The difference between the two tables is that the analysis presented in Table VI was concerned with individual items and this one deals with the larger constructs made up of those individual items.

The differences between the expectations and experiences of the challenge of college scale were not as dramatic as the difficulty scale but they did exist. The comparison of the two frequencies showed a slight decline in challenge from expectation to experience. College was easier than expected and the challenges were not as great. There are also differences in the other students scales, with the experience being

TABLE XII
 FREQUENCIES OF EXPECTATION AND EXPERIENCE SCALES*

Expectation	Expectation			Experience		
	Value	Frequency	Percent	Value	Frequency	Percent
Difficulty	1.00	77	20.2%	1.00	23	6.1%
	2.00	106	27.2%	2.00	54	14.3%
	3.00	95	24.9%	3.00	93	24.7%
	4.00	76	19.9%	4.00	124	32.9%
	5.00	25	6.5%	5.00	58	15.4%
	6.00	2	.5%	6.00	23	6.1%
	7.00	1	.3%	7.00	2	.5%
			377	100.0%		382
Challenge	1.00	0	.0%	1.00	0	.0%
	2.00	4	1.0%	2.00	3	.8%
	3.00	9	2.3%	3.00	10	2.6%
	4.00	58	15.0%	4.00	57	14.7%
	5.00	134	34.6%	5.00	152	39.2%
	6.00	162	41.9%	6.00	133	34.3%
	7.00	20	5.2%	7.00	33	8.5%
			387	100.0%		388
Other students	1.00	2	.5%	1.00	2	.5%
	2.00	7	1.8%	2.00	2	.5%
	3.00	21	5.4%	3.00	13	3.4%
	4.00	130	33.4%	4.00	97	25.1%
	5.00	130	33.4%	5.00	160	41.3%
	6.00	78	20.1%	6.00	91	23.5%
	7.00	21	5.4%	7.00	22	5.7%
			389	100.0%		387

* Differences in N's due to variations in number of persons completing all variables included in the scale.

slightly better than the expectation. While 229 respondents expected students to be moderately to extremely friendly, smart, and responsible, 273 respondents found other students to be these things.

The differences between expectations and experiences of the various scales were computed to discover how much change occurred. The scores from the experience scales were subtracted from the scores on the expectation scales and the resulting difference is presented on Table XIII. A negative value means that the experience score was higher than the expectation score. This means that the experience was generally more favorable than the expectation. On the other hand, a positive score demonstrated the fact that the expectation was greater than the experience; for example the expectation of challenge was greater than the experience of challenge in college.

In glancing at Table XIII, it is clear that many of the respondents did not appear to change their opinions about difficulties, challenges, or other students. These are composite scores which demonstrate a lack of overall change toward difficulty; there may have been changes on individual items included in the scales.

By far the majority of respondents had few overall changes between the expectations and experiences of these scales. On the challenge scales, 50 percent did not change and almost 40 percent were within one point (plus or minus) of the no change mark. The differences among the other scales was equally unimpressive. There were, however, individuals that had made dramatic changes in the way they expected and experienced college. Twenty persons made a change of 4 or 5 points on the difficulty scales. This means that these persons may have expected college to be about a 2 - fairly difficult - but found it to be a 6 or 7

TABLE XIII
DIFFERENCES BETWEEN EXPECTATION AND EXPERIENCE SCALES

Scales	Value	Frequency	Percent
Difficulty	-5.00	7	1.9%
	-4.00	13	3.5%
	-3.00	27	7.3%
	-2.00	59	15.9%
	-1.00	111	29.9%
		109	29.4%
	1.00	35	9.4%
	2.00	9	2.4%
	3.00	1	.3%
	371	100.0%	
Challenge	-3.00	4	1.1%
	-2.00	19	5.0%
	-1.00	71	18.7%
		192	50.5%
	1.00	69	18.2%
	2.00	18	4.7%
	3.00	6	1.6%
	4.00	1	.3%
		380	100.0%
Other Students	-4.00	3	.8%
	-3.00	13	3.4%
	-2.00	29	7.6%
	-1.00	98	25.7%
		150	39.3%
	1.00	62	16.2%
	2.00	18	4.7%
	3.00	7	1.8%
	4.00	2	.5%
	382	100.0%	

- very easy. Sixteen individuals expected students to be less responsible, intelligent, and friendly than they found them to be.

The difference between college difficulty scales demonstrated that older students found the experience of college to be less difficult than they had expected, although there were few changes. This was demonstrated by the 217 respondents that had negative scores and only 45 that had positive scores. The differences on the other students scales were also more positive with 143 experiencing other students to be 1 to 4 points better than expected and only 89 experiencing other students to be 1 to 4 points worse than expected. The differences between the scales on expectations and experiences of the challenge of college were even. Once again, this table supports the findings in Table VIII but clearly shows that the majority of older students experienced little general change between their expectations and experiences of college. Some individuals had dramatic changes, usually for the good.

Relationships Between Expectation/Experience
Scales, College Problems, Surprises, and
Educational Background

It was believed that older students' college expectations and experiences would be related to the problems, frustrations and general negative feelings toward college. Fortunately for colleges, but unfortunately for this study, older students made few negative comments concerning their college experience. The surprises the respondents wrote about were basically good, with only 39 negative comments out of 404 responses to the question. Other open ended questions, such as the importance of college, whether or not the student would encourage other

older adults to attend college, how attending college has affected their lives, the support they had while attending college, were all similar. All of these questions were asked to discover negative as well as positive attitudes toward college yet the answers were overwhelmingly positive.

The question concerning problems that the older students encountered on campus, however, did provide enough responses for analysis. Because of the nominal nature of the question, the Chi Square statistical method was once again utilized. The responses to the question on problems were either none (no problems encountered) or problems due to pressures and frustrations dealing with those pressures. When Chi Squares were computed for the problems variable and each of the scales, no significant differences were found. Chi Squares were also computed for the differences between the scales (as presented in Table XIII) and the problems that older students encountered. Once again, no significant differences were found. The findings showed that discrepancies between expectations and experiences of college were not related to whether or not older students had problems with college. This finding is in opposition to expectancy theory which states that the larger the discrepancy between strong expectations and negative experiences, the more likely there will be negative attitudes, feelings, problems, or frustrations.

A significant difference was found between whether or not older students encountered problems with college and the type of college and with the percentage of older college students on campus. There was wide variation on the actual problems that older students encountered. Therefore, it was decided to group them according to whether or not the

older student encountered a problem. Thus the actual problem was not considered, simply the existence of a problem. Table XIV shows that those students attending non-metropolitan community colleges were significantly more likely to have no college problems than those attending metropolitan four-year colleges.

TABLE XIV
PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED AND TYPE OF COLLEGE

College Variable	Problem		Total
	No Problems	Existing Problems	
College Type and Location:			
Non-metropolitan Community College	43.7% (38)	56.3% (49)	100.0% (87)
Metropolitan Community College	38.5% (52)	61.5% (83)	100.0% (135)
Non-metropolitan Four-Year College	31.6% (36)	68.4% (78)	100.0% (114)
Metropolitan Four-Year College	20.6% (14)	79.4% (54)	100.0% (68)
	34.7% (140)	65.3% (264)	100.0% (404)
	Chi Square = 10.44 significance = .0152		
College Proportions of Older Students:			
Low	18.8% (21)	81.3% (91)	100.0% (112)
Medium	41.8% (38)	58.2% (53)	100.0% (91)
High	40.3% (81)	59.7% (120)	100.0% (201)
	34.7% (140)	65.3% (264)	100.0% (404)
	Chi Square = 17.37 significance = .0002		

Even more significant was the difference between the colleges with differing proportions of older students on campus. Those with medium and high numbers of students were much less likely to have problems than those with small percentages of older students. The structural variables, college type, location and proportion of older students on

campus, had a strong relationship with the problems variable. Conversely, the more social psychological variables concerning expectations and experiences had little or no relationship.

Since variables other than expectations and experiences were more salient when problems of older students were considered, some of the assumptions of this study were scrutinized. One of the predominant assumptions was that those with large discrepancies between expectations and experiences would be those with less college experience. It was believed that experience with college would lead to accuracy of expectations. Pearson product moment correlations were computed for the expectation/experience scales, the differences between the expectation/experience scales, and the education variables (year in college, previous education, and overall educational experience). Table XV presents part of the results, which show that there was no correlation between these variables.

TABLE XV

PEARSON CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS BETWEEN EXPECTATION/EXPERIENCE SCALE DIFFERENCES AND EDUCATION VARIABLES

Expectation/Experience Scales	Education Variables		
	Year in College	Previous Education	Educational Experience
Difficulty	.0319	.0841	-.0128
Challenge	.0346	.0274	.0487
Other Students	-.0362	-.0528	-.1310 *

* significant at .005

The correlations between each of the six scales and the education

variables were similar to those presented in Table XV. The correlations are extremely small with only one significant finding. The negative correlation between educational experience and the discrepancy between expectations and experiences with other students means that older students with more positive experiences (resulting in a negative discrepancy score) were those with more college experience. This finding, however is suspect due to the weakness of the correlation.

Overall, the finding was that there was no relationship between the expectations and experiences of older students and their educational experience. Analyses were also conducted on the relationship between expectations and experiences and the type and location of college. Once again, the findings were of no significance. Older students' expectations and experiences of college did not differ by type or location of campus nor did they differ by proportion of older students on campus. Since college expectations and experiences were not related to educational experience this was not surprising.

It was originally believed that those with less college experience attended certain types of colleges. It was also believed that those with less experience with college would have more discrepancies between their expectations and experiences. If these two statements were true then certain types of colleges would be expected to have students with discrepancies between expectations and experiences. While the first statement was true, the following two statements were false. The implications of these findings are discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The first purpose of this research was to discover whether there were any differences between students over the age of 50 who were attending different types and locations of colleges. In fact, there were significant demographic differences between older students who attended two-year versus four-year colleges. There were even more striking differences when the location of the college was considered in addition to the type. The proportion of older students on campus was also determined to be an important variable in relation to the characteristics of these students and their experiences.

In addition, the older students' expectations of college and their actual experiences with higher education were studied to learn about any discrepancies between the two. The most salient finding was that college exceeded, in positive ways, the older students' expectations. This research was also interested in the effect that past experience with higher education had on older students' expectations. It was found that past experience with college did not significantly effect college expectations, experiences, or problems of older students. Finally, it was found that there was little relationship between college expectations, experiences, past college experience and the following variables: the problems that these students experienced while attending college, the surprises that these older students faced, their

willingness to encourage others their age to attend, and the overall effect that attending college as an older adult has had on their lives.

The last chapter presented the statistical findings while the present chapter will elaborate those findings. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss fully the implications of those findings and place them in the overall context of the place of older students in higher education. To accomplish this task, the information received during the ten telephone interviews is integrated into the discussion. The first section of this chapter discussed the implications of the demographic differences and similarities of older students on various college campuses. The second section considers how differences between expectations of college and the actual experiences with college effect the older student. The third section is on the place that past experience with higher education has in the lives of older students. Next, the relationships between the problems, surprises, expectations, experiences, and effects of college attendance are discussed. A final summary is then included and, lastly, a section on the limitations of this research and suggestions for future research in this field.

Demographic Differences of Older Students

The findings in Chapter IV show that older students were more likely to be female than male. This finding is supportive of other reserach literature but it is still a curiosity in some ways. The women who are now over 50 were less likely to attend college as young women. They grew up in a time period when it was considered generally unnecessary for women to be employed outside the home; in fact, it was often considered wrong. However, women have increasingly sought out

higher education, at all ages (Crimmins & Riddler, 1985). This might mean that women, as a group, would be most uncomfortable on campus. College is an arena in which they "should" feel unprepared by their lack of past experience. This, however, is not the case. An hypothesis to explain this anomaly might be that older women, because they have traditionally had the child rearing responsibility, are comfortable with the typical younger college student. They would probably be more comfortable around younger students than men their age (Speer & Dorfman, 1986). This is a possible explanation, but many of these women have attended college off and on for years. Some are teachers who have had to return to college every couple of years for new educational courses. Others may view college as a leisure activity. One of the persons who was involved in an in-depth interview was the wife of a college professor and had always taken one or two courses "just for fun."

Colleges located in metropolitan areas were more likely to attract a larger proportion of older men than those in non-metropolitan areas. It should be noted, however, that most of these men were attending college for employment purposes. It may also be more acceptable for men in metropolitan areas to attend college. The culture of less populated areas has traditionally been less interested in higher education and, sometimes, local people who have attended college are ridiculed by their neighbors for being a "college boy." The insinuation is that a college education is for the rich and not of use for the everyday person. In such an environment older men would be less inclined to attempt college courses.

The marital status remained fairly constant across all categories of college type. Most of the older students were married. Once again,

this finding supports most other research on older students. It is generally believed that the predominance of married older students is because they are more mobile than non-married older adults. The finding that older persons attending non-metropolitan colleges were more likely to be widowed than those attending metropolitan colleges is partially explained by the larger number of widowed persons in less populated regions. But it is also because women are the ones most likely to be widowed and there is a significantly larger proportion of women attending colleges in non-metropolitan areas.

The larger proportion of widows on non-metropolitan campuses is also interacting with the age of older students on those campuses. The community colleges located in non-metropolitan areas were significantly older than any of the other colleges. This, of course, adds to the chances that an older student will be widowed. The age differences between community and four-year colleges may be due to the reason given by an employee of the Oklahoma State Board of Regents, who said, "community colleges are for people who are threatened by college." The community college campus is less dominating than the four-year college campus. Community colleges have a reputation of being friendlier and easier. Therefore, it is not surprising for adults over 65 who have less experience with higher education to attend college in a less threatening environment. A community college located in a small town would be even less imposing. Older adults would probably be slightly familiar with the campus and would have a general feeling for the personnel, faculty, and staff on campus. This would all provide a more inviting atmosphere for the oldest students. City campuses tend to have a faster pace and have more parking problems than small town campuses.

Therefore, the age of the student is generally younger because they are less likely to be dissuaded by longer walks to class or being pushed and pulled by the bureaucratic establishment. It is not that older persons are less able to cope with problems. Instead, there may be a change in attitude, with age, and the bureaucracy may have less to offer the older person in exchange for his/her cooperation. For the adult over the age of 65 attending college is a leisure activity; therefore, there are weaker reasons for the older adult to deal with the hassles of a city campus.

The predominance of whites over minority older adults on the college campus was not surprising when viewed from the position of minority persons. College has rarely been an inviting place for them. Only recently have institutions of higher education attempted to bring in minority students. The area in which this sample was taken has not had an outstanding record for civil rights of minorities. The little progress made has been at the insistence of the federal government. Therefore, it was not unusual to find very low percentages of minority older adults on the college campus. But for those who do attempt to break through the stronghold of the young white collegians, it can be a rewarding experience. One of the persons that was interviewed by telephone was a black woman, age 54. This woman had begun to attend college at the age of 52, after the last of her five children had left home. She had not completed her high school education and before enrolling in college, she had to take the General Education Development Test (commonly referred to as the G.E.D.). She also had to find the finances to support herself through college and did so by working nights as an office cleaner and taking in sewing during the day. This woman

had been attending college for three years when she was interviewed and although she said her progress was slow, it was worthwhile. She stated that she loved going to classes, felt comfortable on campus, and had finally found where she belonged. Many older minority adults may not have as much determination as this woman and they may not enjoy the experience of college as much as she. However, she offers experiential evidence that older minority persons have the ability and the desire to attend college.

The vast income differences between college types were easily explained when the other demographic variables were considered. The older student at non-metropolitan community colleges were predominantly female, older, and retired. The younger, fully employed students were attending metropolitan four-year colleges. These students were also more likely to be male than those attending small town community colleges and gender had a significant influence on income. Not only were fewer older students attending city four-year colleges retired, but 80 percent were at least partially employed. Older adults wishing to attend city colleges may need a larger income to help circumvent some of the problems such as transportation that are more likely to be on city campuses.

Transportation and automobile parking problems have been mentioned several times in connection with the differences between metropolitan and non-metropolitan colleges (Perkins & Roberston-Tchabo, 1981). The reason that they are considered to be problems is not only because older adults may have more difficulties walking long distances, but also because that distance must be walked in all kinds of weather. There are usually no provisions made for days that are hazardous to walk. School

officials assume that if students can drive in bad weather they can also walk in it. This is an invalid assumption. There are days when driving long distances is much less treacherous than walking long distances, especially for older adults.

The differences in educational experiences of older students basically supported past research. It was surprising, however, to find that 40 percent of those older adults attending non-metropolitan community colleges had practically no experience with higher education prior to their current attendance. This is in direct opposition to Houle's (1982) statement that "college education begets college education." Houle could have easily been speaking for those students attending city colleges but his statement is not true for community colleges, especially those in small towns.

It is believed that older adults who have not attended college in the past are afraid of enrolling as an older person. If these adults are aware that many of the older students on campus are "uninitiated," then these potential older students might decide to take a chance and try a college course.

College Expectations and Experiences of Older Students

The findings presented in Tables VIII through XIII showed the differences between what older students expected college to be like prior to their attendance as an older adult and their actual experiences with college. The three scales developed through the factor analysis of expectation/experience items were helpful in determining the constructs which students used in thinking about college and differences

between their expectations and experiences of those constructs.

From the findings concerning the difficulty of college construct it was evident that older students begin college with the idea that it would be difficult. After they had attended classes the majority found that college classes, instructors, and grades were not as problematic as they expected. This should be good news to colleges. If most older students experience college to be easier than they expected it should alleviate some of the fears of other older adults who are concerned about the difficulty of college courses. There were about 12 percent who experienced college to be more difficult than they had anticipated and 29 percent who had no difference between their expectations and experiences of college difficulty. In addition, 25.6 percent of these students had not attended college prior to their current enrollment. These findings should encourage older adults to attend college regardless of past experience.

Along with the decline in difficulty, from expectation to experience, there was also a decline in the challenge of college. This decrease was not overwhelming, many of the students found college still challenging and be useful but not as difficult as expected. One of the goals of higher education was to challenge students and help them to think in new directions; therefore, it was disappointing to find students not being challenged by college. Older students, however, do have a life-time of experience that may affect the challenge that college can present to them. One older student commented that he had an advantage over the younger students because he had "tags" on which to hang the information presented to them. These "tags" are the result of years of reading newspapers and books, travelling within and beyond the

borders of the United States, experiences brought on by raising a family and spending 30 or 40 years employed. Older students may not find college to be as useful or as challenging as they had hoped because their lives have already provided many challenges that have been overcome. It should also be noted that although there was a slight decline on this scale the scores were still very high. Older students had very high expectations; therefore, it would be more difficult for higher education to meet their expectations.

Another of the findings that should be useful to college recruitment offices were those concerning the expectations and experiences with other students on campus. Although 23 percent found the other students to be less responsible, friendly and intelligent, 37 percent experienced the other students as better than they expected. One of the main concerns with older adults returning to college is that they will not fit in with younger classmates (Hooper & March, 1978). The older adult is aware that American society is stratified by age and that there are penalties for crossing over into an area dominated by younger persons. Several of the persons that were interviewed commented on their acceptance by the younger generations. They were pleased that the other students did not resent their presence in classes or working with them on course projects. One older student stated that he thoroughly enjoyed the company of his friends; the majority of them 30 years younger than himself. A woman mentioned that one of the main reasons she was attending college was because she missed being around younger people. Her world had begun to revolve around people over the age of 60 and she felt that she needed to discover what the younger people were thinking about. She said that the college provided first

hand information on the state of youth in America and she found them to be more mature than they were portrayed on television.

The items measuring college recreational activities did not cluster together in the factor analysis; therefore, a scale could not be constructed concerning this area. It is important to note that the older students did find these activities to be more fun than they had anticipated. The original expectations concerning extra-curricular activities were fairly low and although a sizable shift did not occur, the experiences with recreation were slightly better than the expectations. One woman commented that while she did not participate in youth dominated activities there were plenty of organizations available and she enjoyed acting as secretary for one of the clubs. She had not anticipated becoming active in any activity or organization but had developed an interest while working with younger students. A student attending a four-year college had been active working with an organization that pushed for services that would help the older student. She said that the organization was made up of persons over the age of 30 and while they were not interested in some of the "foolishness" of the younger students, they enjoyed social activities along with purposeful ones.

Past Experience with College, Expectations, Experiences, and Problems

The findings from this study did not support expectancy theory. While there were significant changes from expectations to experiences, these discrepancies had no relationship with negative attitudes, problems, stress or frustrations. As pointed out in Chapter V, this may

have been due to several reasons. The lack of negative attitudes and problems that permeated the responses did not allow much analysis. The study may be biased due to older students with negative experiences choosing not to respond to the questionnaire. With a response rate of over 50 percent it is hoped that this did not occur.

An alternative reason for the positive nature of the responses could be the effect of social cognition. As discussed in Chapter II, older adults have been found to be more likely to self-monitor themselves (Armon, 1984). They tend to view situations within their context, being able to compartmentalize their world. Older adults have also been found to be more likely to comment on their attitudes and beliefs as being situated in their own perspective rather than the more absolutist view of younger persons (Blanchard-Fields, 1986). They are also more likely to state that personal values and experiences distort perception (Gibson, 1969). If this is true, then older adults may be less likely to reveal their true attitudes because they may feel that these attitudes are biased and situated in experience. One of the telephone respondents commented that she was afraid that her view would bias me, "Afterall, it's only my opinion and probably doesn't hold water." This type of belief might prevent older students from being more forthright in their expressed opinions.

The finding that 35 percent of the sample had experienced no problems in attending college as an older student was unexpected. Older students attending four-year colleges experienced more problems but this might be due to their predominant employment status (full time). The respondents may also have been influenced by social desirability - the need to answer in an acceptable manner. The majority of those with

no problems attended community colleges, where they were more likely to be retired or partially employed. This would mean that they had more time and energy to spend on college activities and fewer stresses outside college.

Older students at colleges with larger proportions of older students might also find less stress and fewer problems because they have a better chance of finding a support group their age. Most of the colleges had some sort of organization for older and/or returning students. Therefore, these students had a better chance of finding others in the same situation. The presence of more older students on campus may also be due to the attitude of the college administration (Nidiffer & Moore, 1985). With the drop in enrollment of younger adults, some administrators are more interested in pulling in older adults and creating a more hospitable environment for older adults.

Although the problems and surprises that older students encountered on campus were not presented in table format the following discussion concerns some of the specific problems that older students confronted. The predominant problem for older students who had problems was finding time to study. The sample consisted of older adults, most of whom were in their fifties, which is a time filled with work and family obligations. These people probably lead full lives and attending college was only one responsibility among many others. Those students who had not attended college for many years found it difficult to learn how to study again. For some of these students it had been 40 and 50 years since they had last "cracked a book." One man stated that it was not only the fact that his "brain didn't want to remember things anymore," but it was partially the discipline it took to study in the

evenings rather than relax.

Although very few students experienced age discrimination from professors this is a topic that concerns older adults who are interested in enrolling in college. Those who stated that they had been discriminated against usually mentioned that the professor did not appreciate the questions these students asked because the professor could not answer them correctly. One man commented that he had worked for 30 years in the same field as the course but that the professor did not want to hear about what "really" happened on the drilling rig, only what was supposed to happen according to the books.

Twenty percent of the sample did not encounter any surprises when they attended college as older adults. These were the persons that had been attending college for years and were familiar with all aspects of college life. It surprised many students that there were other students on campus their age. Since few older adults choose to return to college, they are typically the only person within their family and friendship networks to do so. This influences them to think that they are unique and, thus, they are surprised to find other adults in their classes.

As stated before, many students are unsure of their capabilities. About 20 percent of the students were surprised with their own intellectual abilities and the ease with which they conquered college courses. This finding, like many of the others, should encourage interested yet unsure older adults to take college classes. A few (5 percent) were surprised that they found it difficult to study after so many years out of school and others were surprised by the younger students' easy acceptance of the older adult on campus.

Effects of College Attendance on Older Students

The majority of students stated that college was very important in their life. Only 7 percent stated that it was not very important or not important at all. The persons who responded to the questionnaire may consist of more involved persons than those who did not take the time to complete the survey. These persons would be more likely to view college as very important. This bias was considered when the questionnaire was developed but it was believed that older students who were attending college as a leisure activity would not view college as important. This was not the case. Across college types and locations, attending college was important to these persons. More of those attending four-year colleges felt that college was very important compared to older students at community colleges. Many of the students at four-year colleges were graduate students and more heavily committed to their college career.

Four-year college students were more likely to state that college was very important in their lives, yet a quarter of them stated that attending college as an older adult had made no difference in their lives. Others said that they had increased their self confidence, their understanding of the world, and their joy in life. Many others stated that they had experienced different forms of internal growth and others believed that their increased knowledge was most important.

All of these answers speak of persons who have benefitted by their college experience. One of the women stated, "I started attending college after I got my divorce. It was hard at first, with three kids in high school, but the kids got used to it and began helping me out. I think my relationship with my kids actually improved while I was in

school because they could relate to what I was going through." Later on this woman said, "When I first started going to school, I thought I'd never make it. I thought I didn't know anything - you know what they say about teaching old dogs. Well, when I started make A's and B's in all my classes, I was impressed. I thought, 'hey, maybe this old girl can make it.' And you know what? I did!" This student was not unusual in her comments. Women were more likely to discuss their increased feeling of self confidence and efficacy. They often spoke of being frightened to attend college but they were more frightened of not doing anything with their lives. Once they took the plunge they found that they could swim along side of the younger students.

Summary

The purpose of this research was to examine older students on the college campus. Higher education has become more accessible to all groups of persons, thus opening up new opportunities for varied social interaction. Older students have only begun attending college in recent years. Because of this, there have been few comparative studies conducted. This study researched the demographic differences between older students on metropolitan four-year college and university campuses, non-metropolitan four-year college and university campuses, metropolitan two-year college campuses, and non-metropolitan two-year college campuses. The study concentrated on how educational experience interacted with the older student and the type of college. This project also focused on the college expectations that older students had prior to their attendance and their experiences while attending college. The last objective was to consider the problems that this special group

of students encountered on the college campus.

The findings show that there are some significant differences between older students on different types of campuses. The community colleges in less populated areas had more female students, along with less wealthy, older, and more retired older students. Those attending four-year colleges were more likely to be fully employed, had better incomes and were younger. Those at four-year colleges also had more education and educational experiences than those students attending community colleges. These findings should be taken into account when college attempt to provide special programs for these students.

The majority of students had negative feelings about the difficulty of college prior to their attendance. Their experiences proved that college was not as difficult as they had anticipated. They also found other students to be more friendly. Finally, they had very high expectations as to the challenges that college would provide them and the usefulness of courses. Many found college not to match up to their high expectations but they still believed it was challenging and useful.

The problems that older students encountered revolved around the stress created by their lack of adequate time to study and learning to study again. While they had problems, they also stated that they had benefitted from college. The benefits were predominantly internal, such as increased self confidence, internal growth, and increased knowledge. Older students also had some surprises in store for them. They had not expected to see so many other older adults on campus, nor had some expected to be accepted by the young. They were also pleased with their abilities in the classroom. Overall, these students spoke of the

fulfillment that college provided for them while it also brought a little more stress in their lives.

Expectancy theory, as Sears (1981) presented it, was not confirmed in this study. The discrepancies between expectations and experiences had no relationship with negative assertions. Even those with strong positive expectations who experienced college negatively did not differ significantly from other students. This finding could be due to the lack of negative responses, the social cognitive make-up of older adults, or, it could be simply due to sampling error. It does provide questions as to the relationship between expectancy theory and older adults. The lifetime experiences of older adults interacts with college expectations and experiences. Accumulated knowledge and maturity may affect the expectations of older adults. Because they have had so many experiences, older students' expectations may be more accurate than younger adults. They may not have the ability to be confounded by current experiences due to their life-long accumulation of experiences. The relationship between accumulated life experiences and current experiences would be a difficult yet fascinating one to discover.

Limitations and Suggestions

In many ways, this study provided more questions than answers. The answers that it has provided were also tainted by some of the limitations of the study. The first one being the unexpected low response rate. While older students at four-year colleges responded well, those at community colleges did not. This may be due to their unfamiliarity with social research, but it may also be due to a lack of interest in college. If this is true, then these findings were biased

by students who were more committed to college, enjoyed college more, and had positive views toward college. Past research on survey data shows that a response rate of over 50 percent is usually adequate for making generalizations about the population, but this is never certain.

A second limitation was the lack of data gathered concerning frustrations felt by older students. The study would have been improved if more direct questions concerning when and how students felt stressed, limited or frustrated had been asked. Instead, the research was dependent upon the responses to open-ended questions, which were overwhelmingly positive. Since the cover letter stated that the study's findings would be conveyed to the State Board of Regents, it was hoped that the respondents would be influenced to answer honestly believing that they would have an impact on future policy.

Suggestions for future research bound out of every finding. Since there are more older women than men on campuses, do they feel incongruent or traitorous to the traditional ways in which they were reared? A good qualitative study might be able to pull out the older women's feelings on these matters. It is also not known whether older persons attending college for non-job related reasons view college as a leisure activity. The present study has assumed this to be true but there is no research that addresses the views of the older adult uninterested in the employment possibilities that result from college attendance.

One question that surfaced through the discussion on differences between metropolitan and non-metropolitan colleges is whether older students living in rural areas feel out of time with their peers. In fact, the whole question of older students being "on time" would be a

fascinating research topic. Recently, life-span developmentalists have discussed the problems of those persons who do not feel as though they are in sync with their age group - these people are not "on time" - they are out of time, out of step. Do older students feel out of step with the drummer of age or are they comfortable stepping to their own beat?

Another research question could be the effect of college on the marital status of older adults. College has typically been the time and place where younger students did their "mate-hunting." Does this also occur with older adults? How do older adults see the relationship between college and romance?

A major research question is how the life experiences of older adults affect their college experience. As discussed previously, these persons are not new to much that is covered in the classroom. Instead, they have large data banks in their minds filled with information gathered over their lives. How is the college experience different for those with large data banks from those with data banks waiting to be filled?

How do older students' sense of time differ from younger students? Younger students often appear to be attempting to pour experiences into their lives as quickly as possible whereas the older adult often has a different perception of time. They have been filled with experiences and may be less anxious about experiencing new events and environments. Does this possible difference in sense of time affect the way older and younger students utilize what is offered in the classroom?

The experience of the older minority student on campus has been ignored because there are few of them. They represent, however, the antithesis of traditional college students. What is the experience of

older minority students and how is it different from the experience of other students?

The area of expectations of institutions is also lacking research knowledge. There is little research on expectations of marriage (Smith, 1985), expectations of parenting, expectations of religion, expectations of politics, or expectations of education. All persons enter the major institutions of society with specific expectations and these are either attained or unfulfilled. The nature of those expectations and the resulting experience need to be gauged.

These are a few of the questions that have arisen out of this study. There are many others concerning older adults that will be asked and answered as these persons attend college in larger proportions. Colleges offer a unique opportunity for older and younger persons to listen and learn from one another. This research was conducted with the hopes that the dialogues have just begun.

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APPENDIX

February 12, 1986

Dear Student:

The enclosed questionnaire is sent to you as part of a study on nontraditional college students (those not 18-22 years of age). The Oklahoma State Board of Regents has given their approval and the college or university you attended has given us your name and address. We ask that you fill out the questionnaire and mail it back in the enclosed, self-addressed, stamped envelope. Your participation is totally voluntary and your answers will be kept strictly confidential.

The study is being conducted as partial fulfillment of a doctoral thesis and is concerned with several different areas pertaining to nontraditional college students. Occasionally, participants find some questions objectionable, please be assured that the questionnaire you fill out will only be used for this study. We are interested in groups of people, not individuals, but we need as many individual responses as we can get in order to have representative groups.

We hope that the information that is obtained from this study will help Oklahoma better serve its college students. Therefore, we encourage you to take time to respond to our questionnaire and mail it back to us. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Gene Acuff, Ph.D.
O.S.U. Professor

Krista S. Moore, M.A.
O.S.U. Graduate Student

Nontraditional College Student Survey # _____

- 1) What was your educational status last semester?
- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 freshman | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 senior |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2 sophomore | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 graduate student |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3 junior | <input type="checkbox"/> 6 student not working toward a degree |
- 2) Were you participating in a special program? yes no
- 3) Were you attending college for purposes relating to your current employment? yes no
- 4) Before you attended classes as an older adult, how much formal education did you have?
- | |
|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 less than a high school degree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2 high school degree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3 some college (no degree earned) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4 degree from a 2 year institution |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 5 degree from a 4 year institution |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 6 some graduate school |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 7 graduate degree, please list: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 8 post graduate work |
- 5) Please list your educational history, for example:
- | | |
|-----------|-------------------------------------|
| 1938 | finished high school |
| 1946-1950 | attended and graduated from college |
| | no school for 32 years |
| 1982 | started taking courses again |
- | Date | History |
|-------|---------|
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
- 6) Did your father attend college? yes no
 if yes, did he earn a degree? yes no
- 7) Did your mother attend college? yes no
 if yes, did she earn a degree? yes no
- 8) How many children did your parents have? _____
- 9) How many, including yourself, went to college? _____
- 10) How many children do you have? _____
- 11) How many have gone to or are now in college? _____

12) Why did you originally decide to attend college as an adult?

13) What surprised you most when you came to school as an older student?

14) What type of student did you think you would be prior to attending college as an adult?

1 excellent 3 adequate

2 good 4 poor

15) When you began college as an adult, what did you expect your overall grade to be?

A B C D F

16) How did you expect your grades to be in relation to younger students?

better about the same worse

Why? _____

17) How did you expect your grades to be in relation to other older students?

better about the same worse

Why? _____

18) How long did it take for you to feel completely comfortable on campus?

I always felt completely comfortable on campus

about a week

about a month

about 3 months

I still don't feel completely comfortable on campus

19) Did you feel that you were part of the student body? yes no

In the next series of items, please rate yourself between 1 and 7 on each item in each category. For example:

I expected instructors to be:

(hard)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 (easy)
(friendly)	7	6	5	4	3	2	1 (unfriendly)
(not helpful)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 (helpful)

Please try to remember what you expected before you began attending college as an older adult.

- 20) I expected instructors to be:
- | | | | | | | | |
|---------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|----------------|
| (hard) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 (easy) |
| (friendly) | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 (unfriendly) |
| (not helpful) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 (helpful) |
- 21) I expected other students to be:
- | | | | | | | | |
|----------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|-------------------|
| (unfriendly) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 (friendly) |
| (sharp witted) | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 (slow witted) |
| (responsible) | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 (unresponsible) |
| (radical) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 (conservative) |
- 22) I expected grades to be:
- | | | | | | | | |
|----------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|-------------------|
| (important) | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 (not important) |
| (hard to earn) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 (easy to earn) |
- 23) I expected classes to be:
- | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|-----------------|
| (not challenging) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 (challenging) |
| (boring) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 (interesting) |
| (easy) | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 (difficult) |
| (waste of time) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 (very useful) |
- 24) I expected college related recreation to be:
- | | | | | | | | |
|------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|------------------|
| (not important) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 (important) |
| (no fun for me) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 (lots of fun) |
| (too few) | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 (too many) |
| (only for young) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 (for everyone) |
- 25) I expected college, in general, to be:
- | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|-----------------|
| (useless) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 (worthwhile) |
| (easy) | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 (difficult) |
| (interesting) | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 (boring) |
| (no fun at all) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 (lots of fun) |

26) What was your overall grade for last semester?

_____ A _____ B _____ C _____ D _____ F

27) What type of student do you think you are?

_____ 1 excellent _____ 3 adequate
 _____ 2 good _____ 4 poor

Now, please rate the next items in the same way as the ones you just did, but this time, please rate how you CURRENTLY view college.

28) My personal experience with instructors is that they are:

(easy)	7	6	5	4	3	2	1 (hard)
(unfriendly)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 (friendly)
(not helpful)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 (helpful)

- 29) My personal experience with other students is that they are:
- | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|-----------------|
| (unfriendly) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 (friendly) |
| (sharp witted) | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 (slow witted) |
| (irresponsible) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 (responsible) |
| (conservative) | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 (radical) |
- 30) My personal experience with grades is that they are:
- | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|------------------|
| (not important) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 (important) |
| (hard to earn) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 (easy to earn) |
- 31) My personal experience with classes is that they are:
- | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|-------------------|
| (not challenging) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 (challenging) |
| (interesting) | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 (boring) |
| (easy) | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 (difficult) |
| (useful) | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 (waste of time) |
- 32) My personal experience with college related activities is that they are:
- | | | | | | | | |
|------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|-------------------|
| (not important) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 (important) |
| (lots of fun) | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 (no fun at all) |
| (too many) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 (too few) |
| (only for young) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 (for everyone) |
- 33) My personal experience with college, in general, is that it is:
- | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|-----------------|
| (useless) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 (worthwhile) |
| (difficult) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 (easy) |
| (interesting) | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 (boring) |
| (no fun at all) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 (lots of fun) |
- 34) What are some of the problems you have faced as an older student?
-
-
-

- 35) Did you work with other students on class projects or studying for exams? _____ yes _____ no

If yes, were these students _____ about the same age as you
 _____ younger than you
 _____ of mixed ages

- 36) Would you like to work with other students in the future?
 _____ yes _____ no

if yes, would you like to work with those _____ about your age
 _____ younger than you
 _____ mixed ages

- 37) How important is attending college to you?
 _____ very important
 _____ important
 _____ not very important
 _____ not important at all

Why? _____

These last questions deal with general population characteristics. Please remember that the information you give is held completely confidential.

- 45) Sex: _____ 1 Male
 _____ 2 Female
- 46) Marital Status: _____ 1 Married
 _____ 2 Widowed
 _____ 3 Divorced/Separated
 _____ 4 Single, living alone
 _____ 5 Single, living with someone
- 47) Race: _____ 1 White
 _____ 2 Black
 _____ 3 Mexican American
 _____ 4 Native American
 _____ 5 Other, _____
- 48) What is your religion?

- 49) What was your age at your last birthday? _____
- 50) In what size town have you spent most of your life?
 _____ 1 Rural
 _____ 2 Town under 10,000
 _____ 3 City between 10,001 and 50,000
 _____ 4 City between 50,001 and 100,000
 _____ 5 City over 100,001
- 51) What is your yearly family income?
 _____ 1 under \$10,000
 _____ 2 \$10,001 - \$20,000
 _____ 3 \$20,001 - \$35,000
 _____ 4 \$35,001 - \$50,000
 _____ 5 \$50,001 - \$100,000
 _____ 6 \$100,001 +
- 52) Are you employed?
 _____ 1 full time } what is your occupation? _____
 _____ 2 part time } _____
 _____ 3 homemaker
 _____ 4 retired
 _____ 5 unemployed
 _____ 6 other, _____
- 53) Overall, would you say your health is:
 _____ 1 very good _____ 4 bad
 _____ 2 good _____ 5 very bad
 _____ 3 average
- 54) Overall, would you say your spouse's health is:
 _____ 1 very good _____ 4 bad
 _____ 2 good _____ 5 very bad
 _____ 3 average _____ 6 no spouse

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VITA

Krista S. Moore

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis: EXPECTATIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF OLDER COLLEGE STUDENTS:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TWO-YEAR AND FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS
OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Major Field: Sociology

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Bartlesville, Oklahoma, October 5, 1957,
the daughter of Ted Russell and Delta Marie Moore.

Education: Graduated from Callaway High School, Jackson,
Mississippi, in December 1974; received Bachelor of Science
degree in Sociology from Oklahoma State University, Stillwater,
Oklahoma, in August, 1979; received Master of Arts degree in
Gerontology from Trinity University, San Antonio, Texas, in
August, 1981; completed requirements for the Doctor of
Philosophy degree at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater,
Oklahoma, in December, 1987.

Professional Experience: Graduate Research Assistant, Gerontology
Department, Trinity University, September, 1979 to May, 1981;
Teaching Associate, Department of Sociology, Oklahoma State
University, September, 1983 to May, 1986; Teaching Associate,
Department of Statistics, Oklahoma State University, September,
1985 to May, 1986; Adjunct Assistant Professor, Oklahoma
Baptist University, September, 1986 to December, 1986; Computer
Assistant, Department of Sociology, Oklahoma State University,
September, 1986 to May, 1987.