

COLLEGE, TECHNOLOGY, BUSINESS CLASSES AND
CAMPUS LIFE: THE CHALLENGE FOR RURAL
NONTRADITIONAL STUDENTS

By

KATHY NEWMAN HARRIS

Bachelor of Science
in Business Education
Phillips University
Enid, Oklahoma
1974

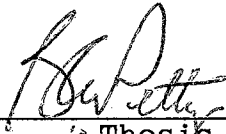
Master of Education
Phillips University
Enid, Oklahoma
1987

Master of Business Administration
Phillips University
Enid, Oklahoma
1990

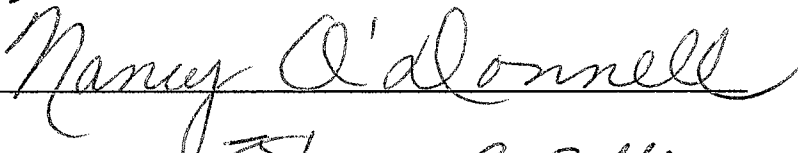
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Thesis Approved:



Thesis Advisor



Dean of the Graduate College

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CHAPTER I

OVERVIEW

Statement of the Problem

This nation's higher educational institutions have been undergoing drastic changes in demographics during the last fifteen years. Colleges and universities have been experiencing a rapidly changing student body. The majority of the student body no longer is composed of the traditional 18- to 23 year-olds, dependent and financially supported by parents. Instead, a segment of adults over the age of 23 is seeking a college education for various reasons.

The proportion of adult students has been rising steadily over the past two decades, roughly from 30% in 1970 to 40% in 1980 to 45% in 1987 (the latest statistics available). That means that, for every collegian under 25, there's one over that age. A College Board study found that one of every 25 Americans who is 25 years of age and older enrolls in a college course or program, producing more than 6,000,000 adult students annually. These figures reflect only adults seeking academic credit. If we were to add those who return to college for noncredit/continuing programs, the number is at least 12,000,000 (Asianian, 1991, p. 57).

These nontraditional students are bringing into the classroom different and distinct backgrounds, motivations, needs, and experiences. The survival and growth of higher educational institutions will be dependent upon their

ability to adapt to these changes and to effectively market education to these students.

Purpose of the Study

Given the continuous growth of the nontraditional student population within higher education, the primary purpose of this study was to describe the perceptions of rural, nontraditional, undergraduate, college students when challenged with college, technology, business classes, and campus life. A secondary purpose was to identify needs they judged to be critical to their successful completion of a business degree program.

Significance of the Problem

In 1984, Rogers wrote that as students go through the process of education, one of educators' most neglected tasks has been finding out what has been really going on in their minds. He also described how there has been an extraordinary amount of available test data dealing with college student outcomes but very little information about what lies beneath the surface of students' test responses and grades. Rogers further emphasized that a movement in this direction was long overdue. This study has been designed to take a qualitative look at the perceptions, concerns, and needs of rural, nontraditional, undergraduate students.

This research of nontraditional students was a qualitative study. Support for the need of this type of research may be found in the work of Terenzini and Pascarella (1991) who reviewed virtually all research relevant to student change during college that was produced since 1967. To identify relevant studies, searches were made of such databases as *Sociological Abstracts*, *Psychological Abstracts*, *Sociology of Education Abstracts*, *Dissertation Abstracts*, *College Student Personnel Abstracts*, *Higher Education Abstracts* and *ERIC*. They concluded that eight recommendations could be drawn from this review of more than 3,000 books, monographs, journal articles, papers, and research reports. Two of these recommendations supported this study.

The current literature on college effects is almost exclusively quantitative. While the logical positivist, quantitative paradigm has served us well, judicious and creative qualitative approaches are capable of providing greater sensitivity to many of the subtle and fine-grained complexities of college impact than the more traditional quantitative approaches (p. 92).

Certain areas of study are particularly in need of attention. While the sheer volume of studies of the effects of college on students done over the past twenty years is truly impressive, several important holes in the research fabric are identifiable and become more glaringly so as time passes. One in particular that stands out...is the nature and dynamics of the collegiate experience for significant groups of nontraditional students (p. 93).

In addition, the impact of the personal computer on society during the last decade has been remarkable. By 1984, there was already an electronic keyboard for every

white-collar worker. This included keyboards that operated computers, terminals, electronic typewriters, and word processors (Trends in computing..., 1984). Today, the majority of these keyboards have been exchanged for computers.

In this high-tech information based society, adults in the workplace have been finding themselves immersed in new learning projects involving the use of the personal computer or the software that drives personal computers. These learning activities many times have led them to independent learning projects or back to college as nontraditional students. The widespread use of personal computers has led to two questions for colleges and universities: (1) How can educators support adults in learning about computers and computer software? (2) How can educators enrich adult learning through the use of computers?

Perceiving an educational program from a cultural perspective of nontraditional students and understanding these viewpoints can bring about effective changes leading to improvement of their college experiences. Forkey (1989) found that student services, enrichment activities, and course scheduling have been almost exclusively designed for traditional students. The steadily growing number of nontraditional students has presented potentially costly campus life problems for a university system still geared to traditional students. These problems have included child care, transportation and parking, overnight housing,

specialized orientation and advisement, and other services.

This qualitative study has dealt with the need to improve our understanding, recruiting, and educating of nontraditional students and the need to build a knowledge base about nontraditional student perceptions of higher education. Educators in higher education will be able to use this research to improve their understanding of nontraditional students and provide programs targeted to solve the problems relevant to nontraditional students and increase their chances for success.

Definition of the Terms

Acculturation: a process of intercultural borrowing between diverse peoples resulting in new and blended patterns or modification in a primitive culture resulting from contact with an advanced society. Webster's New World Dictionary in 1970 defined acculturation as "the process of becoming adapted to a new or different culture with more or less advanced patterns" (p. 10). Changes occur within an autonomous cultural group or individual when it has contact with another cultural group or individual. Acculturation also implies that one individual or group has the power to dominate the other group or individual to cause this change.

Age Wave: The senior boom, the birth dearth, and the aging of the baby boom are coming together to create a massive

demographic shift, one which Dychtwald and Flower (1989) referred to as Age Wave.

Baby Boomers: one-third of all Americans, 76 million people, who were born between 1946 and 1964 (Dychtwald & Flower, 1989).

Birth Dearth: A decade ago, fertility in the United States declined to its lowest point ever. It has been hovering there ever since, and it is not likely to change in the future. In addition, the great population of elders is not being offset by an explosion of children (Dychtwald & Flower, 1989).

Breakdown: according to Agar (1986), a disjunction among traditions. The "specific nature of the breakdown was an identification function of the ethnographer..."(p. 20).

Coding: Strauss and Corbin (1990) referred to coding as a data analysis method as applied in grounded theory research. Analysis occurs through the following coding: (1) Open coding, breaking down data into discrete pieces of phenomenon, labeling them conceptually, and arranging them into categories according to similarities; (2) Axial coding, reassembling data in new ways by "making connections between the categories through the use of the coding

paradigm" (p. 96); and (3) Selective coding, identifying the central category and other related categories.

Coding Paradigm: as shown by Strauss and Corbin (1990), a pattern by which subcategories are associated to categories "in sets of relationships denoting causal conditions, phenomena, intervening conditions, action/interactional strategies, and consequences" (p. 99). These categories are fully expanded, and relationships between categories are determined through their qualities, dimensions, and consideration of coding paradigm.

Coherence: "Ethnographic coherence was achieved when an initial breakdown was resolved by changing the knowledge in the ethnographer's tradition so the breakdown was now reinterpreted as an expression of some part of a plan" (Agar, 1986, p. 20).

Culture: a group's way of doing things and the means by which people made sense of their setting. Culture refers to the way an individual or group perceives and interprets their world based upon shared values and beliefs (Heckman, Oakes, & Sironnik, 1983).

Emic: beliefs perceived subjectively within the culture (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ethnography: the work of describing a culture with the aim of understanding that cultural view. Ethnographic field work involves observing, asking questions, participating in the observed group, and testing perceptions through member validation (Saville-Troike, 1982).

Etic: beliefs observed objectively from outside the culture, frequently based upon research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Evolving: Webster's New World Dictionary defined evolving as developing over a period of time. The nontraditional students' numbers have been steadily increasing, inching upwards. Thus, this gradual increase over the last twenty years was referred to as evolving.

Nontraditional Students: in this study, those undergraduate students over the age of 23 or married, with children or a previously interrupted education, even if under the age of 23. Correspondingly, they had a full-time job, commuted to classes, and did not center their lives around college.

Participant Observation: that method of research in which the observer participates in the daily life of the natives while observing things that happen, listening to what is said, and ultimately, questioning people over a period of time. The participant observer is seeking to perceive the

environment from the natives' point of view (Spradley, 1980).

Resolution: the process of moving from breakdown to understanding. This process is an emergent one and is constrained by the traditions in which it occurs (Agar, 1986).

Schema: a theme developed by a researcher through a process of participant observation and qualitative research. A "strip" or a piece of information, for example an interview, is applied to a schema to test understanding and validity (Agar, 1986, p. 27).

Senior Boom: Americans have been living longer than ever before, and older Americans have been more active, vigorous, and influential than any other older generation in history (Dychtwald & Flower, 1989).

Social Realignment: in this paper, the bettering of nontraditional students' lives. They pursued upward mobility and a new life while still maintaining portions of a previous existence. Most have not been able to move or quit their jobs. Social realignment has been compared to standing with one foot in the future with the other in the past. Additionally, many find that social realignment while in college has been the balancing act between what is

possible in the future, when their college education is completed, and what is practical now, while they are pursuing a college education.

Strips: "any bounded phenomenon" against which the ethnographer tests understanding and validity. Strips used in this study were a variety of phenomena, including interviews, documents, and observations (Agar, 1986, p. 27).

Thick Description: a detailed report that provides sufficient depth and range for the reader to understand the researcher's findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)

Triangulation: the application of differing research methods to confirm research findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation in this study involved comparison of the findings and conclusions of the researcher with the findings and conclusions of a separate research team. In addition, two nontraditional students, one female from the research team, and one male who was not on the research team, critiqued the entire paper.

Upward Mobility: improvement in one's income, self-esteem, technological skills, standard of living, and/or career. The nontraditional students were found to be pursuing upward mobility with the middle-class dream of a college education. They were a group in search of bettering their lives.

Summary

How higher educational systems fare in the future may depend on their ability to serve and recruit the growing constituency of nontraditional students. Today, as in the future, an appreciation of such demographic trends should be a prerequisite to good planning. Therefore, academic planners, professors, and leaders at all higher educational institutions must strive to understand the implications of the growth of nontraditional students' enrollment. As a result, this study was designed to provide information about what lies beneath the surface, the thoughts and needs of the rural nontraditional students, when coping with college, technology, business classes, and campus life.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Chapter II presents a review of selected literature relating to the education of nontraditional students. The historical overview examines the steps of acculturation of the nontraditional student into the higher educational system, focusing on the period from the GI Bill through the present. The review then focuses on the characteristics and motivations of nontraditional students and the technology and methods of instruction preferred by nontraditional students. Next, a background summary will be given of baby boomers and the chapter will conclude with a summary.

Historical Overview

Tribes, bands, societies, and nations have depended upon their members' ability to learn and change throughout history. The quality of life and the ultimate survival of society was also dependent upon education. Due to the growing complexity of contemporary society and the challenges facing it, studies have shown an ever-increasing amount of learning has occurred in higher educational settings.

Since the founding of Harvard University 350 years ago, American universities and colleges have witnessed dramatic

educational and social changes. There has been a sense that higher education, individuals, and society shared a common ethic; education enriches both society and the individual. Despite their many individual differences, this generally has been perceived to be a truth. Hence, there has been the perceived sense that the destiny of the world has been dependent, or at least linked to education.

In the past, a college education was usually discussed in terms of young males. For example, Charles William Eliot, president of Harvard in the 1800s, wrote, "At what age can an American boy best go to a university where choice of studies is free? I believe the normal age of college students under reasonably favorable conditions to be eighteen" (p. 145). This theme of young male college students continued to linger in much of the literature about college students until after World War II and the GI Bill.

Statistics

Tom Snyder, National Center for Education Statistics in Washington, (1991) stated that nontraditional students have thought of college as the "Promised Land" (p. A1). In the early 1970s, more than 75 percent of the nation's college students were just out of high school. Now, according to Snyder that population is less than 60 percent and shrinking. Adults are going back to school because it makes sense financially. Snyder said that, "In general, the payoff from college has been growing over the past ten to

fifteen years, so more people will be interested, regardless of their age" (p. A1). Snyder also found, on the average, that four years of college added more than \$13,000 a year to a worker's paycheck.

The data in Table I lists the number of older students in higher education from 1970 until 1990. It is noteworthy to mention that before 1982 the number of students over the age of 24 was not even published. In 1982 older students earned a footnote to the table of 18- to 22-year-old students. Then, in 1987, the number of students ages 35 and over was reported starting with the 1970 figures. In other words, prior to 1987, the numbers had been collected but not published, due to lack of perceived importance.

TABLE I

NUMBER OF OLDER STUDENTS AT INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION: 1970-1990 (in thousands)*

	Fall 1970	Fall 1975	Fall 1980	Fall 1985	Fall 1990**
Total Enrollment	8,581	11,185	12,097	12,247	13,213
Age 25-29	1,074	1,774	1,871	1,953	1,901
Age 30-34	487	967	1,243	1,261	1,360
Age 35+	823	1,383	1,422	1,885	2,227

*All numbers taken from Digest of Educational Statistics published between 1968 and 1988.

**projected

The growth in older student enrollment began after World War II when returning soldiers brought nontraditional students to university campuses. Correspondingly, Table II displays the number of veterans who took advantage of the GI Bill by returning to further their education in institutions of higher education.

TABLE II
NUMBER OF VETERANS USING THE GI BILL AT INSTITUTIONS OF
HIGHER LEARNING: 1945-1980*

	1946	1950	1960	1970	1975	1980
Number of Veterans	1,572,049	580,597	171,720	590,000	1,693,000	842,000

*All numbers taken from U.S. Bureau of the Census, Statistical Abstracts of the United States from the years' 1946-1990.

Olson (1973) stated that those who authorized the GI Bill had feared the impact on the economy of multitudes of veterans returning from World War II. Hence, the GI Bill was not meant to be just a pleasant gesture on the part of the federal government toward the returning overseas veterans.

In fact, the prospect of unemployed veterans in the U.S. was a very worrisome problem for a nation just barely out of the ravaging Depression of the 1930s. Answering the

need to delay soldiers' return to the work force, a portion of the GI Bill benefits provided for the veterans' education.

However, the effect of the GI Bill went significantly beyond the bounds of what the authors had originally conceived. The GI Bill gave access to higher education for many who otherwise would have been unable to afford it. Hyman (1986) wrote, "...it gave access to previously inadmissible universities and degree programs leading to professional careers and away from blue-collar constraints" (p. 69). Hyman referred to this new expansion of an affordable college education, for those that had no chronicle of a college diploma in their family history, as "culture of aspiration" (p. 69).

As a result, the old paradigm of the elite college education was no longer true. Hyman wrote that it not only made the previously unattainable college degree attainable, but it also, "...made reasonable the pursuit of careers that, before the war, were unrealistic, even if perceived" (p. 70). He concluded the children of veterans and older students witnessed the emphasis their parents were placing on education; this also changed their educational orientations. As a consequence, a new educational paradigm had been formed, creating a new trend that is continuing today.

Whether they're in their late 20s or their early 60s many new college students are older, wiser and more goal oriented than their more youthful

counterparts. And their ranks continue to grow. In fact, reports the U.S. Department of Education, more than 40 percent of all university and college students in the United States will be 25 years or older by the year 2000 (Bumgardner, 1991, p. 160).

The last twenty years have been a period of great change in the enrollment of higher educational institutions. During the decade from 1966 to 1976 there was huge expansion in enrollment, and from 1976 to 1986 there was a notable shift in the composition of the enrollment. However, this period was supposed to be a time of disaster for colleges and universities.

Enrollment projections, based upon the falling birthrate of the 1960s, predicted a rapid decline starting in the late 1970s. Therefore, many higher educational institutions were expected to shut their doors. Astonishingly, however, history has shown stable and increasing enrollments.

For example, the examination of federal government's National Center for Education Statistics showed the largest increases were found in the enrollment of part-time students and women, under the unclassified section. The data in Table III lists an average increase of two percent during each of the two-year intervals, except for the period from 1982 to 1984, when there was a decline of 1.5 percent. In addition, the largest jump occurred from 1978 to 1980, an increase in enrollment of 7.4 percent.

TABLE III

PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN HIGHER EDUCATION ENROLLMENTS BY
MATRICULATING STATUS AND ENROLLMENT LEVEL:
SELECTED YEARS, FALL 1976 TO FALL 1986*

	76-77 78-79	78-79 80-81	80-81 82-83	82-83 83-84	83-84 84-85	84-85 85-86
TOTAL STUDENT	2.3%	7.4%	2.7%	-1.5%	2.1%	13.5%
Undergraduate	1.7%	8.0%	3.8%	-1.2%	1.1%	13.8%
Graduate	-0.4%	1.8%	-0.9%	2.2%	5.2%	8.0%
Professional	5.2%	8.1%	0.2%	0.1%	-2.8%	10.8%
Unclassified	7.9%	8.6%	-1.1%	-6.5%	7.8%	16.8%
FULL-TIME	-0.7%	6.5%	1.7%	-1.7%	0.1%	5.8%
Undergraduate	-1.1%	6.7%	1.9%	-1.8%	-0.7%	4.8%
Graduate	-0.0%	3.6%	-0.1%	4.1%	4.7%	12.9%
Professional	5.6%	8.1%	0.3%	-1.0%	-1.5%	11.7%
Unclassified	3.0%	3.9%	3.5%	-13.0%	20.8%	16.3%
PART-TIME	6.9%	8.9%	4.1%	-1.2%	4.85	25.5%
Undergraduate	8.2%	10.6%	7.8%	-0.1%	4.4%	34.5%
Graduate	-0.6%	0.5%	-1.4%	0.9%	5.5%	4.8%
Professional	0.8%	8.4%	-0.3%	9.8%	-14.3%	2.4%
Unclassified	8.7%	9.3%	-1.8%	-5.4%	5.8%	16.9%

*The U.S. Department of Education, Annual Surveys of Fall Enrollment 1976, 1978, 1980, 1982, 1984, and 1986.

Table IV lists the enrollment totals for the same years. Enrollment numbers climbed from 11,012,137 in 1976 to 11,260,092 in 1978; to 12,096,895 in 1980 to 12,425,780 in 1982; before showing a decline to 12,241,940 in 1984. This decline was largely due to a halt in the growth of full-time undergraduates. The largest expansion was in the unclassified category, which was mainly nontraditional students.

TABLE IV

HIGHER EDUCATION ENROLLMENTS BY MATRICULATING AND ENROLLMENT
LEVEL: SELECTED YEARS, FALL 1976 to FALL 1986
*ROUNDED TO NEAREST THOUSANDTH

	FALL 1976	1978	1980	1982	1984	1986
TOTAL STUDENT	11,012	11,260	12,097	12,426	12,242	12,498
Undergraduate	8,443	8,585	9,268	9,621	9,506	9,607
Graduate	1,085	1,081	1,100	1,090	1,114	1,172
Professional	244	257	278	278	279	271
Unclassified	1,240	1,337	1,452	1,436	1,343	1,448
FULL-TIME	6,717	6,668	7,098	7,221	7,098	7,109
Undergraduate	5,880	5,813	6,201	6,317	6,205	6,160
Graduate	431	431	447	447	465	487
Professional	220	233	251	252	250	246
Unclassified	185	191	198	205	178	216
PART-TIME	4,295	4,592	4,999	5,205	5,144	5,389
Undergraduate	2,563	2,772	3,066	3,304	3,301	3,446
Graduate	653	649	653	643	649	685
Professional	24	24	26	26	29	25
Unclassified	1,054	1,146	1,253	1,231	1,165	1,233

*The U.S. Department of Education, Annual Surveys of Fall Enrollment 1976, 1978, 1980, 1982, 1984, and 1986.

Nontraditional Students' Analysis

Today, a visit to a campus quickly confirms the fact that the profile of the contemporary college student has become distinguished by diversity. College students are no longer young high school graduates taking the next step in the formal education process. The modern university has

become host to a student population less homogeneous than those of the past. In a recent study of the nontraditional and traditional students, Clark (1989) found traditional age college students were interested in a college education for what it could do for them in the future and nontraditional students for what it could do for them now. These nontraditional students had distinct backgrounds, motivations, needs, and experiences that they had brought with them into the classroom. Nontraditional students also were more set in their ways, less open to innovative ideas, and felt they had more to lose when learning questioned their past beliefs.

Characteristics

Identifying and defining characteristics of nontraditional students were also part of the goals of many investigations. Characteristics distinguishing traditional students from nontraditional students have been blurred as increasing numbers of young students commute, cohabit, and interrupt their education. Magarell (1981) found age to be the main determinant. He chose to use age 25, while Bean and Metzner (1985) and O'Connor and Aasheim (1985) supported ages 23 or 24, as well as, 25. Hence, age was most often used as one of the critical factors to classify nontraditional students. Also, several studies classified part-time rather than full-time students as nontraditional students, based upon twelve semester credit hours as being

full-time. In an extensive review of the literature, Hughes (1983) found three main characteristics were indicative of nontraditional students: multiple commitments, commuting to campus, and past on-the-job learning experiences. Holtzclaw (1980) supported the need for practical and tangible learning experiences. In fact, Boshier (1981) stated most nontraditional students engaged in educational programs for six main reasons: (1) escape and stimulation, (2) social contact, (3) social welfare, (4) professional advancement, (5) external expectations, and (6) cognitive interest.

In comparison, traditional students did not have the number of responsibilities and commitments as nontraditional students. Attending college was the main responsibility of most traditional students. The college campus has been the primary focus for the traditional student and formal learning at the institution has offered the means to achieve their goals. However, many nontraditional students often had multiple commitments with course work being only one of them. For example, family and job responsibilities sometimes impeded educational goals of the nontraditional student.

Traditional students generally have preferred a more pedagogical style of learning, such as lecturing, while the nontraditional students have appeared evenly divided between pedagogical, and andragogical styles, such as simulation, role-play, and other hands-on experiences. Kelly (1986) found the traditional student to be more dependent on the

teacher for what was to be learned; the nontraditional student was more autonomous. Additionally, the immediate application of knowledge for the nontraditional student was more important than it was to the traditional student.

Kelly (1986) found several similarities did exist between the two groups. All students brought into the classroom emotions, personalities, motives, needs, and expectations. For example, both types of students were motivated as they gained love and respect of the class because of the importance of peer acceptance. Through observations and interviews, it was also found that class interaction was a vital part of learning for nontraditional students. Correspondingly, many students found that others also possessed the same needs, exhibited similar personalities, and expected the same from the class. These similarities would then help them begin a support system of other nontraditional students, thus increasing their likelihood of finishing their goals and staying in school. Throughout the literature, the nontraditional students were more goal oriented with unique expectations and needs.

Motivating the Nontraditional Student

Edricksen (1974), in his book Motivation for Learning, demonstrated that each student brought to the classroom, distinct resources to help transform instruction into meaningful knowledge. For example, immediate application of

new knowledge was deemed more worthwhile for nontraditional students.

Wlodkowski (1982) found nontraditional students brought with them several reasons for seeking learning experiences. Moreover, these external factors affected how the student was motivated within the classroom. For example, life-changing events such as divorce, job changes, death of a loved-one, and marriage were found to alter the lives of many students. These experiences sent many adults back to school, or even enrolling for the first time. He also found that the more life changing events that occurred, the more intense the drive for the student to learn became. Surprisingly, the learning experience was sought equally before, during, and after the transition. Zemke and Zemke (1981) established increasing one's self-esteem to be a strong motivator for seeking education during these life transitions.

As an overview, Cashin (1979) offered seven major points concerning how to better motivate the nontraditional student in the classroom: (1) begin where the students are, (2) establish the relevance of the material, (3) involve the student in the choice of what will be studied, where possible, (4) arrange learning tasks at levels appropriate to the abilities of your students, (5) reward the students, (6) consider the advantage of the discovery method, and (7) use teacher and student interaction.

While the seven major points may also apply to traditional students, they were most appropriate for the nontraditional students. Zemke and Zemke (1981) described an enthusiastic and motivated teacher who presented an interesting lesson in a psychologically and physically comfortable environment as a great motivator. For example, handing out the syllabus at the beginning of the course, discussing course objectives, and emphasizing student expectations would readily let students know from the beginning what was expected, thus creating a psychologically comfortable environment. As a result, discussing students' needs, motivations, and expectations at the onset of the course provided much feedback for the teacher. Then, with proper feedback, the teacher could better direct the course design to suit each unique class.

While teacher directed objectives were necessary, objectives that seemed unattainable for the nontraditional students presented frustration and stress from the very beginning! Success breeds success and meeting each challenge with some degree of success for the nontraditional student enhanced motivation. As the nontraditional student was successful in reaching an objective, it was important to supply feedback as quickly as possible.

A study by Boshier (1981) found rewarding the student, even in the form of positive comments, as encouraging and motivating. Similarly, Edricksen (1974) proclaimed applying behavioral theory through positive reinforcement as a strong

motivator. For example, life experiences of the nontraditional student offered vast resources within the classroom. So, for the traditional student that has yet to encounter these experiences, this exposure was quite meaningful. Encouraging student interaction with real life examples enhanced textbook theory for both groups, thus increasing motivation.

Additionally, in the study by Kelly (1986) nontraditional students preferred the structured and traditional methods of learning. Thus, lengthy lectures, prolonged sitting, and a lack of applicable practice opportunities should be minimized. Traditional students were more receptive to the innovative teaching methods such as peer teaching and teaching games.

Wlodkowski (1985) expressed the prevailing attitude of many students as finishers rather than learners. Their intentions were merely to finish the endeavor as simply and easily as possible. In the examples, this attitude did little to enhance motivation and learning for the student. Therefore, if this thinking was redirected to be viewed as a learning process rather than an end in itself, both the teacher and nontraditional student would triumph. The self determination for learning also was found to enhance intrinsic motivation.

The professor's role has not been an easy one. The primary focus in the classroom should not be merely to retain students, but to present and facilitate a richer

learning experience through an interesting course content. Yet how this can effectively be accomplished tests the teaching effectiveness of even the best teachers.

Methods of Instruction

Teaching the diverse groups of traditional and nontraditional students in the classroom concerned many in higher education. Holtzclaw (1980) stated the dilemma of "teaching to the middle" or "teaching on an individualized basis was ever present" (p. 356). As a result, what worked in one situation might not work in a like situation due to class composition. As course objectives were presented, expectations discussed, and student characteristics identified, each class was found unique in the research. However, general methods and guidelines were recognized so appropriateness to the situation could be applied.

Consequently, the concept of andragogy and pedagogy was found to assist the teacher in deciding the method of instruction. Kelly (1986) indicated that nontraditional students were evenly divided between lecturing (pedagogy) and simulation (andragogy). Therefore, if the class majority was composed of nontraditional students, the andragogical approach would supply a stimulating learning experience. Brain-storming, role-playing, and case problems were just a few instances discussed by Kelly (1986). She believed a blend of both concepts could be utilized through lecturing followed by simulation.

Encouraging active participation was implemented to reveal the rich experiences of the students. As a result, group discussions were consistently used, along with field trips, case studies, and simulations. Coordinating the learning objective with a realistic situation enabled all students to absorb the knowledge in their own ways.

Choosing the lecture method of teaching did merit consideration since some course content lends itself to the presentation of facts. Yet, this traditional method was enriched through research papers, interview projects, computers, internships, and/or any method utilizing critical thinking skills. Kelly, (1986) recommended the focus should be to teach the students how to learn.

In addition, Wlodkowski (1982) stipulated, if lecturing was appropriate, an expressive voice and the use of interesting examples would aid the delivery. Visual aids, as a supplement, added a fuller dimension and then, the auditory and visual learners were satisfied. Another form of lecture, the demonstration, made the theory come to life. Also, being adequately prepared was necessary. Still, the teacher should not use the lecture and demonstration methods with the idea expressed by Wlodkowski (1982) as a mean to finish the allotted course time. Merely observing lengthy lectures was not shown to be a preference of nontraditional students, either.

Along these lines, Zemke and Zemke (1981) stated structured or unstructured discussions could be used by the

teacher as long as the students did the majority of the talking. Asking open-ended questions often primed the discussion that followed. Interjecting unnecessary comments and coercing the discussion with the teacher's view, stifled participation.

All experts consulted agreed that unnecessary negative criticism should not be the topic of conversation when the student sought advisement. As a result, positive comments on identifying the problem and correcting them produced better results. The motivation of the student was adversely affected if the student did not receive appropriate feedback and positive reinforcement from the teacher.

Technology and the Nontraditional Student

A variety of telecommunication delivery modes were to have revolutionized continuing education in the 1970s. They did not. Why should the personal computer be different?

The difference is that most of our major organizations now employ personal computers to accomplish their work, especially in the business and scientific realms. Learning about personal computers and learning about software are currently among America's preeminent learning projects, involving millions of adults.

Technological applications are constantly changing the American workplace. As a result, employers want a new kind of worker--one with a broad set of basic workplace skills including creative thinking, problem solving, reading,

communication, and computer. President Bill Clinton (1989) wrote while still Governor of Arkansas, "We cannot compete if our current work force is under-educated and under-skilled. We must not only continue our public school reforms, but we must effectively re-educate our work force now before it is too late" (p. 15).

The adoption of the personal computer by society has been the result of its remarkable utility and low cost in doing the work of our information-rich culture. This utility will continue to increase, due to ongoing technological enhancements. Consider the following in computer technology. Computing power has been increasing at an even higher rate than the 25 percent per year predicted in 1984 in "Trends in Computing." The cost of computing power has been rapidly decreasing beating predictions made by "Trends in Computing" in 1984. It was predicted one million dollars worth of computing power in 1970 would cost only ten thousand dollars. In 1993 even more and faster computing power is available for less than five thousand dollars. Personal computers are readily available (Ageloff, Zimmerman, & Zimmerman, 1993). The computer will continue to shrink in size, increase in computing power, and decrease in cost (Ageloff et al., 1993). Technological changes have brought a wide diversity of opportunities in the delivery of educational programs. As telephone companies replace obsolete copper cable with fiber optics, an even greater array of interactive video and computing technologies will

become available to augment educational programs (Smith, 1991).

Given the growing international research interest in virtual reality, the evolution of human-computer interface technology will dramatically change in the next decade (Vizard, 1990). Pioneering work in interactive cinema was conducted in the MIT Media Lab in the 1980s (Brand, 1987). Graduate students used laser disc and computer technology to make possible the design of one's own personal movie from sound and image databases. Today's students are working on similar concepts, but within a virtual environment. In the future, we may see virtual performance entertainment centers in which audience members will be able to create their own personal experiences using the threads of data originated by the computer (Krueger, 1991; Laurel, 1991).

Gayle (1990) predicted these trends in education and work: (1) Six million jobs in the next decade will be available in the executive, professional, and technical ranks; (2) Computer competence will approach 100 percent in urban areas by the year 2000; (3) Work at home will increase as office automation becomes more portable and powerful; (4) The impact of high technology industries on the work place will continue to be underestimated; (5) Community colleges and technical institutes will become major factors in technological growth; (6) Technology, coupled with flexible home, work, and learning environments, will provide more productive time for effective schooling and training; and

(7) Lifelong learning will generate birth-to-death curriculum and delivery systems of education.

Edmondson (1988) recommended education programs should ally themselves more closely with employers who have been teaching basic technical skills. He deemed employers have enough applicants for their openings, but many are functionally illiterate and lack the interpersonal and technical skills for the jobs available. For example, in Saginaw, Michigan, the Dow Chemical Company, has contracted with the local school system to provide special training in English, math, science, and computers. Moreover, some of the other corporations making multimillion dollar commitments to basic technical training were Prudential, Coca-Cola, Pizza Hut, Metropolitan Life, and Xerox.

Edmondson's study found adult education has become increasingly responsive to the needs of business. He credited 35- to 54-year-olds as comprising the most rapidly growing group seeking higher adult education. His research led him to conclude three reasons for this trend: (1) increased mechanization of the workplace leading to increased need for training; (2) increased numbers of workers needing employment due to the baby boom flood of the labor force between 1969 and 1984; and (3) increased numbers of women entering the work force, with most needing training as they began a career after children.

Background of Baby Boomers

In the future, college education will not be just a preparation for the practical aspects of life or for job advancement, but will be used to make life richer, especially in the second half. Lifted by the coming Age Wave, a new leisure life style focused on a flexible balance of recreation, play, and continued intellectual growth and learning will emerge (Dychtwald & Flower, 1989, p. 148).

Historically, at each stage of their lives, the needs and desires of the baby boomers have become the dominant concerns of American businesses, educators, and the rest of the American culture. It has been proven that this generation of elders is more savvy, powerful, and politically forceful in the marketplace than any previous generation. Today, the leading edge of the boomer generation has now passed forty. Therefore, as the boomers approach and surpass fifty, their numbers will combine with two great demographic changes—a senior boom and birth dearth—to produce a historic shift in the concern, structure, and style of America.

As a result, this impending historic shift has begun to create a nation that is increasingly concerned with the needs and desires of its middle-aged and older citizens. In the past, when the boomers hit school age in the early to mid-1950s, many schools went into double sessions. By 1957 more elementary schools were built in America than in years before or after. As the boomers became teenagers, a bulge of increased enrollment appeared throughout the school system.

Ultimately, in the early 1970s as the members of the baby boom began to reach age 25, the size of the 25- to 34-year-old group began to grow rapidly and has been expanding ever since. Likewise, Spencer (1984) has found the 45- to 64-year-old group has begun to increase as the first legion of baby boomers has reached the gates of middle-age. Each succeeding decade will first increase, as the baby boom cohort enters, and then decline sharply, as it passes on and is replaced by the smaller birth cohorts of the 1970s. No age group will return to the size it attained when it hosted the baby boomers.

When the baby boomers went to college, the number of college students rose from 3.2 million in 1965 to 9 million in 1975 (Dychtwald and Flower, 1989). As a result, 743 colleges were opened to absorb the glut. Then, the great decline in enrollment predicted because of the aging of the baby boom generation never materialized, observed Norman Brandt, a statistician with the Department of Education (Bradley, 1988). Brandt then added, "Almost everybody underestimated the participation of the baby boomers who are the older students in continuing education"(p. A1).

Presently, as the boomers grow older, they will continue to dominate the culture. In short, when thousands of baby boomers across the country share an opinion, read a book, buy a product, or return to college, that is important. Thus, observation tells us that the traditional framework of life is coming unglued. The old paradigm; when

youth was the time for learning, adulthood was the time for non-stop working while raising a family, and old-age was the time for retirement; is rapidly changing. Moreover, if we can anticipate the movement of the baby boomer's life-span migration, we can see the future and be ready as college educators.

Research completed by Edmondson (1988) predicted:

The next 15 years are likely to be even better for adult education than the last 15 years. Here's why: 70 percent of the adult education market are aged 25 to 54. These are the career-building years, when people are striving to get ahead. Sixty percent of the market are baby boomers, though baby boomers are just 42 percent of the total adult population. It's likely that baby boomers will continue to be the best customers of adult education for years to come because the better educated people are, the more willing they are to sign up for even more schooling (p. 15).

Finally, Dychtwald and Flower (1989) pointed out that the boomers have always influenced adjacent generations, those following and those preceding them. As a consequence, many people who are now in their late twenties and early fifties, although not boomers themselves, have always felt comfortable sharing the values and lifestyle adventures of the boomers.

When the boomers have proposed a new definition of something, such as the right time to receive a college education, it definitely has been worth studying. It is the contention of this study that most nontraditional students are either baby boomers or directly influenced by their new definitions; one of these new definitions is continuing

adult education. Therefore, returning to school at 30, 53, or 67 is no longer an oddity, but a common practice.

Summary

During the second half of the twentieth century, higher education has been dealing with two distinct groups of students, traditional and nontraditional. The growth in older student enrollment began after World War II when the GI Bill brought nontraditional students to the campuses. This trend then continued as the baby boomers decided they wanted continuing education.

In the past almost everybody underestimated the baby boomers and their continuing educational demands, leaving higher educational programs unprepared for the older students. Today, we can see the future and be ready as college educators if we can anticipate the needs of the baby boomers. As the nontraditional students continue to grow in numbers, the recognition of their needs and characteristics has become more important. In fact, meeting the needs of both traditional and nontraditional students in the classroom setting has been providing richer learning experiences and increasing motivational levels for both groups.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The primary purpose of this study was to look at rural undergraduate higher education through the perceptions of the nontraditional student. Viewing education through the eyes of the student demanded a research methodology that departed from traditional research approaches common to educational study.

Qualitative methods and procedures were chosen to support the rationale and assumptions underlying this study and the fact that nontraditional students played an important reciprocal role in the research process. Qualitative research methods used included ethnographic techniques of deliberation. The multi-modal features of ethnography encompassed interviews, autobiographies, thick descriptions, data gathering through a nontraditional student research team, and ongoing participant observations. These features provided a variety of techniques for interpreting and describing nontraditional students' perceptions of rural undergraduate higher education pragmatically and experientially.

As validation of the chosen methodology, Pereira (1984) defined qualitative deliberation as a process for formulating, discussing, and interpreting a variety of

perceptions, observations, problems, and solutions. In addition, this qualitative research study focused on gaining insight and understanding of nontraditional students' perceptions and on verifying the interpretations of these thoughts through triangulation and member validation. This chapter will also examine the history of qualitative methods, research setting, phases, participants, data analysis, procedures, and limitations.

Setting

The setting used in this study was a small rural Oklahoma university's off-campus location. This higher educational program was launched in the Fall of 1989 with 252 students enrolled in 1,008 class hours. During Spring 1992, the program included more than 700 students, an increase of 178 percent since 1989. In addition, the students were enrolled in 3,572 hours, a 254 percent increase from 1989's 1008 hours. The number of classes had been increased to accommodate the interest in the program. For example, during the program's first semester, 25 classes were offered, but during the Spring of 1992 semester, 22 classes were closed because they were at capacity and more than 100 people were on the waiting lists for classes.

The director attributed the growth largely to the fact that more people were finding out about the higher education center. The people wanted public higher education, affordable, and accessible. They have never had public

higher education offered before in this area of the country and there are only a handful of places in Oklahoma, not counting the other three higher education centers, that offer a degree program at night. The director asserted, "We're offering the students what they want. In reality, the program is responding to the needs of the students. We are here for the students. That's the only reason for our existence."

The director observed the higher education program catered to nontraditional students--students who worked at least part-time, if not full-time; were an average of 37-years-old; and had families, responsibilities, and other obligations.

The director also quoted the cost of classes offered through the higher education program as reasonable--\$65.25 per credit hour for graduate level courses (less for 1000-2000 and 3000-4000 level courses). Of the \$65.25, \$59 goes to the institution that teaches the course, while the remaining \$6.25, goes to the State Board of Regents.

The higher education program operated in 1992 on a budget of a little more than \$700,000. About \$239,000 of the total were provided by the state regents. The local Economic Development Authority provided about \$57,000 for program enhancement, equipment, furniture, library materials, lease of instructional office facilities, and services paid to the private university for library use and classroom space until the new building has been built. The

rest of the budget, about \$400,000, came from tuition and fees and was reimbursed directly to the institutions that provided the courses.

Today, the higher education program and the local city commission have purchased land and are in the process of building a new facility. "I don't know how much more we can grow until we can get into our own building," the director said. But she believed the higher education program has a bright future. The director has planned to expand the evening program, and provide students regular off campus advising by professors.

Research Design

This qualitative study used descriptive research methods and procedures to collect data. Descriptive research was designed to determine and to report the way things were perceived. It involved collecting data to answer questions concerning the status of subjects, settings, and situations. Borg (1963) and Gay (1981) stated many different types of descriptive studies have been generally categorized in terms of how data was collected (self-reports and observation).

Self-reports included: (1) surveys, (2) interviews, (3) questionnaires, and (4) autobiographies. Observations included: (1) nonparticipant observations (naturalistic observation, simulation observation, case studies, and

content analysis); (2) participant observations; and (3) ethnography.

Borg (1963) reported those descriptive studies provided the researcher with a starting point. Likewise, the data yielded through the descriptive approaches used in this study were starting points for deliberations about nontraditional students.

Four Phases of Research

Phase I took place during Fall, 1991. The researcher, a beginning adjunct professor in the business department of a small rural university was given the opportunity to teach a class of nontraditional students. The business management class was to be taught at the off-site higher education location.

This off-site higher educational program was located in a rural community and leased classrooms from a private university. The researcher arrived with expectations of nontraditional students being more responsible, experienced, focused, and motivated than other students. These first expectations differed from the actual experiences of the researcher. The nontraditional students seemed to have divided responsibilities, more experience only in certain areas, multi-focused, and at times more dedicated or burned-out than motivated. These differences influenced the researcher to conduct this study.

To build the knowledge base of nontraditional students' perceptions of this higher educational environment, the researcher conducted participant observations and interviews of nontraditional students during phase I. Observations were made of 15 different classes at the higher education center and 20 nontraditional student interviews were conducted. Participant observations and interviews were the primary methods used to gather data during this phase. A summary and analysis of this information was used in my proposal and included with the information gathered during the other phases.

Phase II was conducted during Spring, 1992. The researcher again was given the opportunity to teach for the same program, but this time the class was Introduction to Marketing. At this time a student research team was formed using the 15 students in the class. The nontraditional students agreed to do marketing research projects as a group, and individually, using nontraditional students as the target market.

Initially, time was spent writing personal autobiographies about thoughts regarding college, technology, professors, goals, problems, and business courses. To protect confidentiality, personal information was removed from the autobiographies prior to analysis.

Second, a literature search for published information on nontraditional students was completed to compare original data with past research. Using the autobiographies and

information from the library, the student research team discussed the findings. Most of the group discussions were recorded by tape recorder and later transcribed. In conjunction with the data gathering, the researcher kept a journal of group research, discussions, and observations. Furthermore, the student researchers wrote individual journals that were completed in the same manner.

Next, after much discussion the student research team developed the interview questionnaires. The original questionnaires were too long and were finally pared down to half the original length. Then, the student research team interviewed three to six other nontraditional undergraduate college students each. However, even after cutting the length of the questionnaires in half, the average interview lasted between 45 to 60 minutes. In all, 76 interviews were completed by the student research team and 76 interviews were completed by the researcher. A summary of the student research team's and the researcher's information may be found in Appendix B.

The last step of phase II was to analyze the published information and original data collected as a group. As an individual assignment, the student researchers each wrote their three part reports. The reports contained personal experiences, review of the literature and interviews, and conclusions. The student research team's conclusions were combined in the student research team summary found at the end of chapter IV.

Phase III was completed during the Summer and Fall of 1992. The researcher along with the help of students at Medford High School transcribed all journals, student papers, interviews, autobiographies, and recordings to the qualitative computer database ALPHA. The database consisted of 1034 pages of raw data.

The data was then coded. First open coding of the data took place. During the open coding step 234 codes were developed breaking down the data into many pieces of phenomenon. Open coding was accomplished by arranging data into categories according to an identifying code. Next, during axial coding, the categories were combined, reassembled, and renamed into six main categories. Under the six main categories there were 45 codes identified (Appendix C). Connections were then identified between the codes through the use of the coding paradigm. The schema of this step may also be seen in Appendix C. The final step of the coding process was the selective coding. This step identified the central category and arranged the six main categories into the coding paradigm for nontraditional students.

Phase IV was completed during Spring, 1993. This was the phase dedicated to writing, defending, and validating the study. Triangulation of the study was accomplished by comparing the pilot study, the researcher's data, the student research team's data, and the review of the literature. The research was also validated by the reading

of the study by two nontraditional students, one a member of the student research team and the other a recent nontraditional student graduate that had not been a member of the team.

Participants

In this qualitative research study, both the researcher and the student research team were involved in the research process. According to Rogers (1984) the notion of reciprocity made the research findings significant and meaningful.

Student Research Team

Fifteen students comprised the original student research team. Thirteen of the 15 were initially identified as nontraditional students using age 23 as a criterion. However, the students later decided that they were all nontraditional students because they attended classes off campus, maintained full work loads, and/or had an interruption in their education. Three of the 15 students completed interviews, journals, and group discussions, but never completed the final summary of their findings. Ultimately, twelve students completed the research project. The final student research team was made up of four males and eight females with their ages ranging from 19- to 49-years.

Researcher

Major areas of study for the researcher have been business, education, and technology with degrees including a Bachelor of Science, Master of Science in Business Administration, and Master of Science in Education. In addition, technology has been emphasized during both the business degree and the studies for the doctorate.

The researcher assumed the role of participant observer throughout this research procedure. A participant observer was described by Gay (1981) as an observer who actually becomes a part of the situation to be observed, but records everything that happens either as it happens, or as soon afterwards as possible. Everything was recorded in as accurate and descriptive terms as possible.

The researchers responsibilities as participant observer included: (1) collecting autobiographies, recording observations, and interviewing individual students; (2) listening to, recording, and sometimes facilitating group discussions; (3) listening to and recording students' deliberations; (4) summarizing and interpreting the data; and (5) making recommendations based upon the research findings.

Procedure

This study was conducted during the 1992 school year using Crowson's procedural principles of qualitative

research. Crowson (1987) outlined four steps of qualitative research as:

1. Search for Understanding. The researcher, from the native's point of view, must first make observations of actions, events, and perspectives.
2. Norm of Research Proximity. The researcher must examine events and actions as they happen. This can either be as a participant observer or as a leader.
3. Emphasis on Analytic Induction. Rather than being directed by preconceived hypotheses, the researcher in a qualitative study is directed by the research setting and the natives. The knowledge then gained from observed data is used to form "tentative working hypotheses."
4. The researcher must suspend preconceptions and state biases clearly in order to avoid the stigma of value bias. All research has been "value-laden," whether it has been qualitative or quantitative (p. 9).

In summary, various methods were utilized in collection of data, which included autobiographies, surveys, formal and informal interviews, participant observations, leadership observations, group participation and discussion, activities, and documentation. Documentation included newsletters, memoranda, educational records, literature, and State Department of Education reports. The researcher and the student researchers maintained records of events during the duration of this study. As a result, this record included, but was not limited to, journals, field notes, recorded and transcribed interviews, surveys, and group discussion notes and recordings.

Triangulation was one of the most important tools used to confirm qualitative research. Triangulation referred to the application of differing research methods to confirm the

research findings. In other words, it was researching and comparing this study from different points of view. The findings of the student research team, the researcher, and the review of the literature were used for triangulation during this study to insure both confirmation and trustworthiness.

To insure validity and trustworthiness two readers were asked to read the study. The readers were both nontraditional students. One was a female member of the research team and one was a recent nontraditional male student graduate that had not participated on the research team.

The insight obtained from student deliberations served three basic functions in this research project. First, the information brought an extended view of the problems that existed for nontraditional students. Second, student deliberation provided a native's interpretation of the research. Third, the student deliberation and research offered a plan of action that identified and offered solutions to an existing problem, a problem that has an effect on successful interpersonal relationships between nontraditional students and higher education.

Data Analysis

Initially, one must understand that data analysis was an ongoing process throughout the research project. The researcher and the student researchers have been in the

process of analysis, both actively and contemplatively throughout the investigation looking for "similarities and differences that appeared" (Agar, 1986, p. 20).

Similarities were actions, thoughts, and beliefs that kept reappearing and differences were actions or events that did not make sense or expectations that were not met. Themes were developed by the researcher through a process of coding analysis (open, axial, and selective coding). Next, by reading and rereading the coded findings and sorting and resorting them the researcher could begin to discover how the findings came together around the core category. In this study our core category was identified through analysis. Once the researcher began to understand how the categories went together an organizing schema emerged (Appendix C). Finally, if the recognition and resolution of the breakdown or similarities occurred, then understanding and coherence was achieved identifying a theme grounded by the data (Agar, 1986, p. 20).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that as the codings of data emerged for the researcher they should be grouped according to category. During this time, the researcher moved from emic to etic perspectives in order to focus on interpretations of cultural events and actions. Next, confirmation was assured by an audit trail containing all written, computer, and oral documentation collected during the study. In order to emphasize trustworthiness Lincoln and Guba defined:

1. Credibility-prolonged field work and observation
2. Transferability-provision of data base through thick description
3. Dependability-findings grounded in terms of data, also known as grounded theory (p.38)

The results of this study's credibility, transferability, and dependability were demonstrated through prolonged field work and observation, a large data base full of thick descriptions, and findings grounded in the data. The trustworthiness and validity of this study was insured through the student research team and the two readers. This team and the readers were made up of nontraditional students and used for validation and triangulation with thick descriptions confirming the information.

Limitations

This study was limited by the fact that only one setting during two different higher education classes was observed and utilized. In addition, 30 participant observations by the researcher were conducted, 15 in phase I and 15 in phase II, while the researcher also had the responsibility of teaching.

However, Cusick (1973) stated, "...what is reasonable behavior for one human being in a given situation will, at least in some ways, be reasonable behavior for others given the same situation" (p. 5). He further stipulated the data resulting from participant observation methods were important and transferable to other situations.

Summary

The goal of this study was to create a detailed description of the rural nontraditional student when faced with college, technology, business classes, and campus life. Qualitative research methods were employed in this study. The study examined the higher educational process and the effects of the process on the nontraditional students.

Ethnographic interviews, participant observations, student researchers, and related literatures were sources used to gather data for this study. Data analysis was accomplished through a grounded theory method using the coding paradigm. The coding paradigm included axial coding to develop the categories and selected coding to identify the central category. The student research team and the readers were used for triangulation of the trustworthiness and confirmation of the research.

CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS

Chapter IV introduces the data collected and analyzed during this study by the researcher and the research team. The purpose in this chapter was to present the data in such a way that the "informants speak for themselves" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 21).

Identifying the codings (open, axial, and selective) of nontraditional students are of primary importance and will be analyzed in this chapter. This identification will provide a better understanding of rural nontraditional students. Finally, the student research team's summary will be presented.

Perceptions of the Researcher

In the past educators have disregarded the students' point of view and have failed to apply an important resource of understanding. This research examined the culture of higher education from the nontraditional students' point of view. Recording, coding, and analyzing the interviews, autobiographies, journals, and field notes about the nontraditional students were also completed. Finally, conclusions and recommendations were summarized.

The study took a close look at nontraditional students who found themselves confronting the culture of a college campus in order to obtain a college education while maintaining many other responsibilities. Many of these students were in the process of social realignment through a college education. They were also learning to cope with becoming a part of the culture in which they had enrolled.

Universities have been recruiting older students because of the declining birth rates of the 1960s and 1970s, which have resulted in smaller freshman classes. Since, colleges and universities have done such an exemplary sales job, these older students are now the students to understand and please.

Perceptions of Student Researchers

The following findings were written by members of the student research team. These narratives describe their own personal experience as a nontraditional student and/or the personal experience of one of the nontraditional students interviewed. These perceptions were written by the students and edited by the researcher only when needed for spelling.

Carol

Carol was a 44-year-old married female. She was the mother of two traditional college students—a 20-year-old male and a 18-year-old female. She graduated from high school in 1965. Carol was a traditional college student in

1965-1966 at American University, Washington D.C. and in 1966-1967 at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK. Then, after marriage and children, she returned in 1982-1983 for a year of college at a private university in the community. In 1991, Carol returned to college in the higher education program with plans to graduate in 1994.

In an interview with Carol, when asked about college, she stated, "College is great when I am motivated to learn because of an enthusiastic professor who enjoys teaching and wants to make a difference in their students' lives. It is not so great when the professor is tired or has lost their spunk and allows the classroom to become a 'no-win' work place."

When asked about business subjects Carol stated, "They lack hands-on experience. Role playing is a great teaching tool seldom used in college classrooms. I am primarily learning theory and how to memorize." In regards to technology, Carol suggested, "I know about how to use word processing, spreadsheets, data bases, and merging them together; however I need to know what else is available in today's world. How what I do know can be used in all phases of business. Computers need to be integrated into all classes."

Carol was a high achiever that always participated in class discussions. She was achievement motivated, wrote well, and was a strong influence as a member of the research team. Carol's entire narrative is representative of those

on the research team and has been selected to be included here in it's entirety.

Carol's Class Perceptions. Little did I know that enrolling in a college marketing class would result in my being directly involved in obtaining primary data for a marketing research study. Now, five interviews later and much time spent in tabulating the results of these interviews with my classmates, I am prepared to discuss my personal interviews, and the effects they had on me and on my interviewees.

I interviewed five individuals who were currently taking a college class or who had recently been enrolled in higher education. Each was a personal friend or co-worker.

Initially I felt the interviews would be of little concern to those answering the questions and that, especially with the length of the survey questionnaire, I would have to "work hard" to keep their attention and prevent their impatience. I was mistaken. Each took the entire interview, which usually lasted at least an hour, very seriously. My impressions of the whole concept of higher education for the older student were positive having conducted these five interviews.

Perceptions of one of Carol's Interviews-More Than Special Earrings. It was so close to supper time. I felt like an intruder as I rang her doorbell. After all, she was one of the busiest women I knew, and I could tell she was merely accommodating me by allowing this interview. Her children bustled to the glass storm door, hopping and dancing as they waved from behind the difficult latch. They were always glad to see me.

In what seemed a casual manner, she appeared from behind her noisy children. She always dressed as if a fashion designer had selected her clothing for the day. Once again her earrings perfectly matched the outfit she was wearing. I never could decide if she was attractive because of her dress or her personality. Probably both, I thought.

Tonight, as I expected, she was tired. Teaching preschoolers all day and coming home to two young ones of her own was a lot, not to mention everything else she was involved with.

She assured me her husband would again be late for supper and I was not a bother. She was, as usual, a gracious hostess, offering me something to drink before we began. I noticed she seemed to relax as we settled into the chairs at her kitchen table. Her children approached, and she explained we would be busy for a while. They were good to mind her, I thought, as they hurried away.

I felt I was taking advantage of her precious time. Why had I asked her for this interview? Probably because she was my husband's cousin, and I felt so close to her. After all, she had only recently taken her first college course and was not the typical interviewee. All the others I had talked with were well into their courses and had definitely decided to accept the challenge of obtaining a college diploma.

I really did not even know very much about why she took the computer course several weeks ago. I had decided she did it rather on a whim, certainly not to launch into other classes. Was I just using her and her time?

She was very attentive as I began the interview. I noticed how much serious thought she gave to each answer. It was interesting how much more relaxed she was than I. As I asked the first page of questions, I began to soften my approach a little. She really wants to answer these questions, I thought. I had been trying to hurry through hoping to keep it brief. I knew the interview could last a while, but as we talked she actually seemed to be enjoying it.

During the second page of questions, I found I was able to relax a little myself. It occurred to me that this might even be good for both of us. There were times she gave so much consideration to her answers that I was not at all sure what to record. She was reflective about high school, her recent course, and her education in general. We began taking time to discuss various aspects of her views on education and her individual abilities.

All at once it occurred to me I was seeing a side of her I had never known was there. She was most concerned with the whole topic of higher education. We were thinking through the possibilities of her return to the classroom for a degree, instead of just a few classes. She had

several questions of me: Was it hard to get back into the study habits? How much time did it really take? Did I feel it was worth it? I was surprised and pleased to see her thinking along these lines.

I have always been, and continue to be, an advocate for any person who wants to advance themselves to whatever level they are able, at whatever age they are able to do so. I just had not expected to be experiencing all of this during this particular interview. Perhaps her recent classroom experience had been a launching pad for her. If so, how timely this interview was. My mind was active as we shared, as I tried to keep moving on with the interview questions, and as we explored what the future might hold for her. Of course, she was expressing her hesitations and the very real roadblocks that might be before her. But with her young age and her enthusiastic, never-say-die attitude, I could not help but encourage her.

This was so unlike any of my other interviews. They each had been enlightening, but what was happening here was the unfolding of a new thought for her--one that was enticing, one that evoked an eagerness, one that allowed me to encourage and support her. I felt this young mother moving beyond herself and reaching toward places previously unthought of. She was growing through this interview.

Now as I think back on it, I was discovering a little deeper person than the one who wore special jewelry and well-appointed clothing. She had opened up more than I had known her to before. We had shared a special time together.

Her children reappeared as we parted. They were telling me "bye" in the wonderful ways kids do. I found myself saying how pleased I was I had chosen her to interview. I meant it. She quietly said how much she appreciated my asking her, and her face told me it had been meaningful to her as well. As I climbed in my car, a feeling of contentment fell over me. I thought about her life and how full it was, much as mine had been when my family was young. Yet, the future for this dear person holds so much, far beyond designer clothes and fashionable earrings!

Donna

Donna was a court reporter and the mother of three children aged eighteen, fourteen, and ten. She was a single parent with a self-diagnosed type "A" personality. During our interview Donna shared that she liked college and felt challenged by taking college courses. She stated, "I feel fulfilled even though I may feel stressed due to my job, family responsibilities, and college." She added, "Several friends and family members suggested I take this semester off. I finished up on my Associates Degree last semester." At first she stated that she was agreeable, but the more she thought about it the more she leaned toward taking classes. "I honestly did not know what to do with my time at night. I felt unchallenged and bored."

When asked how she felt about the marketing class and becoming a member of the research team she stated, "I am excited about this class, but bummed out by the work necessary. Hopefully, I can contribute and also get lots out of here. I am trying to find my niche in the world and maybe this is it. It bothers me that I do not know what I want to be when I grow up and I am already 37."

When asked if there was anything that made her feel bad at college she stated, " Being humiliated by a teacher, not being treated like an adult, and being tested on unknown and unexplained material are my main ones that come to mind."

Donna was a hard worker on the research team and participated a great deal during the discussions. She was a

good student always striving for the A's, but sometimes falling a little short when she would let the stress get the best of her. Donna enrolled in college after trying to help her daughter with Algebra and feeling frustrated at being unsuccessful. Donna's narrative may be found in Appendix D.

Eric

Eric was a 30-year-old male with a seven-month-old daughter. He started working full-time after one semester of college. He was a departmental supervisor for a large oil company. When asked about how he felt about college he answered, "I feel college is an excellent opportunity to increase or further my education. Being a nontraditional student it is at times very hard to attend classes, work on a responsible job, and still have a family life, all at the same time. There are times in the evening that studying for school is the last thing I feel like doing, especially with a new seven-month-old daughter." He added, "I know college courses prepare you for certain aspects or jobs that are in corporations, but so does experience. I have gone much farther in my company than a lot of people with college degrees and at times have trouble convincing myself that I need a degree. The only thing that keeps me going is realizing that even though I have a very good job I am still in a corner if I ever lost it."

Eric was a quick-witted person with a ready smile for everyone. He offered much to the team. In class, he had

the ability to set the curve, but usually made a high B or a low A. He relied heavily on his common sense and life experiences and less on the book to get him through the class. His narrative is found in Appendix D.

Sheila

Sheila was a 38-year-old married female with two children, one 20 and the other 15, both males. Sheila has worked eleven years as a bookkeeper and secretary. She received her GED in 1973.

During the interview she stated, "When classes begin, I always feel excited. Ready to learn what the professor has ready to teach us. By mid-term, I am usually starting to get so busy that college begins to become somewhat of a burden. But I am always excited for finals to be over and receive my grades, getting a good grade always seems to wipe out the despair felt by the pressure." During the interview Sheila added, "Attending college gives me an out from the everyday hum drum of life, I enjoy learning. Whether I ever use my formal education to seek another job, I do not know. I have set my goals and I just continue to work towards them. Money is important, but getting an education is more important to me. I also am trying to set standards for my children. If they see me working, hopefully they will see the importance and also learn to enjoy learning."

Sheila was very self-motivated and a leader during the research team project. She never was happy with just an A,

but was always striving for perfection. She added a lot to the research team and took on many of the responsibilities of tabulation and the final report. Sheila's narrative is found in Appendix D.

Penny

Penny was a 24-year-old recently married female. She was married to an air force pilot. She stated, "The hardest part about college has been having to take my courses at night. Schools should offer more variety for evening students. A definite must is to have advisors and admissions open in the evenings. A college must be customer service oriented to meet each individual student's need."

Penny was a good student and worked hard as a research team member, however she was constantly being pulled by conflicts with job and family demands. She gave up a management position and her college to get married and move here with her husband. She was having difficulty not resenting these losses during this class. Penny's narrative is found in Appendix D.

Lee

Lee was a 40-year-old male married with a 8-year-old son. He stated, "College makes me feel like I am accomplishing something. College and higher education are a joy for me, I am learning more about the overall scope of business. After being out of school so long, it is good to

begin to understand how things work in this new technological and economic times."

Lee was a strong member of the research team that worked along with Sheila to tabulate the 76 interviews conducted by the students. He had a quick mind and a ready smile. He ended our interview with, "Who knows? I might go for my masters after this." Lee's entire narrative is presented here as it is representative of how he viewed nontraditional students as a traditional student and then how it felt to be a nontraditional student almost thirty years later.

Lee's Perceptions about Higher Education.

When I first started college it was in 1963 and the Viet Nam war was in full swing. We heard about it every evening on the news and hoped every day that we would not have to report to the draft board. This is where I was first exposed to older students (now we call them nontraditional). They were Viet Nam vets that were on the GI Bill. Most of them were not much older than me, but they had a much different outlook on classes and getting an education than I did. I especially remember two of them. One was tall and the other one was about my height and stocky. Usually every afternoon you would find them at the student union shooting snooker or pool and beating about everyone they played. At the time, I thought it was their life experiences that made these guys more dedicated to their classes. Now I see that it was even more than that. It was also their desire to accomplish something. Most of the time, when I had one of these guys in one of my classes, he was very outgoing and willing to help those of us that needed it. He was also the one with the highest test score and quickest with the answers to questions in class. Sometimes I would wonder "Why are these guys knocking themselves out for a grade." A "C" is passing; why try for an "A?" It took me several years to discover the answer to this question.

It was only after I quit school, got married, and worked at several jobs that I realized I

needed an education to do more than just work as a laborer from now on. With that in mind I went back to school in 1976 and received my Associates degree in 1977. This time when I went back I was one of those guys that made the good grades, but I noticed I was not alone. There were more of the older students on campus than I realized when I was there before. Not only was it guys using the GI Bill, but it was older people in general. Many of them were women that were going back to school too. Some of these women were empty nesters. Their children were gone and either there was nothing for them to do around the house or they wanted to go to work and found that they had obsolete skills to get the job they wanted.

After I graduated I did find a better job and a chance to use my new found education. This was my first so called "professional" job; it was working for a local private university as a computer programmer. I think the reason I got the job was the fact that I lived close by and that I would work so cheaply. Even though that job only lasted about a year it gave me a taste of what I could be.

As time progressed I felt the need to try to attain my bachelors degree, but there was the problem of either commuting a very long distance to class or paying a very large sum per credit hour at a private university. One day a friend mentioned to me that there was a higher education program in a local community that was geared to students like us, nontraditional students. I really was not sure that I wanted to go, but some of the classes that were being offered I could use toward my bachelors degree so I decided to give it a try.

That was three years ago and there have been many changes since then. The program has expanded and so have I. What started out to be one class to see if I would enjoy it has become an attainable goal of a bachelor's degree. Through this small amount of schooling within these past years I have learned much about life in the business world and what we are all made of. It takes determination and a strong will to attain a degree in night school, but when I see the people around me taking the classes they are taking and making the grades they are making I realize that there is a desire within all these students to achieve their goal. I just hope that I can be one of them that attains that goal.

Vic

Vic was a 31-year-old married male with four small children ranging in ages from eight to two. In my interview with Vic he stated, "After high school I could go anywhere and earn a living in manual labor--now if you do not have an education you cannot get a job. The days of getting ahead on hard work alone are over--right or wrong, a college diploma is the best road to a secure future. A college diploma today is like a high school diploma was when I graduated from high school." He added, "Technology has invaded every job and without the proper training you are left behind."

Vic felt he was too busy to be a valuable team member. However, he was one of the members that seemed to have some true insight into how the nontraditional students really felt. In class he participated and sometimes would spur the other team members on when they would bog down in an overload of information. Vic's narrative may be found in Appendix D.

Kelli

Kelli was a 22-year-old female that got married during the semester. During the interview she reflected about how it felt to be a traditional student versus a nontraditional student. She stated, "While I was attending college full-time and just working part-time, school came first and my work came second. It is really harder for me, now, to keep

my mind on my schooling because I feel obligated to put 100 percent into my work and my school comes second. Especially just going to school in night classes, it does not feel as much like college. I feel removed from my college friends, campus life, and I have to push myself harder to study for my night classes. I have too many conflicts, now."

Kelli was a young team member that was able to give her insight into being a traditional student and a nontraditional student. Kelli's narrative is found in Appendix D.

Priscilla

Priscilla was a 22-year-old unmarried female. When we first began the marketing assignment she thought she was a traditional student, but as time went on she felt she was a nontraditional student. She has worked primarily as a secretary since the age of seventeen and was presently a full-time secretary for the higher education office. She felt the part-time status and full-time priority of a job put her into the nontraditional category.

Priscilla also offered the team insight into both groups, the traditional and the nontraditional students. When asked about college during our interview she stated, "College is a great opportunity to gain knowledge in our areas of interest. Unfortunately, it is expensive and very time consuming. It is very difficult to work full-time and be successful in the college courses, as well. I constantly

feel conflict about which one I owe my first loyalty too." She added, "Without my job I cannot go to college, and without college I cannot do as good a job." Priscilla's narrative is found in Appendix D.

Sandra

Sandra was a 49-year-old female married with a boy 24 and a girl 18. During our interview Sandra shared, "College is a necessity to compete in the work force today. Unfortunately, it was a luxury for females at the time I graduated from high school in Nashville, TN, class of 1960. I am paying for this lack of education, today, in reduced earnings and by a feeling of inferiority because of this lack of formal training." She added, "If only I was younger, if only they had believed as they do today, back in 1960, if only..." Sandra's narrative is located in Appendix D.

The Student Research Team Summary

The following summary was edited from reports turned in by the student research team. Sandra Bridges, Jeannie Bridgforth, Victor Brown, Penny Crook, Kelli Doll, Sheila Green, Carol Hoberecht, Eric Kitchell, Bryan Luginbill, Donna Marlowe, Lee Scott, and Priscilla Tucker were the twelve members of the research team responsible for the following summary.

In the early months of 1992, the student research team participated in a study of nontraditional students to determine how higher education could market services to that growing segment of the population. With the vast amount of information compiled in the study, the student research team has attempted to explore some of the complexities of the nontraditional students' circumstances, characteristics, and needs.

The research group consisted of nontraditional students, and the interviews were compiled of questions about areas in which members of the group have personally expressed interest. The surveys were questions developed by the research team through brainstorming, consolidation, and elimination. A total of 76 interviews were conducted among people with differing lifestyles, age groups, and financial status. The students interviewed were nontraditional students presently enrolled in, or recently graduated from, college.

Fifty-seven of the students interviewed responded positively when asked how they felt about college, using terms such as "challenging, rewarding, love it, and interesting." Even with these positive attitudes, however, many used the adjectives, "scary, difficult, and confused." Most of the problems stemmed from the lack of advisors for many of the students in the evening hours, leading to confusion about how to muddle through the maze of

requirements towards obtaining a degree and taking the correct subjects required for their majors.

What were the motivating factors involved in spurring these individuals into the role of nontraditional student? Most of those interviewed stated that their motivation was to obtain a better, higher paying, more prestigious job. Many have also undertaken this step as a method of self-improvement whether or not they achieve more earning power in their careers, expressing the belief that their lives will be enriched by the knowledge and experience, and that they are fulfilling a dream which they have, until now, not been able to bring about. However, it is important to note that in this study the majority of the respondents 47 will be around the age of 30 years of age at the completion of their studies, while 29 will be over 40-years-of-age.

Very few studies or opinions contradicted the belief that nontraditional students miss out on most of the extra curricular activities and other social aspects of traditional college life. For example, night students stated they missed out on valuable extracurricular activities--valuable chats over coffee with classmates and professors--the comradery of groups that can lead to a lifetime of connections. However, we found that the majority of nontraditional students interviewed would not participate in a nontraditional student organization even if it were offered due to the lack of time and other more pressing responsibilities.

Respondents said the disadvantages of being a nontraditional student were: less time and less access; and they said the advantages were: maturity, life experience, knowing why I am in college, and financial assistance with school from employers.

Those interviewed seemed as a whole to be choosing classes primarily because of a personal goal of obtaining a degree or because of pertinence to work. However, interest was second primary reason for course selection for many interviewed.

Although these nontraditional students noticed a marked difference in themselves as compared to the traditional students, for the most part, they felt accepted by them in the classroom settings. They expressed the opinions that they felt their maturity contributed towards making them better students as a whole than the traditional students, as they had learned discipline and were more aware of the value of an education. Some expressed opinions that many traditional students were as yet unsure of their goals, and several felt that a great many traditional students were "party animals." Fifty-six of those polled felt their priorities would be significantly different in a more traditional college setting, and said they would have more time to study and less responsibility. Many of those polled said they felt isolated and envious of the traditional students' youth, time, and freedom. But most also felt that the traditional students treated them just fine.

A positive note for nontraditional students was that most of those interviewed felt they tested as well as or better than traditional students and actually felt challenged by tests and grades. Most indicated discomfort with other types of grading.

Among the older students, the greatest concern seemed to be the deficiencies they suffered in the basics such as math, English, and science, as high school requirements have changed considerably over the years. Most felt the universities could help these deficiencies with tutoring. Responses on what nontraditional students could do to eliminate them were: study harder, tutoring, student-teacher communication, and extra work. Most of those polled felt these deficiencies did not seem to reflect on the end grades if the student worked hard to make-up for these deficiencies.

As part of the study, the research group also gathered information from a variety of published sources. Sexton (1976) addressed an issue which some of the students interviewed and many of the interviewers would like to see implemented and that was the subject of receiving credit for life experiences. Sexton stated:

You, as an adult, have probably acquired knowledge equivalent to some college-level learning through life experiences. Some of this knowledge probably can be rewarded with college credit. Varying procedures are designated by colleges to allow adult students to demonstrate the nature and the extent of their life learning. Typically, the student prepares a portfolio for each academic area or subject in which life-learning credit is sought (p. 81).

By implementing a life-learning program, higher education programs would greatly reduce the time element which was crucial to those older students or those who must obtain a degree in order to proceed with their career advancements.

A majority of those students who were fulfilling multiple roles of career, spouse, and married or single parent, found the typical classroom schedules were difficult. They expressed the desire for more variety in evening scheduling, having courses offered more often than once every year or two, and the need for some noon, early morning, or Saturday classes.

Having taken the initial step towards higher education, women, in particular, appeared to experience more difficulties in bringing ambitions to reality for a variety of reasons such as lack of child care at the school sites, lack of class flexibility to accommodate multiple responsibilities, and lack of school and fellow student support to make up for lack of family support. Hoponski stated:

The dropout rate of female students in higher education is a feature not only of discriminatory school practices, but also of the tasks and obligations that are involved for many women in child rearing. Social policies directed at reducing the dropout of female college students must also, therefore, be directed at providing greater relief from these home tasks and making it easier for women to pursue college studies at home or during more flexibly scheduled hours (p. 83).

Although a majority of those interviewed stated that a change in technology has occurred in their work, most did

not feel comfortable with the changes because they did not grow up with computers as had most of the traditional students they were competing against. They expressed the need to have technology incorporated into all of their classes with more access to computers for various lab work time.

Financial Aid was absolutely crucial to some of those interviewed, with some stating that college would not be possible were it not for some sort of aid. However, this could also be true for a vast number of traditional students. The difference here seemed to be that a traditional student did not have the responsibility of a family adding to the financial burden.

An important element in this study was the willingness of many of the employers of the nontraditional students to offer support in the quest for further education. Just under a quarter of those interviewed stated that their employer assisted financially. However, 46 of the 76 stated that their employers stood behind their going back to school, with the main areas of assistance being in flexibility of work schedules.

Location of the higher education institution was more vital to the nontraditional students who had spouse, children, jobs, and financial obligations tying them to their community. The higher education program has solved this dilemma for many students who cannot afford the tuition at a private college in the area, yet, cannot commute to

areas in the state where state supported colleges are located. The majority of nontraditional students interviewed stated they would not be willing to move in order to continue their education 47 of 76. When asked how important location of classes were to the school and the programs offered, 43 answered "more important" while thirteen said "equally important." Fifty-six said they would be willing to travel only an hour or less for their college classes. Clearly, location was more important by quite a margin to the busy nontraditional student than to the typically less tied down traditional student.

Coding Analysis

An open coding analysis was completed on all the data collected. The data included: thirty participant observations, journals, field notes, and 76 interview questionnaires completed by the researcher; and 76 interview questionnaires, 15 autobiographies, 12 summaries, and a group summary completed by the research team. Two hundred and thirty-four codes were developed breaking down 1034 pages of data into many pieces of phenomenon. Open coding was accomplished by arranging data into categories according to an identifying code.

Next, during axial coding, the categories were combined, reassembled, and renamed into six main categories. The six main categories and the 45 codes were identified as:

Desire for a college degree

improve self-esteem
 better jobs
 higher income
 finish a past goal
 correct a past mistake
 increase control of life's
 crises
 recapture youth
 understand technology

Barriers

divided responsibilities
 lack mobility
 fear of failure
 dread competing against
 younger students
 shortage of money
 insufficient time
 technology deficiencies
 old values
 difficult to change

Isolation

older age
 more life experiences
 remote location of classes
 commute
 feel different
 more responsibilities
 fear and envy of
 traditional students
 out of touch with current
 trends
 curve busters

Acculturation

shared goals
 shared sense of identity
 comradery
 empathy
 NTS support group

Student paradigm

past school experiences
 feeling the teacher knows
 best
 fear of tests
 recapturing youth
 try to reduce workload
 argue test questions and
 answers

College degree

self-esteem/pride
 job status
 skill
 employability
 security
 knowledge
 respect
 money

FIGURE I: Six Categories

Connections were then identified between the codes through the use of the coding paradigm. The causal condition of social realignment was identified as desire for a college degree. The context from within which nontraditional students attend college was identified as isolation. The intervening conditions were student paradigms and barriers. The strategy used by nontraditional students to obtain a college degree was identified as acculturation. The outcome of the nontraditional students schema was coded as college degree/self-actualization. The schema of these steps may be seen in Appendix C.

Triangulation was one of the most important tools used to confirm the qualitative research findings. Triangulation referred to the application of differing research methods to confirm the results. In other words, it was researching and comparing this study from different points of view. The findings of the student research team, the researcher, and the review of the literature were used for triangulation during this study to insure validity.

To insure trustworthiness two readers were asked to read this study. The readers were both nontraditional students. One was a member of the research team and one was a recent nontraditional student graduate that had not participated on the research team.

The final step of the coding process was the selective coding. This step identified the central category and

arranged the six main categories into the coding paradigm for nontraditional students.

Theme Development

Desire for a College Degree

Desire for a college degree was a reoccurring theme throughout the research. The desire for this goal was the catalyst that sent the adults to college as nontraditional students seeking a college degree. The desire for a college degree was seen as an answer to: improve self-esteem, obtain better jobs, earn higher income, finish a past goal, correct a past mistake, increase control of life's crises, recapture youth, and understand technology.

Mary was an example of a nontraditional student trying to control some of life's crises. Mary was a 35-year-old nursing student. She agreed to do the interview, but felt that she had nothing to offer to a research project. She agreed to do the interview by saying, "Well, why not? I guess my story will tell everyone what not to do." Her narrative is located in Appendix D.

Many nontraditional students hoped that college would help them cope with the technical revolution they were facing in their jobs. Today, adults are returning to college because in many kinds of work, things change so quickly. "There's a technical revolution going on," said Richard Hall, director of school relations at the University of Oklahoma in Norman, Oklahoma. "Their skills are becoming

obsolete and they have to tool up for a new age" (Washington Staff, 1991, pp. A1-2).

Lester, one nontraditional business student interviewed, agreed with Mr. Hall and stated that if it were not for lacking some technical classes for work, he never would have tackled going back to college (Appendix D).

A growing percentage of the nontraditional students are women. One out of every five women in college was 35 or older in 1989. Fifteen years before only one in eight was that age (Washington Staff, 1991, pp. A1-2). Many women found themselves in need of more income especially after mid-life changes such as divorces, or death of a spouse.

Amber started college as a traditional student, but lacked a year and a half until graduation, when she quit to get married. Consequently she lost credit for some of her hours because she exceeded time limitations. At the time of the interview she was divorced and still going to college (Appendix D).

The researcher found both men and women trying to update their job skills by completing that sought-after college degree. Is the college degree the accomplishment that they think it will be? Is this just a good sales job by the public relations department of the universities? Is the public being financially exploited? Peter, a former nontraditional student, thought not. He was proud of his degree and all the hard work it stood for. He felt that the

degree helped him obtain the job he has now, as well as, his good feelings about himself (Appendix D).

Isolation

Isolation was a theme that the nontraditional students referred to many times. The nontraditional student felt isolated from the traditional undergraduate and the rest of the university culture. During the day-time classes, the older students sometimes felt like they were the curve busters, out of touch with some of the things the younger students would talk about. Several nontraditional students stated, "I feel more comfortable taking night classes that mainly have older students." Several other nontraditional students referred to feeling like the traditional students' parents with statements like, "I feel like a parent to some of the students. My teenagers are about the same age as many of these college students."

In addition, the older students enrolled in evening classes felt initial isolation from both the younger students and the rest of the campus, but this lessened as they were in the majority at night. It also helped having other fellow older students with whom they were able to form a support system.

Student Paradigm

The theme student paradigm encompassed all past school experiences. The nontraditional students acted like

students. These older students were more focused, responsible, and practical. But no matter how many responsibilities they handled in their everyday jobs when they walked into the classroom they began to act like most other students. For example, they worried about the results of their tests, tried to talk teachers out of some of the required work, and cheered if they got a day off due to snow or other circumstances. Surprisingly, these same students were bankers, managers, or business owners during the day, but when they were in the classroom, they were students. Feeling the teacher knows best, fearing tests, questioning their own ability, arguing test questions and answers, and trying to talk the professor into reducing the workload were all categories identified under the theme of student paradigm.

Barriers

Barriers were also referred to by most nontraditional students as something that they had to overcome. Some examples of barriers were divided responsibilities, lack of mobility, fear of failure, dread of competing against younger students, shortage of money, lack of time, technology deficiencies, and difficulty of changing old values. These barriers are referred to over and over again in the narratives found in Appendix D.

Acculturation

Acculturation was defined as a process of intercultural borrowing between diverse peoples resulting in new and blended patterns or modification in a primitive culture resulting from contact with an advance society. In this study nontraditional students developed new and blended patterns or modification from contact with traditional students and higher education. Acculturation referred to the shared goals, comradery, empathy, shared sense of identity, and support groups that the nontraditional student developed. As the development of acculturation increased so did the likelihood of the nontraditional student completing their college degree. It was also found that the older the nontraditional student was at the time of enrollment the longer the acculturation period seemed to take.

College Degree

Nontraditional students are invading the college campuses by the thousands in search of a college degree. The college degree represents the hope of opportunity for these nontraditional students. Some are looking for lost youth, others, self-esteem, and still others, better jobs, more pay and technological knowledge. Indeed, these are the ones that dream of new social realignment and upward mobility through the evolving peaceful invasion of our college campuses.

Jerry was a typical example of a nontraditional student with many responsibilities and achievements in his career, before returning to school for that sought after degree. The narrative found in Appendix D was recorded in the nontraditional student's own words as given to the researcher when asked to tell about how he came to be a nontraditional student and what it meant to him. He had just graduated the semester before this interview and gave some good insight as to what a college degree meant to him.

Sometimes, educators do not understand the students in their classes because they do not know who they are, what they want out of a class, or where they want to use that knowledge. Narratives of nontraditional students' experiences were typical of other nontraditional students and important for educators to understand.

Summary

In summary, this study has shown that nontraditional students have been impacting the campuses in rural Oklahoma. The student research team and the researcher would like to note that the interviews conducted on nontraditional students, with the exception of one, were on students attending universities in the state of Oklahoma. Seventy-five percent of them were attending the higher educational off-campus location at the present time. The student research team and the researcher each conducted 76

interviews. The summary of these interviews were included in Appendix B.

The nontraditional students wanted to be in college. They were serious about their commitment to the classroom and its many requirements. These students were willing to accept the minority status they must face in classrooms even though it meant discomfort, fear, and embarrassment for them. The nontraditional students were willing to endure the challenges of rigorous study and the lack of time as well as limited financial resources because they believed the sacrifice would pay for itself in the long run. The pot of gold at the end of the rainbow varied from self-esteem and love of learning to better pay and job promotions. The nontraditional students' one hesitancy was time away from their family and work. As a result, they were unwilling or unable to travel too far for their higher education.

The higher education program has been less than ideal as various community locations have been utilized for classes. The prediction of the student research team was that when a permanent location has been built to house the higher education program the nontraditional students will have a great asset geared to their specific needs. Perhaps someday, the older student with all the advantages they bring to the classroom will not even have to consider being part of a minority with programs like the higher education program.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

The data collected in this study presents a picture of the rural higher educational process from the perspectives of nontraditional students. This chapter presents the summary with recommendations and conclusions along with the grounded theory and themes generated by the research design and data analysis.

Summary of the Study

Purpose

Given the continuous growth of the nontraditional student population in higher education, the primary purpose of this study was to identify the perceptions and specific needs of rural, nontraditional, undergraduate college students when challenged with college, technology, business classes, and campus life.

Research Participants

This study was conducted in a small, rural, Oklahoma university, off-campus location. Both the researcher and a nontraditional student research team were involved in the research process. The researcher, in the role of

participant observer, served as the primary data gatherer. Participants in this research included nontraditional undergraduate students either presently enrolled in higher education or graduated during the preceding six months.

A nontraditional student was characterized in this study as being over the age of 23. In addition, marriage, interrupted education, and/or parenthood placed a students in the nontraditional category even if they were under the age of 23. Most of these students worked a full-time job, commuted to classes, attended college part-time, and were multi-focused. Any combination of these traits placed a student into the category of nontraditional student.

Data Collection

Several qualitative research methods were used to collect the data. These methods included participant observation, open-ended interviews, literature review, and document collection.

Participant observation was the primary tool used in the data collection process during the first semester of the study. The researcher observed many nontraditional students in various classes. As the research progressed into the second semester, the researcher explained the purpose to a group of nontraditional marketing students, and the student research team was formed.

Through the use of open-ended interviews, the researcher collected the perceptions of nontraditional

students in their own words. In addition, the student research team developed a questionnaire which they used to conduct their own interviews of nontraditional students. These interviews provided rich descriptions of personal experiences, comparisons of backgrounds, discussions of the barriers faced, and interpretations of those experiences. The inconsistencies encountered as a part of the interview method were controlled by replication of data gathered and the use of the student research team. The interviews were recorded from September 1991 through Summer 1992.

The collection of documents provided an additional dimension to the data base. They included demographic and economic data, research publications, notes from oral interviews with directors of various programs, and published literature.

Data Analysis

The data analysis occurred through grounded theory analytic procedures. After the completion of an extensive coding process, the data were conceptually analyzed and then organized into categories. A "paradigm model" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 99) was utilized to develop the categories. The identified concepts were linked to the categories as (1) causal conditions which give rise to a phenomenon, (2) the context within which the phenomenon occurs, (3) the strategies employed to bring the phenomenon about, (4) the

intervening conditions which effect the phenomenon, and (5) the consequences of the phenomena.

Summary of the Findings

The findings of this study include the perceived conditions which govern education as seen by nontraditional students and the culture of higher education as well as the ways in which those conditions impact the learning and educational process. The qualitative study revealed social realignment, an educational evolution to be the central phenomenon grounded in the perceptions of nontraditional students. Social realignment was defined as the commitment to the pursuit of a new life while still maintaining portions of an older existence. Thus, it may be likened to standing with one foot in the future and the other in the past. The nontraditional students usually had a full-time job and did not live on campus, so they were restricted in the availability of time and schools.

The findings of the study were: (1) Desire for a college degree was the causal condition which gave rise to the phenomenon, Social Realignment...an Educational Evolution. (2) The central phenomenon, Social Realignment...an Educational Evolution, occurred within the context of nontraditional student isolation. (3) The student paradigm served as an intervening condition in the educational process of the nontraditional students. (4) The nontraditional students' barriers served as an intervening

condition in the educational process. (5) Acculturation was the strategy employed by the nontraditional students that brought about the phenomenon, Social Realignment...an Educational Evolution. (6) The students were willing to give up much during their pursuit of the diploma and as long as the schema was adhered to the outcome was a college degree.

Desire for a College Degree

The nontraditional students were in search of the ultimate goal that was described by some as a college degree and by others as the improved life-style that a college degree would bring. The literature review and research data indicated that a multitude of nontraditional students have been invading the college campuses in search of a college degree which represents the hope for opportunity and the fulfillment of their own dreams. Some were looking for lost youth; while others were looking for self-esteem, and still others, better jobs, more pay and technological knowledge.

In the last ten years this nation's higher education institutions have undergone drastic changes in demographics. More nontraditional students have been going back to college to either update their existing degree or gain a degree once sought but never completed; or they are trying their hand at higher education for the first time. There were many factors contributing to this increase in older nontraditional students. First, due to economic and life

changing conditions in this country, many people were faced with career changes due to forces beyond their control such as a lay off, bankruptcy, divorce, or death of a family member.

Second, many nontraditional students have concluded that the nation's economic future lies in technological advancement rather than secondary economic activity like manufacturing or processing. As a result, they have chosen to migrate from blue collar to white collar careers by the means of obtaining a college degree.

Finally, many nontraditional students have decided that they need to finish something they started in the past or wanted to start but never did. They were the ones that were going to college for self-actualization. They had made mistakes in the past which they wanted to correct. Striving for the college degree, or social realignment, was the causal condition which gave rise to the phenomenon, Social Realignment...an Educational Evolution.

Nontraditional Student Isolation

The central phenomenon, Social Realignment...an Educational Evolution, occurred in a climate of isolation. The nontraditional students felt isolated from the traditional undergraduate students and the rest of the university culture. In the daytime classes, the older students sometimes felt as if they were the curve busters, and out of touch with some of the things the young

students talked about. Some nontraditional students said, "I feel more comfortable taking night classes that mainly have older students. I feel like a parent to some of the students."

In addition, the older students in evening classes felt isolation from both the younger students and the rest of the campus, but this feeling lessened since they were in the majority at night. Having other older students with whom they were able to form a support system also helped.

The climate of isolation in which the nontraditional students found themselves was produced by older age, more life experiences, remote location of classes, different goals, more responsibilities, fear, lack of understanding on the part of instructors, and envy of youth.

Student Paradigm

The student paradigm served as an intervening condition in the educational process of the nontraditional student. The conditions for the student paradigm were created when the nontraditional students were children going through the public school system. During these formative years the teacher was in charge and they were merely students. Adult student entering the college classroom carry with them the old student paradigm.

The newly enrolled nontraditional students, once admitted, were ready to experience the reality of the educational opportunity. These older students were more

focused, responsible, and practical. However, no matter how high the level of responsibilities they handled in their everyday jobs, when they walked into the classroom they began to act like most other students. For example, they worried about the results of their tests, tried to talk teachers out of some of the required work, yelled "yes" when they made a good grade, and cheered if they would get a day off due to snow or other circumstances. Surprisingly, these same students were bankers, managers, or business owners during the day, but when they were in the classroom, they acted like other high-achieving students.

Nontraditional Student Barriers

Several nontraditional student barriers served as an intervening condition in the educational process. Nontraditional students were faced with many barriers such as divided responsibilities, lack of mobility, fear of failure, dread of competing against younger students, shortage of money, insufficient time, and technology deficiencies. They were locked into their job and family responsibilities so most were not free to live near the college of their choice, nor did they have much time left during each day to pursue their college education. Therefore, many nontraditional students stated they selected a college because of its location. Many had difficulty changing old values that had been a part of their lives for a long time.

Acculturation

Acculturation was the strategy employed by the nontraditional students to realize their educational goals. Shared goals, backgrounds, and comradery were important components leading to the nontraditional students' desire for acculturation through the higher education culture. Acculturation was defined as a process of intercultural borrowing between diverse people resulting in new and blended patterns.

In spite of sharing an anxiety about losing their will power, most who enrolled believed they would eventually succeed if they just kept taking three to six more hours each semester. Their rationale was that if they stopped they might never resume their studies. Then all this sacrifice would be wasted. The nontraditional students provided support for each other, but their support was based on empathy because they found themselves in similar circumstances.

The data suggested that empathy for one another provided the glue for their cohesiveness. In addition, this shared sense of identity made it easier for them to stay in college and to allow mentors or professors to assist them in assimilating into the college scene. In turn, this cohesiveness also caused the nontraditional students to provide support for others in similar circumstances, which helped to strengthen their own determination.

Perhaps the greatest challenge to the nontraditional college student was taking the first step toward educational opportunity. Since many had not previously experienced success in the educational setting and may not have had the support of friends and family, it was difficult to take that first step into the unknown. Also, some had a GED instead of a high school diploma, and many had difficulty writing papers and answering essay questions. Therefore, to these nontraditional students, the prospect of attending college was at first overwhelming and created a great deal of anxiety. But most overcame these fears with the help of shared determination and cohesiveness.

College Degree-The Outcome

The nontraditional students perceived the college diploma to be the ultimate goal. The diploma promised increased self-esteem, job status, skill, employability, security, and knowledge. In this environment of pursuing the college degree, the role of education took on many dimensions of domination of the nontraditional students' life. The nontraditional students were willing to give up much during their pursuit of the diploma, but as long as this paradigm existed the outcome was a college degree/self actualization.

Social Realignment.....an Educational Evolution: A Theory
of Higher Education and the Nontraditional Student

The nontraditional student is herein described as a person above the age of 23 in pursuit of a college diploma and a better life. Social realignment is defined as the commitment to the pursuit of a new life while still maintaining portions of an older existence.

These older students demand full value for their tuition, compete fiercely for top grades, feel inadequately equipped to deal with the technology with which they are confronted, and believe that a college education will help them succeed. Juggling family, job, and the mid-term exam, they face challenges not encountered by most of their younger classmates. This leads to feelings of isolation.

Nontraditional students want convenience. They want to be able to register for classes from their homes, take classes in the evenings or on weekends, and have access to payment plans that fit their needs. Usually, nontraditional students also share determination, cohesiveness, and many typical student behaviors.

Because nontraditional students are demanding certain conveniences and concessions from the universities, universities and professors will be better able to recruit and work with these students when they better understand their cultural traits.

understand the way nontraditional students perceive their educational experience.

Recommendations

Turbulent economic times often reflect an increase in the average age of students seeking higher education. Many nontraditional students are going to college to gain a degree in hopes of a better standard of living and that "Promised Land." The educational choices nontraditional students are faced with often have serious economic implications for their families and, indeed, the nation.

Technology and Business Classes

More hands-on simulations such as role playing and practice sets need to be integrated into most business lessons plans. In addition, computers need to be integrated into all phases of the business classes. The students want to actually experience what it will be like in the office using the technology and knowledge they are studying.

Funding

Many nontraditional students have trouble bridging the gap between tuition costs and costs associated with day to day living. Dependents are asked to make sacrifices while the student attends school for four years or more. In

addition, these are not constant costs which tend to remain unchanged; on the contrary, these costs tend to go through a ratchet effect which gradually increase over time. However, with planning and assistance, nontraditional students can attain their goals with what some would call "relative ease." The family, the individual, the learning institution, and sometimes even the community must have a plan in place to help the students achieve their goals. There are many plans, programs, and sources to help nontraditional students acquire the resources needed to overcome problems associated with financing higher education and maintaining a household at the same time.

Due to the increased responsibilities of nontraditional college students, many are held back citing economic difficulties. However, there are many low cost, or even better yet, free programs offered to nontraditional students attempting to support themselves and/or their families while simultaneously continuing their education. These free programs include such programs as food stamps, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), and Low Income Heating Assistance Program (LIHEAP).

Grants and Loans. Nontraditional students often have to deal with problems balancing school, family, and work schedules. Traditionally, low income families qualify for financial aid to attend college. Most of this financial aid falls under the category of grants and/or loans. The aid is

very helpful. However, rarely does it ever cover enough costs to eliminate the need for the nontraditional student to seek employment. Many students try working more and borrowing less from lending institutions to help pay for their education, and in the process, reduce their post-graduation liabilities. This effort is not only the conservative trend, but also reflects the students' economic attitudes of the future.

Housing. Housing creates many problems for nontraditional students, especially students with children. The Department of Housing and Urban Development has housing for lower income families and student families who qualify. The rent schedule is based upon income and family size. Depending on the area and economy, many times the rent schedule does not vary drastically from the private sector in relation to comparative quality. Single nontraditional students have the option of choosing resident hall accommodations as a source for affordable room and board. However, at many higher education institutions, this type of housing is not available to married couples or couples with children. One concept the nontraditional student should be familiar with is that everything is relative. Many times cheaper housing will not be as energy efficient as other slightly higher priced housing. Therefore, although some money is saved by cheaper rent it is offset by higher utility costs.

Child Care. Affordable child care is a major problem for all families with children. And with the increasing number of nontraditional student families, this problem tends to draw focus from other groups in society. Currently low income student families can send their children to state licensed child care institutions and the state will cover the cost. Generally, qualification for other programs offered by the state directly relates to qualification under this program. Recently some other attempts at affordable child care are being made. At Cameron University in Lawton, Oklahoma, an appeal has been made to discontinue the college's football program which averages a hundred thousand dollar deficit every year. Many students and faculty want to convert the funds from football to child care programs for all students and faculty at the university. Texas Women's University, appealing to the adult student, has an unusual program providing housing and services for families; however, most of these programs are composed of single mothers with children (Green, 1992).

Flexible Scheduling

Flexible scheduling by employers proves highly effective for the nontraditional student. With many of these nontraditional students being employed and having children, flexible scheduling of courses and support services as well as degree programs adjusted to fit the

individuals are all crucial aspects of catering to the nontraditional students.

Acculturation

Even in the most favorable conditions, the nontraditional student must contend with barriers. The nontraditional student has direct physical control over housing, financial assistance, family relations, and work. However, there is yet another hurdle, integration into the campus climate. Although the numbers of nontraditional students are increasing, more frequently these students often feel marginal, conspicuous, and isolated from the mainstream population. In addition, this isolated feeling is increased when the nontraditional student only attends night and off-campus classes.

The campus climate reflects the culture, habits, practices, and policies that make up campus life. The "comfort factor" plays a big part in how well the nontraditional student is integrated into the system, or conversely, how alienated he or she may feel. Students, as well as other members of the campus community, who feel unwelcome are less likely to remain in the situation. If they do remain in that type of situation, certainly they are less likely to succeed. The culture and climate of an institution such as a college often persist without being expressed and with no effect being made to implement change. In addition, changing the campus climate can be a very

elusive task and certainly one that is almost impossible to the individual. However, with a collective effort, the need for drastic change can be met in positive and relatively painless ways.

One of the most impressive efforts aimed at integrating nontraditional students into active roles in the campus community is an organization called the Older Wiser Learning Students (OWLS) found on the campus of Northeastern Oklahoma A & M Junior College in Miami, Oklahoma.

The evolution of this organization is a collective effort among businesses in the private sector, faculty and staff of Northeastern Oklahoma A & M, the Department of Human Services of Ottawa County, and the nontraditional students themselves. Before the group started there was concern among area businesses about the retooling of their employees as well as unsatisfactory skill levels among their pool of applicants.

Campus tours are now conducted for prospective students and the OWLS organization provides a secondary effort of support to some of these nontraditional students. Since its inception four years ago, the OWLS organization has evolved into a network of about 20 active, on campus, members and another 175 members in the surrounding area. What started as a grass roots movement has evolved into a highly independent entity made up of several supporting elements. Many of the members of this group are enrolled in various programs such as AFDC and Food Stamps, and they are able to

help offset other costs by helping families work together, car pool, and share babysitting chores.

Members of the OWLS also contribute to one another's scholastic achievement. They offer tutoring services within the group and foster unity and support within its structure which is the primary basis in any support group setting. The college plays an integral part in the organization's success and integration.

The Ottawa County Department of Human Services has also played an active role in the group's success. The Department of Human Services has received a grant in the past to organize a centralized program to help the nontraditional students find suitable and flexible employment while attending college and thereby reduce the amount borrowed to finance their education. With the ever-changing needs a community is faced with, this is but one example of just how nontraditional students, businesses, and higher education can work together to benefit the entire region. There are no losers in this situation.

Research

This study examined the view nontraditional students have of the educational process. Further research and investigation of the theory analyzed in this study are needed for a more thorough understanding of the interaction of nontraditional students and higher education.

The study was limited to Oklahoma undergraduate nontraditional students in a rural setting with the majority of them majoring in business. All but one of the nontraditional student participants in this study were enrolled in higher education in Oklahoma with the majority attending night school part-time at an off-site higher education center. Findings derived from this research could be compared to other settings to determine if a similar central theory would emerge.

In addition, the conditions of the paradigm model should be examined to heighten understanding of their interaction individually and as a whole. It might also be beneficial to examine each of the conditions to determine their importance, dominance, and influence.

Conclusions

Several major conclusions have evolved from this study. First, the review of the literature on nontraditional students' perceptions of higher education and the insight about higher education as received from both the researcher and the research team make it apparent that students and their perceptions are valuable resources when assessing and changing an educational system. Firsthand knowledge of nontraditional students' perceptions, interpretations, and descriptions of the internal life of the nontraditional student brings about a broader understanding of the current

state of the educational system and increases the chances of making meaningful decisions and necessary changes.

Second, qualitative research approaches such as participate observations, interviews, student research teams, coding, grounded theory analysis, autobiographies, and deliberations offer operable alternatives to the traditional statistical and scientific methods usually used by quantitative researchers. These alternatives enable researchers and educators to study an educational system from within its culture and interact with the students inside ever changing conditions. Data gathered in this manner yield information which is generalizable and yet specifically meaningful and significant in similar situations.

If higher education is to understand what is happening in its classrooms, and if the purpose of studying the classrooms is to provide a basis for improvement without blame, and if educators are to improve the quality of student learning, then the research for the reform must start as close as possible to the scene of the action (Cross, 1987). Research practices such as those in this study provide a means to these ends.

Summary

The research focused on the perceived conditions which guide the educational process and the interpretations of how these conditions impact on nontraditional students. Society

is always faced with change. Change is inevitable. The successes or failures of individuals and communities often determines the attitudes and goals set for the future. Nontraditional students are but a small part of the entire community; however, their numbers are increasing and society should be available to meet the demands set by these individuals. Collectively, schools, businesses, and individuals can overcome the barriers associated with higher education which confront nontraditional students.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The questions below were developed to guide the interview process by the student research team. They were used in an open-ended method and do not constitute an interview script that had to be strictly adhered to. These were the questions used by the research team and the researcher to conduct the 76 interviews each.

1. How do you feel about college?
2. How do you feel about your instructors?
3. How do you feel about you advisor/administration?
4. Are you able to use the facilities you pay for?
5. If you could change the college system to accommodate your needs what would you change?
6. Do you feel that the classes you are taking are geared towards you aptitude of learning?
7. Do you feel that your priorities such as family, job, and school are different than before you started school?
8. List in order of importance, the changes you expect in your life when you receive your degree.
9. Would your priorities be significantly different in a more traditional college setting? If so, how?
10. Do you feel that you have more, same, or less free time than if you were a traditional student?
11. How do you feel about traditional students?
12. What advantages or disadvantages do you feel you have compared to traditional students?

13. How do traditional students treat you?
14. Do you feel you can study/test as well as traditional students?
15. In what areas (subjects) do you feel most nontraditional students are deficient?
16. Do the deficiencies seem to reflect upon the end of the semester grade? Your time spent on assignments? Your time spent studying?
17. What could a college do for nontraditional students with specific deficiencies or problems with courses?
18. What do most nontraditional students do currently to eliminate the deficiencies (improve skills)?
19. If you have deficiencies whose fault is it?
20. How do grades make you feel? Tests?
21. How important are grades to you?
22. Do you feel that most professors grade/test you fairly?
23. Do you have any suggestions about grades/tests?
24. Would you be willing to move in order to continue your education?
25. How important is the location of the school/classes compared to the school itself?
26. What distance would you be willing to travel for higher education?
27. Why or how did you choose your major field of study?
28. Is your employer helping you out financially?
29. Does your employer stand behind your going back to school?
30. How do you feel about your employer in relationship to your college/degree?
31. Would you have enrolled in college sooner if your employer would have encouraged you to? What type of encouragement?
32. Is going back to school helping you out in your job now?

33. Why have you chosen the class/classes you are enrolled in? Does anyone help you in this selection? If so, who?
34. Are you selecting classes in the order you would prefer? Is this different, in your opinion, from traditional students?
35. As a nontraditional student, do you have a specific goal, which highly influences your class selections? Briefly describe.
36. Do you know if your courses will all contribute to your degree?
36. How do you feel about technology?
37. Has a change in technology occurred in your work? Has technology influenced your decision to enroll in college?
39. Does your college classes address your technological needs? Any suggestions?
40. What are your technological needs?
41. What influenced your decision to attend the college /university you are attending?
42. Does your university offer the classes you need at a time that is convenient to you? Any suggestions?
43. Are you aware of any student organizations at your institution for nontraditional students? Would you like a nontraditional student organization?
44. What can your institution offer to assist nontraditional students?
45. Why are you enrolled in college?
46. What age will you be when you complete your degree?
47. How will your age affect your career after graduation?
48. Has age made a difference in what field you have chosen to study and why?
49. How do you feel about universities requiring students to take courses that do not count credit hours toward a degree? (for graduation requirements that were not required when you graduated)

50. List in order of importance the biggest obstacle in the way of getting your degree? How are you overcoming these obstacles?
51. How do you feel about giving up your spare time to continue your education?
52. Are you aware of any financial aids available? Do you know if you qualify for them?
53. Have you ever received financial aid of any type? Does your advisor help you find financial aid?
54. Was cost a factor when you enrolled?
55. Is cost a factor in your staying enrolled?
56. Is there anything you would like to add?

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND SUMMARY

Student Research Team Information Summary

The questions below were developed to guide the interview process by the student research team. They were used in an open-ended method and do not constitute an interview script that had to be strictly adhered to.

The summary of answers to the following questions are underlined to indicate gathered information. There were 76 interviews given and summarized here.

1. How do you feel about college?

positive comments 57 negative comments 13 ? 6

love it, good, confused, interesting, burnt out, necessary, scary, important, lots of rewards, pot of gold, difficult, harder than I remember, harder than high school

2. How do you feel about your instructors?

great helper, helpful, fair, boring, idiot, overworked, feel challenged, as time goes by more equal, knowledgeable, not as business experienced as book experienced

3. How do you feel about you advisor/administration?

do not have one 40 have a good one 34 ? 2

4. Are you able to use the facilities you pay for?

yes 35 no 39 ? 2

5. If you could change the college system to accommodate your needs what would you change?

no time limit on degree, child care, more choice in evening classes, work experience credit, campus instructor instead of adjunct because you have an isolated instructor teaching isolated students, evening, daytime advisors, and administration available on a regular basis

6. Do you feel that the classes you are taking are geared towards you aptitude of learning?

yes 68 no 8

7. Do you feel that your priorities such as family, job, and school are different than before you started school?

yes 55 no 21

8. List in order of importance, the changes you expect in your life when you receive your degree.

Job/money/career 45 self esteem/my own knowledge 28
other 3

9. Would your priorities be significantly different in a more traditional college setting? If so, how?

yes 56 no 18 ? 2

more focused, more study time, less responsibility, more fun

10. Do you feel that you have more, same, or less free time than if you were a traditional student?

less 62 more 14

11. How do you feel about traditional students?

isolated, envious, confused because they are not serious about school, never give them a thought, removed, do not understand them, different, like a parent

12. What advantages or disadvantages do you feel you have compared to traditional students?

advantages - maturity, more motivation, good study habits, my job pays for my college, focused, advantage when looking for job after graduation when you add my experience to my college

disadvantages - less time, longer to get a degree, less access to college and social life, too old for some career fields-example highway patrol

13. How do traditional students treat you?

OK 46 isolated/removed 26 bad/negative 4

14. Do you feel you can study/test as well as traditional students?

yes 45 no 14 better 16 ? 1

15. In what areas (subjects) do you feel most nontraditional students are deficient?

Math, Science, English, Computers

16. Do the deficiencies seem to reflect upon the end of the semester grade? Your time spent on assignments? Your time spent studying?

yes 40 no 20 ? 16

17. What could a college do for nontraditional students with specific deficiencies or problems with courses?

tutor, videos, learning labs, free class with instructor help, remedial course, child care to create more free time, better explanations in class, better explanations about classes and requirements, office hours of professors in the evening

18. What do most nontraditional students do currently to eliminate the deficiencies (improve skills)?

study harder, dig in deeper, hire a tutor, beg teacher for time, multiply the work and study time

19. If you have deficiencies whose fault is it?

old school system, individuals

20. How do grades make you feel? Tests?

good, bad, measure to tell how I am doing, hate, labeled, over-rated

21. How important are grades to you?

very important 63 not important 13

22. Do you feel that most professors grade/test you fairly?

yes 66 no 5 ? 5

23. Do you have any suggestions about grades/tests?

test on what is lectured, dislike curve, like curve, more and varied ways to get grades in addition to tests, more tests over shorter material, more feedback

24. Would you be willing to move in order to continue your education?

yes 29 no 47

25. How important is the location of the school/classes compared to the school itself?

most important 43 equally 13
not very 14 ? 6

26. What distance you be willing to travel for higher education?

2 hours - 15 1 hour - 31 less 1 hour - 25
none - 5

27. Why or how did you choose your major field of study?

because of work, interest, enjoyment, better opportunity, test, high demand, liked teacher, available

28. Is your employer helping you out financially?

yes 18 no/na 58

29. Does your employer stand behind your going back to school?

yes 46 no/na 30

30. How do you feel about your employer in relationship to your college/degree?

wish they recognized it more, OK as long as I do my work first, need more flexibility, with me 100%, very supporting, my promotion is tied to it, keeping my job depends on it, more money tied to it

31. Would you have enrolled in college sooner if your employer would have encouraged you to? What type of encouragement?

yes 23 no/na 53 money, time, encouragement, flexibility

32. Is going back to school helping you out in your job now?

yes 35 no/na 41

33. Why have you chosen the class/classes you are enrolled in? Does anyone help you in this selection? If so, who?

required for degree, need for work, interest, because that was all that was available

34. Are you selecting classes in the order you would prefer?

no 37 yes 39

Is this different, in your opinion, from traditional students?

no 46 yes 30

35. As a nontraditional student, do you have a specific goal, which highly influences your class selections? Briefly describe.

degree, job, what is offered

36. Do you know if your courses will all contribute to your degree?

yes 57 no 19

36. How do you feel about technology?

stressed out, overwhelmed, getting out of hand, afraid, intimidated, necessary, very important skill, moving faster than I am, makes life easier/complicated

37. Has a change in technology occurred in your work? Has technology influenced you decision to enroll in college?

yes 55 no 21

39. Does your college classes address your technological needs? Any suggestions?

no 51 no 25 variety, integration, update, availability

40. What are your technological needs?

word processing, spreadsheets, data bases, knowledge, more access, integration, professors more skilled and less afraid of technology

41. What influenced your decision to attend the college /university you are attending?

cost, advancement, location, size, tradition

42. Does your university offer the classes you need at a time that is convenient to you? Any suggestions?

no 21 yes 55 more variety in night class selection

43. Are you aware of any student organizations at your institution for nontraditional students? Would you like a nontraditional student organization?

no 63 yes 13

44. What can your institution offer to assist nontraditional students?

no 61 yes 10 depends 5

45. Why are you enrolled in college?

degree, money, security, self-improvement, goal, marketability, learning, self-esteem

46. What age will you be when you complete your degree?

47 < age 30 29 > age 30

47. How will your age affect your career after graduation?

advantage, more experience, disadvantage because of competing against younger people that can stay with the company longer

48. Has age made a difference in what field you have chosen to study and why?

yes 11 no 65

49. How do you feel about universities requiring students to take courses that do not count credit hours toward a degree? (for graduation requirements that were not required when you graduated)

unfair, costly, it should count for something like an elective, we need it

50. List in order of importance the biggest obstacle in the way of getting your degree? How are you overcoming these obstacles?

time, my self-esteem, money, job, family, energy, location, availability of classes at night, child care

OVERCOMING THEM BY: taking longer to get degree, staying up latter, borrowing money, better organized, coping day to day, I'm not, not traveling to the school I would prefer

51. How do you feel about giving up your spare time to continue your education?

fine, challenging, OK, resent it, worthwhile, hard, frustrated, hesitant, worried about other obligation, price I have to pay

52. Are you aware of any financial aids available? Do you know if you qualify for them?

no	20	yes	56
yes	34	no	42

53. Have you ever received financial aid of any type? Does you advisor help you find financial aid?

yes	11	no	65
-----	----	----	----

54. Was cost a factor when you enrolled?

no	33	yes	43
----	----	-----	----

55. Is cost a factor in your staying enrolled?

no	30	yes	46
----	----	-----	----

56. Is there anything you would like to add?

more night classes, child care, integration of technology and real life simulations, European approach, would have liked to have been given the chance to do this when I was younger

Researcher's Questions Summary

The questions below were developed to guide the interview process by the student research team and used by the researcher. They were used in an open-ended method and do not constitute an interview script that had to be strictly adhered to.

The summary of answers to the following questions are underlined to indicate gathered information. There were 76 interviews given and summarized here by the researcher.

1. How do you feel about college?

fine, challenging, OK, resent it, worthwhile, hard, frustrated, hesitant, worried about other obligation, price I have to pay

52. Are you aware of any financial aids available? Do you know if you qualify for them?

no	20	yes	56
yes	34	no	42

53. Have you ever received financial aid of any type? Does you advisor help you find financial aid?

yes	11	no	65
-----	----	----	----

54. Was cost a factor when you enrolled?

no	33	yes	43
----	----	-----	----

55. Is cost a factor in your staying enrolled?

no	30	yes	46
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56. Is there anything you would like to add?

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Researcher's Questions Summary

The questions below were developed to guide the interview process by the student research team and used by the researcher. They were used in an open-ended method and do not constitute an interview script that had to be strictly adhered to.

The summary of answers to the following questions are underlined to indicate gathered information. There were 76 interviews given and summarized here by the researcher.

1. How do you feel about college?

positive comments 60 negative comments 12 ? 4

OK, love it, motivational, good, confused, interesting, burnt out, necessary, scary, important, lots of rewards, pot of gold, difficult, harder than I remember, harder than high school, alone, isolated, not as difficult as I remember

2. How do you feel about your instructors?

great, helpful, unfair, fair, interesting, boring, idiot, overworked, feel challenged, as time goes by more equal, knowledgeable, OK, remote, removed, caring, not as business experienced as book experienced

3. How do you feel about you advisor/administration?

do not have one 44 have a good one 32

4. Are you able to use the facilities you pay for?

yes 15 no 59 ? 2

5. If you could change the college system to accommodate your needs what would you change?

no time limit, child care, more choice in evening classes, work experience credit, way of talking to professor when not rushed with class or late hours, evening and daytime advisors and administration available on a regular basis

6. Do you feel that the classes you are taking are geared towards you aptitude of learning?

yes 70 no 6

7. Do you feel that your priorities such as family, job, and school are different than before you started school?

yes 65 no 12

8. List in order of importance, the changes you expect in your life when you receive your degree.

improve self-esteem	10	better job	22
higher income	11	finish a past goal	10
increase control	4	correct a past mistake	5
understand technology	10	recapture youth	4

9. Would your priorities be significantly different in a more traditional college setting? If so, how?

yes 70 no 6

more focused, more study time, less responsibility, more fun
younger age, less life experiences, closer location of
classes, different goals, fit in, in touch with current
trends, normal

10. Do you feel that you have more, same, or less free time than if you were a traditional student?

less 70 more 0 same 6

11. How do you feel about traditional students?

isolated, envious, confused because they are not serious
about school, out of touch with their current trends, never
give them a thought, removed, do not understand, different,
like a parent, OK

12. What advantages or disadvantages do you feel you have compared to traditional students?

advantages - maturity, more motivation, good study habits, my
job pays for my college, focused, advantage when looking for
job after graduation when you add my experience to my college

disadvantages - less time, longer to get a degree, less
access to college and social life, too old for some career
fields-example highway patrol

13. How do traditional students treat you?

OK 48 isolated/removed 28

14. Do you feel you can study/test as well as traditional students?

yes 36 no 10 better 30

15. In what areas (subjects) do you feel most nontraditional students are deficient?

(some had more than one answer and 20 said no, Math 23,
Science 25, English 10, Computers 44

16. Do the deficiencies seem to reflect upon the end of the semester grade? Your time spent on assignments? Your time spent studying?

yes 50 no 20 ? 6

17. What could a college do for nontraditional students with specific deficiencies or problems with courses?

tutor, videos, learning labs, free class with instructor
help, remedial course, child care to create more free time,
better explanations in class, better explanations about

classes and requirements, office hours of professors in the evening

18. What do most nontraditional students do currently to eliminate the deficiencies (improve skills)?

study harder, work harder, hire a tutor, beg teacher for time, multiply the work and study time

19. If you have deficiencies whose fault is it?

old school system, past teachers, parents, mine

20. How do grades make you feel? Tests?

good, bad, need them, measure to tell how I am doing, hate, labeled, over-rated

21. How important are grades to you?

very important 73 not important 3

22. Do you feel that most professors grade/test you fairly?

yes 56 no 15 (but not many) ? 5

23. Do you have any suggestions about grades/tests?

set standards, talk to us, explain grade, tell us how we could have improved, test on what is lectured, dislike curve, like curve, more and varied ways to get grades in addition to tests, more tests over shorter material, more feedback

24. Would you be willing to move in order to continue your education?

yes 20 no 57

25. How important is the location of the school/classes compared to the school itself?

most important 53 equally 13
not very 4 ? 6

26. What distance you be willing to travel for higher education?

2 hours - 10 1 hour - 26 less 1 hour - 25
none - 15

27. Why or how did you choose your major field of study?

because of work, what is offered, field offered close by, interest, enjoyment, better opportunity, test, high demand, liked teacher, available

28. Is your employer helping you out financially?

yes 28 no/na 48

29. Does your employer stand behind your going back to school?

yes 56 no/na 20

30. How do you feel about your employer in relationship to your college/degree?

wish they recognized it more, I do my work first, need more flexibility, with me 100%, very supporting, my promotion is tied to it, keeping my job depends on it, more money tied to it, trying to computerize work, boss needs me to complete this degree or he will hire someone else

31. Would you have enrolled in college sooner if your employer would have encouraged you to? What type of encouragement?

yes 43 no/na 33

32. Is going back to school helping you out in your job now?

yes 45 no/na 31

33. Why have you chosen the class/classes you are enrolled in? Does anyone help you in this selection? If so, who?

required for degree, offered here in town, need for work, interest, because that was all that was available

34. Are you selecting classes in the order you would prefer?

no 57 yes 19

Is this different, in your opinion, from traditional students?

no 20 yes 56

35. As a nontraditional student, do you have a specific goal, which highly influences your class selections? Briefly describe.

degree, job, available here in town, what is offered

36. Do you know if your courses will all contribute to your degree?

yes 60 no 16

36. How do you feel about technology?

stressed out, overwhelmed, getting out of hand, afraid, intimidated, necessary, very important skill, moving faster than I am, better, good, excited, challenged, makes life easier/complicated

37. Has a change in technology occurred in your work? Has technology influenced you decision to enroll in college?

yes 60 no 16

39. Does your college classes address your technological needs? Any suggestions?

no 59 no 17 variety, integration, update, not enough availability

40. What are your technological needs?

word processing, spreadsheets, data bases, knowledge, more access, integration, professors more skilled and less afraid of technology

41. What influenced your decision to attend the college /university you are attending?

cost, advancement, location, size, tradition

42. Does your university offer the classes you need at a time that is convenient to you? Any suggestions?

no 33 yes 43 more variety in night class selection

43. Are you aware of any student organizations at your institution for nontraditional students? Would you like a nontraditional student organization?

no 70 yes 6

44. What can your institution offer to assist nontraditional students?

better selection, advisers, better office hours, time with the professors besides in class

45. Why are you enrolled in college?

degree, money, security, self-improvement, goal, marketability, learning, self-esteem, better job, higher income, finish a past goal, correct a past mistake, increase control over life's problems, technology

46. What age will you be when you complete your degree?

40 < age 30 36 > age 30

47. How will your age affect your career after graduation?

advantage, more experience, it shouldn't, who knows, I am better off with the degree and older than without a degree and older, disadvantage because of competing against younger people

48. Has age made a difference in what field you have chosen to study and why?

yes 31 no 45 age limit, can't do certain types of labor anymore

49. How do you feel about universities requiring students to take courses that do not count credit hours toward a degree? (for graduation requirements that were not required when you graduated)

unfair, costly, it should count for something like an elective, we need it

50. List in order of importance the biggest obstacle in the way of getting your degree? How are you overcoming these obstacles?

time, money, other responsibilities, lack of mobility, afraid I will fail, job, family, energy, location, availability of classes at night, the way I saw myself when I was in public school, an high school adviser telling me I was not college material-but I am now a 4.0 student, a grade school teacher telling me I am too dumb to learn, some bad experiences I had in high school years and years ago, I can still hear this teacher calling me stupid, child care

OVERCOMING THEM BY: taking longer to get degree, staying up latter, borrowing money, financial aid, scholarships, grants, loans, government assistance, better organized, coping day to day, do not feel like I am making it, not traveling to the school I would prefer, think about today and not what happened years ago

51. How do you feel about giving up your spare time to continue your education?

fine, challenging, OK, resent it, worthwhile, hard, frustrated, hesitant, worried about other obligation, price I have to pay

52. Are you aware of any financial aids available? Do you know if you qualify for them?

no	34	yes	42
yes	27	no	49

53. Have you ever received financial aid of any type? Does you advisor help you find financial aid?

yes	21	no	55
-----	----	----	----

54. Was cost a factor when you enrolled?

no	20	yes	56
----	----	-----	----

55. Is cost a factor in your staying enrolled?

no	20	yes	56
----	----	-----	----

56. Is there anything you would like to add?

office hours in the evening, advisers, more night classes, child care, integration of technology and real life simulations, more degrees, phone enrollment, weekend classes, advisor availability, credit for life experiences, better orientation, better support of businesses and communities, nontraditional organization, more hands on experiences, need knowledge of real business situations, role playing, practice sets, help us get rid of old baggage from bad school experiences, classes offered more than once every two years

APPENDIX C

SCHEMA OF SOCIAL REALIGNMENT

AN EDUCATIONAL EVOLUTION

THE CAUSAL CONDITION OF SOCIAL REALIGNMENT -

DESIRE FOR A COLLEGE DEGREE

improve self-esteem
better jobs
higher income
finish a past goal
correct a past mistake
increase control of life's crises
recapture youth
understand technology

THE CONTEXT FROM WITHIN WHICH NTS ATTEND COLLEGE

ISOLATION

older age
more life experiences
remote location of classes
commute
different goals
more responsibilities
fear and envy of traditional students
out of touch with current trends
curve busters

THE INTERVENING CONDITIONS -

STUDENT PARADIGM

past school experiences
feeling the teacher knows best
fear of tests
recapturing youth
try to reduce workload
argue test questions and answers

BARRIERS

- divided responsibilities
- lack mobility
- fear of failure
- competing against younger students
- shortage of money
- insufficient time
- technology deficiencies
- old values
- difficult to change

THE STRATEGY -

Acculturation

- shared goals
- shared sense of identity
- comradery
- empathy
- NTS support group

THE OUTCOME -

COLLEGE DEGREE/SELF ACTUALIZATION
AN EDUCATIONAL EVOLUTION

- self-esteem
- job status
- skill
- employability
- security
- knowledge
- respect
- pride

RECOMMENDATIONS

TECHNOLOGY AND BUSINESS CLASSES

- hands on simulation
- role playing
- practice sets
- computer integration
- knowledge of real business situations

FINANCIAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- financial aid
- scholarships
- food stamps
- AFDC
- LIHEAP
- grants and loans
- housing
- child care

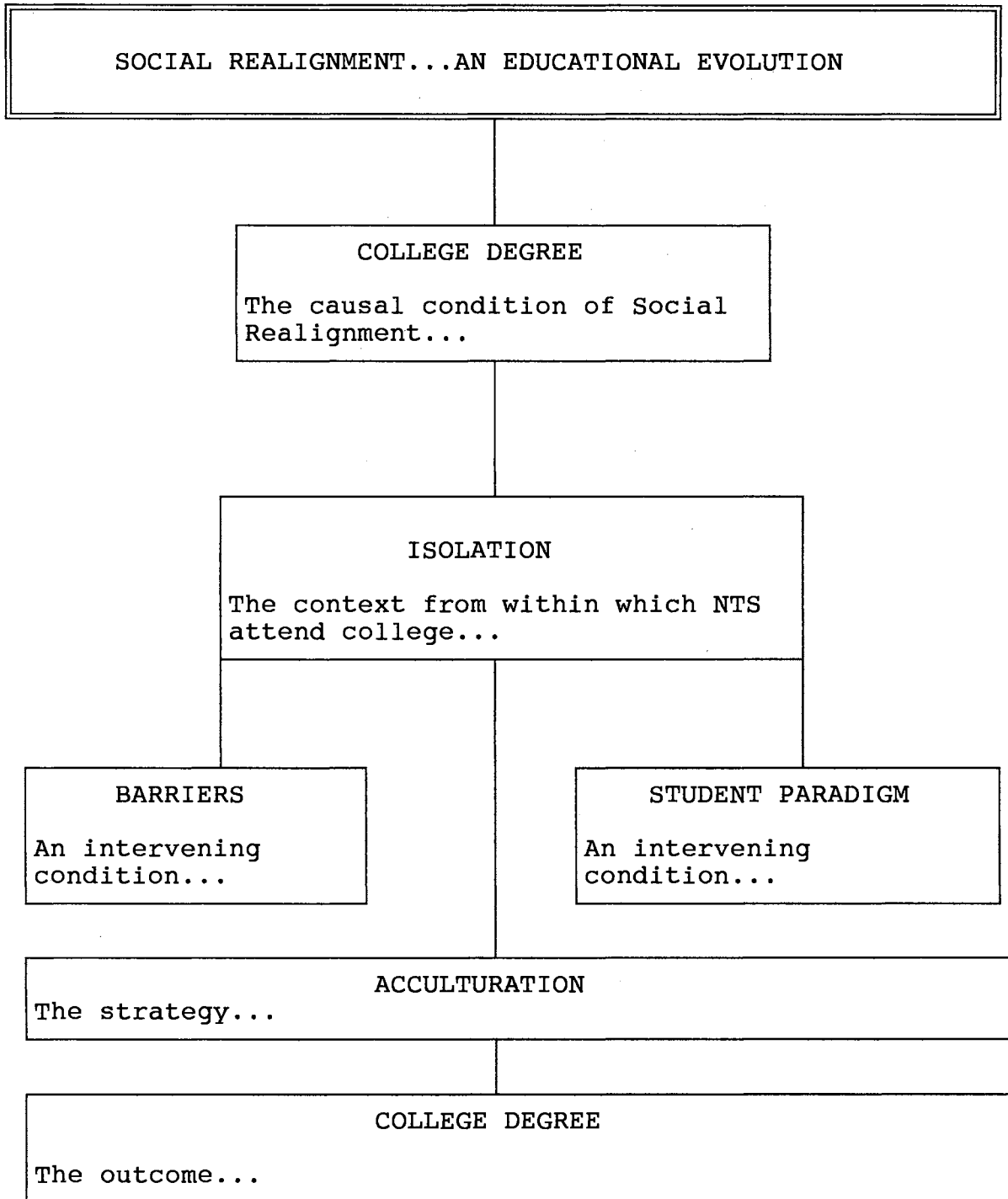
FLEXIBLE SCHEDULING

- phone in enrollment
- special degree programs
- night and weekend classes
- better access to administration/offices
- advisor availability
- credit for life experiences

Acculturation

- nontraditional student organization - OWLS
- better orientation
- improve support of businesses/community

S C H E M A



APPENDIX D

NONTRADITIONAL STUDENTS' NARRATIVES

Lester's Perceptions

I work for an oil refining company located in a small rural town of less than 5,000. My responsibilities include measurement and quality control of product. I enjoy my work most of the time, but could use more income.

I feel extremely good about the classes I have taken and can remember how nervous I was before I started back to college. I had to take some college classes for work or I never would not have gone back to college. Taking those classes and making good grades in them gave me the confidence to see that I could complete my college this time. In high school and college I was never a very good student. There were too many other things on my mind, like girls and sports.

Then I started making more money working and I just never gave college another thought for a long time. I always felt bad when someone would mention college or their degree and I always regretted playing around and not finishing, but I had felt that it was just too late until I took some classes for work.

Amber's Perceptions

I am a forty-year-old female with two children, one a junior in high school and the other a sophomore in college. I live in a small rural town where I have a county job with responsibilities of doing bookkeeping for three schools. I have completed 112 hours with an associate degree from a junior college and expect to graduate in 1994. I did not take any classes last year as I was going through a divorce and felt that I needed a break.

I believe going back to college to complete my degree after my divorce was my way of having control over something in my life that made me feel better about myself. During the divorce I felt worthless, out of control, and dead end. Now, I am excited about my future and good about something I am doing. It is like I have control over at least a part of my future.

I feel that I have been going to college all my life and pray that my kids continue through college to complete it in four or five years. No one could tell me to wait a mere year and a half to get married. So, as a consequence, I have gone to college off and on ever since and so have many of my female friends. I want my degree because it is something I left unfinished and now that I am single, I want to be better prepared for other job opportunities. As my son graduates, I may want to move to a larger city.

I work some with IBM computers to do forms and programs that are already set up at work. I feel a little inadequate around computers, but have learned to use some software packages. One of my goals is to take some computers classes that will teach me to use different business software. Technology has left me behind and I want to catch up, but I have a real fear of the computer. It is almost like it is a person and it will think I am stupid or I will hurt it. I envy today's students that are able to grow up using technology and have their own computers right at home.

Peter's Perceptions

I went back to school in my late forties after I hurt my back and could no longer perform the job that I had for years. I have four children that have completed college. My youngest daughter graduated in nursing at about the same time that I graduated in sociology. I made some good friends while I was in college, prepared myself for a new job and graduated feeling very proud of myself.

If my going to college was the results of a sales job by the universities, then I wish they had sold me on my ability to go to college sooner. My wife and I stressed the importance of college to our children, but I had felt that I would never be able to take advantage of the opportunities

that college would open up for me. I was never a very good student; my wife and I got married at a young age therefore, I could never afford college, so I stressed the importance of college to my children.

Our most prized possessions are the five college diplomas and graduation pictures on our living room wall and now mine is up there too. I now have a good job with the state school and feel very proud of myself. I believe that you are never too old to go to college and I now encourage everyone to start taking college classes. College has given me the chance to do something that I wanted to do when I was younger.

In a way, while I was in college, I was able to be young again even if it was only for four years. It was fun being a student. I would have loved being young while in school, but I would have probably been a party animal so maybe it is best this way. I would do it again even if I was sixty when I started.

Jerry's Perceptions

I found myself sitting on the couch as if I was riveted to it. The shades still closed and the lights off. I looked at the clock, thinking it was almost 1:00 p.m.; my wife would soon be back from taking my oldest daughter to her doctor's appointment in the city. My heart started pounding harder as I wiped my sweaty palms on my jeans and I wondered why I had sat there for at least five hours without leaving the house.

I always prided myself on being brave; after all, in the service we were taught that fear could be used to our advantage. I had looked down the barrel of a gun, been involved in several knife fights, served five tours of military police duty in Korea, placed top in my class at the NCO academy, received numerous awards before retiring from the United States Air Force and worked for both the highway patrol and sheriff's department since retirement almost a year ago and yet, I dreaded enrolling in college. Looking back now, I guess I felt it was almost better to not try college; then I would not have to face failure. Also, I thought I would be the only old man in the class.

This idea of my enrolling in college classes had all started a couple days before, when I had tried to encourage my wife to continue her Master's of Education degree after laying off for ten years. She agreed to go if I would agree to enroll in college and without thinking about what I said, I had agreed. Yesterday, she came home enrolled in nine hours and informed me that today was the last day of open enrollment for undergraduate students. She left that morning, believing that I was going to make the hour and fifteen minute trip to enroll after she left at 8:00 a.m. 'What did you enroll in?' my wife asked as she walked in. 'I haven't left yet,' I replied, hoping she would understand. 'Get in the car!' she ordered. I grabbed the driver's seat (I am still man enough to drive even if I did not go enroll myself).

As we rushed in the student union and up the stairs, my wife went through the lines so quickly I was lost. She would ask me questions I did not know the answer to; then she would answer them herself before I had time to reply. The girl at the computer kept saying, 'That class is filled.' Meanwhile, I kept thinking, good, I can start college next semester. One thing, my wife was persistent. As we left, she handed me forms and said, 'You will be in this building at 8:00, 9:00, 10:00, and 11:00 a.m.; Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.' 'What!?' 'You mean I have to leave the house by 6:00 a.m. every morning!' 'I am retired!' 'What am I killing myself for with four classes in a row.' 'I will never be able to survive!'

After that illustrious beginning, I quickly learned to enroll myself. I might add, I never took another 8:00 a.m. class, nor did I ever enroll in another four classes in a row. During that semester, I wondered if I would ever make it. I was forty-two-years-old and found the idea of competing with the bright eyed younger people very intimidating; but after awhile, I began gaining more and more confidence. Although I found the younger students could possibly out do me in class, they missed more classes, did not have their homework completed, skipped class regularly and many placed a higher value on their social life than on college.

I enjoyed my college days after I got over my first fears. I had never made very good grades in high school and had felt that I could never make

it in college; in fact several teachers had told me so. My advisor in college helped me gain confidence, especially when I got forty hours credit for my service classes and life experience. I went from a freshman to a junior overnight and so did my confidence.

As a supervisor in the Air Force, I had encouraged many under me to grab all the education that Uncle Sam would pay for. After all, what were they going to do after they retired, but I never took my own advice. My regrets are that I did not go to college when I was younger and that I did not take any computer classes while I was in college, but I plan to correct that soon by taking classes in computers, history, woodworking, and TV productions.

In addition to an improved self-image, college provided enjoyment. I had fun. It was almost like I was given a second chance at being young again. At eighteen I think I would have been a member of an 'animal house' fraternity so maybe it was good that I waited until I was a little more mature. I formed several good friendships while I was in college and I am ashamed to say that, when we were in class together, we would cut up so much that you would have thought we were eighteen instead of middle-aged. Also, my wife used to tease us by saying that she expected to be called to the dean's office any day to bail us out of trouble. Even though we had fun and acted like students, we still knew we were there to learn and we took that very seriously.

As a result, I no longer think that I am too dumb to be a college graduate. I just graduated in law enforcement and have two masters started. I started one in history and another, in mass communications. I, also, would have never thought about starting my own business before college, but I now have two. As one can see, college was wonderful for me as it gave me youth, confidence, knowledge, as well as a degree.

Mary's Perceptions

I am the divorced mother of three children, ages: 16, 14, and 7. I had my chance to go to college as I graduated from high school. In fact, I attended college for two years making C's, but I

never bothered to want to learn while I was there. My mother wanted me to go, so I went, I also had an older sister that was racking up the A's and landing a teaching job even before she graduated.

Looking back I cannot tell you why I did not get involved with college and the learning process as my sister did, but I hung on to my high school friends that decided not to attend college. I drank and smoked a little pot anything that I thought my mother would not like and my sister would never do.

Today, as a divorced mother I am back in school trying to earn a RN degree. I married to quit college to a man that was an alcoholic. My life was so out of control during the divorce and my life was on the fast lane down hill, so I tried to think of my regrets and what I would do different if I had the chance. Then I tried to think, is there one of these that I still have time to do differently? 'Finish college' came out at the top of both lists. This also gave me a chance for my kids to see how important an education was to me. It is sometimes easier for a child to believe what you tell them when they see their mom setting a good example.

Sometimes, I wonder who I was trying to hurt, before? I am studying and definitely feeling better about myself than ever before, but I feel isolated from college life. I am too old to date most of the students in my classes or they are already married. I never took advantage of being on campus when I was younger and I could have joined clubs and organizations. Now, I have to work nights at a nursing home, take care of my children, attend evening classes, and sleep during the days.

Is not life strange? You never appreciate what you are offered until it is too late to take advantage of it. I believe I would feel less isolated if there was some means of receiving the school newspaper, shopping at the campus bookstore, eating a snack at the coffee shop, or having access to an advisor and administration during the evening hours.

A college degree I will have some day, but college memories of comradeship I gave up years ago. There are times in class however when discussions are going on that I feel a little less isolated. That is when I realize that other

students in my night classes have gone through similar experiences and it makes me feel less alone. I wonder if some role playing would make some of us feel less isolated?

My children are proud of me and so am I. It is difficult when I need to be three places at once, but is it worth it, for me definitely yes. I will have a career, feel good about myself, and make more money. My sister is a college professor now and I will soon be a nurse and proud of it.

Penny's perceptions. I Was Not Smart Enough - Or Was I?

The first time someone suggested I return to college I felt as if my heart fell to my stomach. For, I decided long ago that I just was not smart enough. My previous educational experiences were proof enough.

I remember when I was a child sitting at the kitchen table struggling with my homework. I would say, 'Mom, I just cannot understand this even though I have read the chapter over and over.' Next thing I knew my father was standing over me trying to teach me. He ended up yelling and I ended up crying.

You see, my family and I had just moved to a new town and the new school I began attending was ahead of my previous school in the subject of math. Thus, being the new kid, it was both frightening and difficult to adjust to new lessons and books. I remember how my stomach ached and my face had the funny feeling I got just before crying. For walking into that classroom of strangers scared me to death. I said to myself in a panic, 'What if they do not like me? Their books are different! What if they are ahead of me? Will I ever catch up or will I answer all the questions incorrectly?' With these fears, one was truly real, math. Once the teacher and I realized I was far behind in math, I was assigned an older student to help me catch up as we sat in the hall teaching and learning while the other students went on with their regular math class. I suppose it was at this point in my life that I began to feel dumb and less of a person than my peers.

Later, in high school, I found that I was very weak in one area, but strong in another subject. First, I learned of a deficiency that

caused me much grief in learning the system of our government. I realized later that I was not able to comprehend what I read which also instilled a fear of writing. Thus, I avoided all classes that related to reading and writing such as English Composition and Literature. Despite my hardships in these areas and in my previous education, I became very good in math. In fact, it was the results of my ACT examination, which ranked my math skills at the top 25% of all students in Missouri, that inspired me to go on to college, the first time.

Contradictory to my high expectations, my enrollment into college as an engineering student was not what I had hoped for. I encountered many obstacles. First, I had to work full-time in addition to attending college full-time. This left little time to do homework and study. Second, I was required to take additional classes that would improve my reading and writing skills. and despite my constant studying, I was very disappointed to receive average letter grades of 'C's for my endless efforts. Thus, I deemed myself too 'dumb' to achieve excellent grades, and I quit in the middle of the semester vowing never to return again. I had mixed feelings about quitting. For one, I felt like a failure--too ashamed to tell anyone for a while. At the same time I felt as if a 'weight' was lifted from my shoulders.

Two months later, I moved in with my best friend and began working a new 'nine to five' job as a clerk for a Personnel Department. This gave me a new challenge as I was able to use skills I never knew I had. With this success and two years time I wanted to be more than just a 'clerk' or a 'coordinator'. I wanted to be a manager and earn a higher income. It was then that my bosses began encouraging me to return to school. The first time the word 'college' was mentioned I cringed and my heart began beating so fast that I thought it was going to jump out between my ribs. I explained to my co-workers that I just was not smart enough, and they disagreed enough to encourage me to take just one course. Next thing I knew, I had proved myself wrong by making letter grades of 'A's in my first 21 credits. I did it by selecting extra courses to assist me with my deficiencies and asking for help as needed. Something I was not able to do when I was younger. I guess I am smart enough!

Kelli's Perceptions. My Sister's Nontraditional Student Experience: As Told by My Sister.

I had attended Oklahoma State University for three years right out of High School taking classes full-time and working part-time. I was on schedule with all of my classes, until I got married during my third year of school and we moved to Wichita, KS, where I attended Wichita State University taking night classes to finish my degree in Finance. Before I enrolled that fall semester, I went to the advisory office in the business department to find out my requirements left in getting my degree. I went back to the office and double checked my requirements and had them sign my enrollment slip. I even went back to the office a third time to get it OK'd again and checked it against my record before I enrolled. They said it looked fine. Shortly after enrollment, a man called my house and wanted me to come in that day, but I would be in the next day. I went to the office and they said that everything looked correct and that I would be graduating in May.

Then in February, I wanted to know my standing GPA so I went to the office and told her that I was graduating in May. She could not find my file in May graduates, but she did find it in the summer graduates. I thought there had to be some mistake. Sure enough, there was a mistake and I would not be able to graduate until summer. I lacked a few hours in recreation courses. The past semester I had taken twelve hours of night classes while working full-time thinking I would graduate in May. All the classes I took that semester were upper class and difficult courses. If I would have known it would take another semester for me to graduate, I would have separated my courses into two semesters.

I was really frustrated with the school system. I called the Dean of Student Affairs and he told me that it was my fault, because I had not checked my requirements in the manual. That did not really make much sense to me because of all the checking I had done with my advisor before I enrolled in what was supposed to be my last semester. The way I feel about advisors is why have one when they steer you the wrong way. I think most of the time being an advisor is their

side job and the professors do not put much thought into helping you.

Advisors should realize that they are a big part in starting your career and they should take that responsibility into consideration. Also, a signed graduation checklist stating I am graduating should mean something. I realize getting married and moving messed up my college plans for a graduation the first time, but this time I really feel like I got the shaft.

Priscilla's Perceptions. "Who Me, Deficient?"

Sitting in my algebra class, I was a little startled to hear the instructor call my name. I looked up and he said he had a note for me and that I needed to visit with the registrar's office before I continued coming to class and that I should probably go ahead and do so then. Feeling a bit confused and even more embarrassed I gathered up my books and left the room. I tried to think of what could be wrong. We were in the second week of class and my tuition had already been paid. I knew my check would not have bounced and I did not know what else the problem could have been.

Entering the registrar's office, I saw many familiar faces because I was a student worker at the office around the corner. I asked to speak to the Registrar and handed her the note given to me in class. She proceeded to tell me that in going over my records they had discovered that I was deficient in the area of math. I explained that there must be some mistake, I was valedictorian of my high school class, graduated with a 4.0 and had taken Algebra I and Algebra II in high school. I can still see that smart-alec little grin she gave me while saying, 'Did you have Geometry? No, but I am not enrolled in College Geometry. I am enrolled in College Algebra,' Giving her attitude right back to her. This probably was not the smartest thing for me to do and I realized that as soon as I saw the glare in her eyes staring a huge hole through me. 'It does not matter what your GPA was if you did not complete geometry, and also you scored low on the placement test given to you the first day of class.'

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with no review, who could do well? I took a few deep breathes to calm myself down and asked if I could retake my placement test. The response was a definite 'NO' and it seemed almost as if she was taking great delight in the whole situation. It just did not seem right to me that I was making A's on the quizzes we had been given in the first week of class and people sitting around me had made C's and D's and they were the ones allowed to stay in the class. After realizing I would get real close to nowhere with this person, I sighed out loud, rolled my eyes, gritted my teeth (for effect), and said as politely as an irate person could, 'What do I need to do then?'

Seeing that she had finally gotten the best of me, she took a little breath of relief and said, so matter-of-factly, 'You will have to drop the class and enroll in the zero level intermediate class for deficient people.' I asked what she meant by zero level and found out I would have to pay the same price for the class, but receive no credit for it. What a rip off! I felt my face turning red with anger and decided I would be better off just to say 'fine', and go cool off somewhere, maybe even plot my strategy for somehow bending the rules.

I calmed down and went to see two women who were working in the counseling office on campus to get their opinion. They both thought it was absurd and went straight to the Vice-President of the institution and went to bat for me thinking they would have more pull than I, the lowly student, would. Guess what? No such luck. It seemed that he did not think I was any more special than anyone else they were jerking around this way. I got a quick lesson that taught me that even sometimes who you know does not help your situation any, especially if you are dealing with requirements by the State Regents.

There was nothing more I could do except rearrange my entire schedule and accept my loss gracefully. Looking back on it now, I can tell you that graceful was not the style I chose to take, but I did take the zero level course the following summer and felt it was a waste of my time and more importantly, my money.

I was a traditional student then, and if nothing else, it did teach me to be more empathetic to the nontraditional students I see come into the office everyday who are going

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through the same frustrations and feelings I did. You see I am on the other side of the desk now working at higher education program office while going to college part-time. Many nontraditional students have been out of high school a decade or more. The graduation requirements have changed since then, leaving them sometimes with having to take several zero level courses before taking their classes for credit. I now understand that the institutions are just trying to help students get a better grasp on areas they may be behind in before they take the college level course, but I still believe it should be the student's choice.

Donna's Perceptions on Entering College.

My daughter comes home from school and cries because she is having trouble in Algebra and wants me to help her. She is frustrated at not being able to complete the assignment. So I, being 'Super-Mom', sit down at the kitchen table with her and offer to give her a hand. After all, I made "B's" in algebra during high school. She tries to explain what the object of her lesson is. I try to comprehend what her teacher has told her, what the book explains, and what she is saying about how to do the work. Pretty soon I am fairly well lost.

I take the book and go into the living room and sit down on the couch. I light up a cigarette and start at the beginning of the chapter. I read in an attempt to get a glimmer of what is going on. I read past the section of the chapter she is at. So far no light flicks on in my mind. I am beginning to doubt if I will be able to provide any assistance to her at all. I flip through other chapters and still no inclination on what I am trying to accomplish.

Finally, I go back into the kitchen where my daughter is completing the rest of her homework and I sit down with a piece of paper. I try to work a few problems out and get a different answer each time. Since the answers are not in the book, there is no way for me to check my work. I show my daughter how I did the problems in a last ditch hope that something I am doing will trigger her teacher's lecture on the subject. I feel angry, worthless, frustrated, and I give up. My daughter tells me not to worry, that she will just go to school early in the morning and get help from her

teacher. I can tell she is very disappointed in me as I am with myself. In my mind, I see her saying to herself, "Some smart mother I have, she cannot even figure out 8th grade algebra." At that very moment, I vowed I would learn or relearn how to do algebra. In fact, I would relearn/learn whatever it takes to be able to help my children in school. Maybe I am not all that great in algebra, but there is not any reason why I cannot be.

The next day after they go to school, I go down to the local university and talk to a counselor. She schedules me for a test to see what my interests are. After filling out a folder full of forms, taking a test, filling out more forms, I am sent to finally get registered for upcoming classes. I am more than a little nervous. Most of the people I have seen walk by are in the late teens. I am in my late thirties. The other students look so young, so full of life, so smart. They probably knew exactly how to do 8th grade algebra. I am depressed to think that I will be going into classes with people only ten years older than my children and ten to twenty years younger than myself who probably know all about Old English Lit and Pre-College Algebra. But I keep telling myself, everyone has to start somewhere.

Remembering when I first learned to ride a bike, my dad pushed me on it and I kept telling him not to let go. He said he would not until I was ready. I was so afraid if he let go, I would fall and get hurt. It seemed like we were moving so fast. I knew I would be killed for sure. Then the next thing I knew my dad was not beside me anymore. He was a block behind me and I was all by myself. Not only was I by myself, but I was riding my bicycle without any assistance. It felt wonderful. My confidence soared. I pedaled faster and faster as the wind rushed through my hair. I saw a stop sign coming up and for an instant I felt panic. Would I be able to stop the bicycle before I got into the intersection? Would I be able to stop and not fall off the bike? I was soon petrified. But I applied the brake and lifted my feet off the pedals and there I was, stopped at the sign. It felt great, but now I was facing another obstacle. Could I get started by myself? For an instant I felt fear and looked around to find my father. But I realized that I could do this by myself and I placed my feet back on the pedals and pushed hard. I was off again.

Again, I felt the exhilarating of doing this for myself.

I am again brought back to the problem of college. I realized that nervousness, fear, excitement were all natural feelings. In time, being a student would be old hat. In the meantime, I just had to take it one step at a time. Yes, it was scary and exciting and yes, I might make some stupid mistakes in class and look like a fool. But no, it would not kill me. And more importantly, I would learn. So I held my head up and walked on down the hall into the first class of my college career and pretty soon the wind was rushing through my hair or was that information soaring over my head?

Eric's Perceptions about being a student.

The 737 cut smoothly through the clouds as it descended from 30,000 feet. Being seated next to a rear wing window, I could feel the effects of the gravitational pull forcing my body against the port hole. I nervously watched the wings vertical movement which certainly did not coincide with the main fuselage. Do wings 40 feet long break off? I am sure they do, but they cannot today. I have people to meet, deals to make and tests to study for.

The jet landed at the Tallahassee, Florida airport without further incident and taxied slowly to an awaiting terminal. My two traveling companions and I quickly grabbed our luggage from the overhead compartments and followed the herd of anxious passengers off the plane. As we headed for the rent-a-car counter I casually tossed my overnight bag across my shoulder and felt a sharp object gouge into my back. I knew without looking what was causing the annoying pain. The excitement of the "big business deal" suddenly died. There I was, standing in Tallahassee with two business associates, preparing to negotiate a deal for more than a million dollars, with a marketing book poking me in the back!

This had to be a sign--but for what? Did the wing not fall off the plane in order for the book to take a shot at my back just to remind me of the upcoming test? Or did the plane land safely so I could complete my business and return to my wife and daughter? Whatever the reason might be, the

book would loose that day, just as it had many times in the past.

Where are my priorities? Actually, I have never known in what order my priorities are when choosing between career and school. Standing at the rent-a-car counter, I knew one thing for certain--school was an annoyance. It was like a feeling you get when you try to forget about a particular instance, knowing full well it will return to nibble at the back of your mind until you feel guilty.

My two business associates and I loaded our gear into the rent-a-car and headed toward Perry, Florida where we were to meet with clientele located at the paper mill belonging to Proctor and Gamble. Both of my traveling companions were engineers and one I had never met. While en route to our destination, the three of us began talking about our jobs and the newly acquainted engineer asked me what type of degree I had. I have been asked that question many times and every time I am asked, I feel embarrassed that I do not have a college education, yet. But at the same time, I am not ashamed about my lack of education. I have accomplished more than many of my co-workers who have acquired a college degree.

I quickly answered the inquisitive engineer with a reply that shocked his curious mind. "I do not have a degree of any kind," I said. The engineer knew my position in the company and the expression on his face was one of "this is not fair". He replied that he had tried a master's degree by going back to night school, but said he had to give it up. I told him I myself was going back to school and I knew how hard it could be to work for a company that demanded 110 percent from its employee. I told him I had a test in a couple of days and I would benefit greatly if I could find the secret to traveling and studying. The engineer was of the persistent type and asked me why I would put myself through the punishment of night school. Chalk one up for the engineer, I thought. Finally, someone who worked for the same company as I did and yet understood my dilemma.

The engineer wanted to know more about my career and how I earned the position I held. We were of the same age and I told the engineer how I had become employed with the company at about the same time, I would guess he was taking finals in his freshman year at college. I had worked

diligently over the years and learned my business well while also fine-tuning my ability to persuade and understand different traits in personal behavior. Knowing how different personalities will react to the same situation has aided my career more than any other ability. This ability is what I believe to be an art and one a book will never have the capabilities of teaching.

We reached our destination and met with the previously arranged personnel from Proctor and Gamble. After introductions, we all got down to business with the engineer leading negotiations. After all, corporate headquarters had sent this engineer to show division personnel like myself, how to play hard ball with the big boys. As the meeting progressed, I noticed our engineer was not playing well. It was not from lack of intelligence on the engineer's part, but rather a lack of understanding of the business he was in. I politely intervened and took over our side of the bargaining table. I felt confident as I continued on with the talks. I knew what had to be done and how to do it. I was feeling rather good about myself--mostly at the cost of the engineer's bruised ego. The business deal ended very favorably and the mind games that accompany business negotiations were over.

As we flew towards home the next day, I remember feeling at ease with myself for a change. I had succeeded at the biggest business deal I had ever been involved in. Knowing my manager back at our home office would be very pleased with the accomplished task also made me feel good. I remember on that flight home, watching our engineer sit slumped submissively in his seat. An engineer who one day ago thought the world could be conquered by the wrath of his ever-so-present intelligence. His ego would eventually heal and we both learned valuable lessons from one another. The engineer knew I had won this one and yet, he held no ill feelings towards me. His day would come with experience and my day would come someday for that degree.

Forty-eight hours later I was sitting in a room full of desks and students with a test looking up at my worried eyes. I knew when very few of the questions on the first page looked familiar that it was not a good sign. I felt like a freshman in high school who had not studied adequately for an exam. I was a nobody now who was definitely losing this game.

The book won this time, but there is always tomorrow.

Sheila's Nontraditional Student Experience.

As I look back, I can see the many mistakes that I have made. I am just thankful that even though I learned about myself the hard way, I learned.

Many home problems led to my quitting high school after my sophomore year. I was striving for something, but I was not sure what. I came out of a bad marriage with one blessing. That was my son, Derek. At the age of 21, I married my husband Rick. I should have graduated the same year he did. Every time he would get an invitation to some type of class reunion, I would feel embarrassment. I received my GED in 1973. This helped my feeling of inadequacy, but it was not the same. All my brothers and sisters graduated from high school. Each graduation ceremony I attended was filled with mixed emotions. The pride I could see in their faces only led to my despair. I just felt that it was too late for me. In 1978, I decided to attend a technical school. I went for a year and received a secretarial certificate. This led to my first job other than clerking or waitressing. I was on my way.

During my employment, I met a retired colonel from the Air Force. His name was Dwayne. I had attended school with his daughters. They had all gone on to receive college degrees. Every time Dwayne came into my office, he would ask me, "What does the future hold for you, Sheila?" "Why are not you taking some college courses?" "You are wasting your brain." I listened to him every day. I gave him my excuses. "I cannot afford it." "I do not have time." This continued for five years. Finally, one day I said, "Dwayne, I cannot go to college, I have not finished high school, besides, I am not smart enough." Finally, I had admitted to someone, the feeling that had been haunting me for years. He then explained to me that a GED was adequate for college admission. So the ball started rolling. He called a mutual friend of ours, Dr. Bill Snodgrass. The next Sunday afternoon, Dwayne, Bill, and I met at Dwayne's house to discuss my future. Bill told me his history class started August 26 at a local

private university and he would come by and pick me up. I was told not to worry about admission procedures. That day Dwayne handed me a blank check and told me to write it for the amount I needed. Of course, I did not take it, but his confidence in me helped to give me the courage I needed to get started.

I finished my first college course with a B. I was so elated. I knew that this was the beginning. From there, I had the courage to enroll in 10 hours the next semester.

My family and friends have been very encouraging. When they say, "I do not know how you do it." "How can you run a household, work, be a mother, wife and still have time for class?" It is tough, but I love it. Nothing is better than the feelings I have about myself now. Whether my degree leads to financial security or not, no amount of money could replace my renewed self-esteem.

Vic's Perceptions. College at Fifty-Six?

Why would a fifty-six year old grandmother decide to go to college and begin an entirely new career? Her children were grown and had moved away, she owned her own business, and on the surface had everything she needed in life. Her husband was retired and they were at the age when people started to think about slowing down and maybe traveling or starting something they had always wanted to do, but never had the time. Instead she enrolled in a full load of hours in a college an hour's drive away.

During the oil boom her family income had reached levels that she and her husband had never imagined possible. They built the home of their dreams on twenty acres of woodland and were very happy. But as the oil market shut down it closed markets such as real estate and building. The family income dropped, and she had to work longer and harder than ever before just to breakeven in her real estate office. At fifty-six years old she was working ten and twelve hours a day, usually six days a week. Even with this commitment, the bills continued to mount. Making the monthly mortgage payment seemed a major victory in the economic struggle she faced. Health insurance was dropped when the premiums

could not be met. Doctor visits were put off or never made because there was no money to spare. Her husband cut wood to heat the home because the utility payments had become unmanageable.

She had worked hard all her life and was not daunted by the hours or the sacrifice. But all those years had been invested for a reason. She and her husband had planned to retire to Albuquerque and live. With no savings left, retirement was little more than a pipe dream now. Among the options were to go on as long as possible and hope that the market turned around, or to start over in a more stable career. When you are in your fifties you realize you cannot wait forever for a change. She was aware that you do not get a decent position without a college degree, regardless of experience. It seemed that the only decision to be made was what career path to choose.

As a young lady she had worked as a nurse assistant and had always had a love for the work. It seemed more rewarding to her than a business career. The decision was a career in Nursing and she decided to obtain an RN license due to the stability of the job. During the four plus years of college she would have to keep her business going. A business which was requiring more and more time. In addition, she would need to carry a certain number of hours to qualify for scholarships.

The prospect of higher education can be daunting enough in the best of circumstances. When you have not been in a classroom in over thirty years it can be quite terrifying indeed. Given the problems faced by the woman, many people would not even have begun. She is now enrolled at NWOSU in Alva. She commutes from Woodward, over an hour's drive one way. I spoke to her a few weeks ago and instead of a frustrated, overworked student, I found a determined woman who was making the best of her situation and seemed to actually enjoy the challenge of the learning experience. She still dreams of moving to Albuquerque, only now to work instead of retire. She still faces an uphill battle. Three to five more years of school and then licensing exams. After this she must begin a new career in an unfamiliar field.

Although it sounds as if the deck is stacked against her I can guarantee that, barring an unforeseen problem, she will be successful. The

problems she faces are no more serious than others she has conquered and, indeed, seem trifling compared to some of the situations she has been through. I am willing to bet that in ten years I will travel to Albuquerque and visit my parents. Of course, any activities will have to be planned around my Mothers job as a Registered Nurse. What an outstanding example she has been to her children and grandchildren!

Sandra-A Nontraditional Student Am I.

Yes, that is me, a nontraditional student. Probably, I am the most nontraditional of the students in this class. Not because of my age, although I am 49 (I have a hard time with that number); but, there are others in class who at least look as if we are the same age. It is not because I am working and going to school, because we are all doing that. I am not even trying to juggle a home, family, career, and studies. My son is in the Navy in California, my daughter in her freshman year at Oklahoma Baptist University, and my husband works evenings at Northrop. What makes me different? I am just taking a course in Marketing, not pursuing a degree. That sounds demoralizing!

Actually, learning has always been very important to me, and not being able to go on to college after graduation from high school has always been a source of disappointment. But, at that time, most girls married soon after graduation, which is what I did. Four months after we were married, we moved to Lake Charles, Louisiana to begin a 20 year Air Force career. It was there that I learned to be a wife and homemaker. After Louisiana, the Mountain Home, Idaho, then three years in Hawaii where my son was born and I learned to be a mother. The eight years we lived in Charleston were not enough. There is so much to do and so much history to see and experience in that beautiful city. And, my daughter was born there! It was here that I learned the joy of home ownership, decorating, and sewing.

After the initial shock and disbelief wore off, we all gained enormously from our two and half years in Turkey, where you can travel a short distance and feel as if 2,000 years have rolled away and you are back in the biblical times. Of

course, the only way to fully appreciate this experience is to speak the language. So, I took a course in Turkish, hired a Turkish maid and a gardener, and made friends with a Turkish family.

For almost 13 years, now, we have lived in rural community. Life was very boring at first. So, I enrolled in a General Office course at Vo-Tech to learn something so I could feel qualified to ask someone to hire me to do some kind of a job. In my third week at school, my teacher recommended me for a job at Security National Bank as a part-time bookkeeper. Why not! In my first five months I moved through several positions to become a department supervisor. Six years ago, the position of Secretary to the Chairman of the Board, Vice Chairman of the Board, and Cashier was offered to me, and it included just a little bit of marketing in my spare time. Six years later, I am Marketing Director and a little bit of a secretary in my spare time.

'Marketing Director' sounds like a pretty good position for someone who has very little formal education, does it not? Sounds like, is all there is to it! Why? No education. Of course! So, I decided one day to take a marketing course. Before allowing time to change my mind, I enrolled, and here I am. But, I need more. I need a course in Layout and Design. I need a course in Desktop Publishing. I need an education!

I have had an education in life that I would never trade for a more traditional life and education. A nontraditional student, yes, that is me. But, still a student for all the years of my life. Some of us learn in more nontraditional ways. If this sounds suspiciously defensive, it just might well be that. You never know, someday (if I can figure out what to do to become officially enrolled as a freshman) I may really become a traditional, nontraditional student. There would just be something wonderful about being able to say, 'I have a college degree.' Let us see now, how old would I be if I were to start in the fall?

VITA ²

Kathy Newman Harris

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Thesis: COLLEGE, TECHNOLOGY, BUSINESS CLASSES AND CAMPUS
LIFE: THE CHALLENGE FOR RURAL NONTRADITIONAL
STUDENTS

Major Field: Curriculum and Instruction

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Enid, Oklahoma, November 11,
1949, the daughter of Lennis C. and Minnie E.
Newman. Married to Gerald L. Harris. Mother of
Crystal A. Hamilton, John C. Holleman, Liberty D.
Holleman, Daniel L. Harris, and Gerald W. Harris.
Grandmother of Kristin M. Holleman.

Education: Graduated from Enid High School, Enid,
Oklahoma in May 1967; received Bachelor of Science
in Business Education from Phillips University in
1974; Master of Education from Phillips University
in 1987; Master of Business Administration from
Phillips University in 1990; completed requirements
for the Doctor of Education Degree at Oklahoma
State University in July 1993.

Professional Experience: Classroom Business Teacher -
Enid High School 1974-1980; Classroom Business
Teacher - Medford High School 1987-1992; Assistant
Professor of Business - Northwestern Oklahoma State
University 1992-present.

Professional and Academic Memberships: The Honor
Society of Phi Kappa Phi, Delta Kappa Gamma,
National Business Education Association, Oklahoma
Business Education Association, Oklahoma Education
Association, and National Education Association.