# THE EFFECT OF ALIENATION ON THE RETENTION AND ATTRITION OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

By

ALBERT CARL THOMAS

Bachelor of Arts
Southeastern Oklahoma State University
Durant, Oklahoma
1978

Master of Science
Oklahoma State University
Stillwater, Oklahoma
1990

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Thesis Approved:

Joseph A. Pearl
Thesis Adviser

Kathryn M. Terry

Paul S. Ward

Robert E. Nolan

Timothy J. Pettijohn
Dean of the Graduate College

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# CHAPTER I

# INTRODUCTION

## The Research Problem

Declining enrollments and the resulting losses of revenue have forced many universities to reduce faculty and staff as well as services to students (Figures 1 and 2). For example, according to an Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education report (1992), the number of first time freshman entering the Oklahoma higher education system declined by 2,970 from 1989-90 to 1990-91. Institutions of higher education across the United States are currently seeking methods to maintain standards and services during this period of student population decline. According to Noel (1985), universities must confront the issue of declining enrollments directly with innovative measures or risk the consequences brought about by fewer enrolled students.

Historically, colleges and universities have been content to accept high rates of attrition. The focus has generally been on recruitment rather than retention. Shrinking applicant pools have now caused the focus to expand to include retention as well as recruitment. Thus, at many universities, the perceived value or worth of the individual student, as an institutional asset, has risen.

American higher education has begun to reevaluate its posture with respect to institutional practices that influence student retention. Research indicates that institutions have the ability to influence students in their decision to leave or remain at the university. For example, Noel (1985) states that students will be more likely to reenroll when their educational environment provides exciting and substantive learning and personal experiences which can be related to future success.

Many universities, therefore, are currently in the process of defining an ideology which differs from the history and traditions of educational practices which have evolved since the first universities were founded. For example, increased emphasis on issues involving the curriculum and the relationship which exists between the student and the university are currently being addressed more fully by many universities.

Specifically, since the publication of Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction by Tyler (1949), curriculum design has been greatly influenced by the rigid institutional emphasis of his approach. Tyler, "the father of behavioral objectives", suggested an approach which deemphasized the student and placed the burden of curriculum design and development on administrators rather than teachers. The influence of the Tyler Rationale is so great that it remains the dominant model. However, higher

education is now beginning to move away from the restrictions defined and encouraged by the Tyler Rationale and toward a more student centered approach brought on by the imperatives of declining enrollments.

In reaction to criticisms of the Tyler model, higher education has come to more fully realize the interrelationship and interdependence that exists between the student and the institution. Tinto (1985) stated:

> Colleges are composed of academic and social communities, each with its own characteristic patterns of interaction and norms of behavior. Achieving membership in college involves participating in its academic and social communities; departure may arise from the failure to become integrated in either of those spheres. Failure to become integrated and establish competent membership in either the academic or social life of a campus appears to arise from two interrelated, yet distinct, phenomena: personal incongruency or individual isolation from the academic and social communities of the college (p. 35-36).

Isolation from, or the failure to become a part of, the social or academic environment of the university describes the concept of alienation. Winthrop (1964) claims that alienation is the central problem of mass society while Schacht (1970) states that alienation has no general meaning. He suggests that the meaning of alienation is always specific and merely suggests the separation of something from something. While the word is often misused, he adds that the meaning has changed over time.

The word alienation, according to Schacht (1970), originated from early theology and meant that man was separated from nature (God), or from his own nature. Rousseau (1947 ed.) first linked alienation and community and Hegel (1965 ed.) used alienation to define the separation from the way things should be. Moreover, Marx (1963 ed.) thought of alienation as the separation through the surrender of control over one's environment.

Alienation is also an important concept in existential philosophy. For example, May, Angel and Ellenberger (1958) define alienation for modern man as the loss of world or isolation from the human or natural world. They argue that alienation creates a sense of epistemological loneliness or an inability to develop a relationship with the natural world. Similarily, Morris (1966) labels alienation as the metaphysical blues, and May (1953) sees society and culture as having forced man to fear being alone.

Alienation influences human behavior within society in general and, specifically, within the context of the university. Institutions of higher education must determine the influence of alienation upon their students and, if needed, act to increase student integration into the university community.

Higher education has long been a major force in shaping the collective personality of the American people. It has

accommodated change, provided leadership, and demonstrated the ability to advance knowledge.

Since America's first days as a nation, universities have enjoyed rapid and steady growth in both numbers of students and capital resources. After the Revolutionary War, the founders felt that a strong system of education would help promote nationalism and further distance the new country from England. In 1785, a law was passed which gave the 16th section of each township to the schools. The 10th Amendment gave the states the right to establish institutional education (Yudof, Kirp, van Geel, Levin, 1987). The Common School movement established public support and control of education.

After the Civil War, secondary schools, which provided a link between the common schools and the universities, were established. The first secondary school opened in Boston in 1821 and by 1880 there were over 2,500 secondary schools with enrollments exceeding 200,000. America, quickly becoming an industrialized nation, required a better trained and better educated work force.

This expansion of education continued and benefited from the passage of the Merrill Act (1862) which established the Land Grant Colleges. Other major public universities began operations at about this same time. Combined, the new colleges and universities provided a means to educate the

population in order to support an economy which required increasing numbers of educated workers.

During the first forty years of the Twentieth Century, the United States was well on its way to becoming a major world power. Massive immigration during the first two decades of the century along with the increasing demands of a growing industrialized society placed great pressure on American education. The Depression years disrupted organized education as well as the economy. After World War II, returning veterans, armed with the G.I. Bill of Rights, descended on college and university campuses by the millions. The tremendous increase in the number of students, and income, following the involvement by some universities in research during the War, resulted in unprecedented growth in stature, desirability, and financial resources for universities.

As a result of the extremely high birthrate following World War II, the decade of the 1960s provided universities, again, with large numbers of potential students. Students from the Baby Boom generation, following their parents, supplied universities with a large and stable population group from which to draw. For example, data from the U.S. Department of Education (1992) reveals that the total population of school age children (5-17 years) increased from approximately 30 million in the 1949-50 school year to

almost 44 million in 1959-60 before topping out near 52.5 million.

The seemingly unlimited number of potential students has begun to decrease drastically. Actual birthrates and other forecasting methods indicate that the student pool will continue to fluctuate drastically well into the next century (Table 1-1).

Therefore, universities must realign their retention practices or face the severe financial hardships caused by declining enrollments. As enrollments decline, high attrition will probably not be acceptable to most universities. The price of attrition is costly to both the students and the university. For the university, certain costs are fixed, yet the costs of maintaining faculty, staff, and facilities are substantially the same regardless of student population. The loss of revenue from one student does not mean, therefore, that costs are reduced by that same amount. Conversely, the addition or retention of the revenue from one student above the fixed cost break even point results in a significant profit to the university.

Table 1-1

Oklahoma High School Graduates

| YEAR | NO. HS GRADUATES |
|---|---|
| 1988 | 37,828 (Actual) |

Table 1-1 (Continued)

| YEAR | NO. HS GRADUATES |
|---|---|
| 1993 | 31,120 |
| 2001 | 38,101 |
| 2005 | 30,690 |

Gone are the days when universities can afford to allow high attrition rates. Clearly, alternative methods must be discovered and implemented to retain those students who enroll. Determination of the effect of alienation on the retention and attrition of students is one area that should be explored in greater depth.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the effect of alienation on the retention and attrition of undergraduate university students.

Further, this study is an attempt to gather meaningful information beyond that reported in similar studies. For example, Tinto (1985), Noel and Levitz (1983), Anderson (1985), Spady (1970), Bean (1980), and others defined numerous characteristics or variables which are thought to influence student retention and attrition. While it is not clear the degree to which each variable or combination of

variables influence retention and attrition, it is clear that there is a relationship between the student, the university environment, and these variables.

The multi-dimensional nature of alienation incorporates and supports an interactional theory which suggests that a relationship exists between the academic, social, and personal variables of the student and the university.

Burbach and Thompson (1973), in a similar study, found that no relationship existed between alienation and attrition. In contrast, Goodrich (1980) and Suen (1983) reported that there was a relationship between alienation and attrition. These studies attempted to determine if a relationship existed between alienation and attrition of university students as a group.

While this study will attempt to confirm the effect of alienation on retention and attrition, it differs from other studies in that it will attempt to measure and define that effect across the various university classes. For example, data will be collected and analyzed from Freshmen, Sophomores, Juniors, and Seniors from groups of students that both remained and departed the university.

This study was designed to provide additional insight into areas which may suggest improvements in the retention practices of institutions of higher education.

## Need for the Study

In past years, higher education experienced steady and continuous growth in the number of potential students and in the revenue which was a result of their enrollment. Recently, that growth trend has slowed and, in fact, begun a reversal or decline. Therefore, it has become increasingly important to identify those areas which may influence students to voluntarily depart the university.

In 1980, according to the Oklahoma State University Student Profile (1991, p. 98), Oklahoma produced 39,305 graduating high school seniors. In 1990, Oklahoma had 35,606 graduating seniors. By 1993, forecasts indicate that Oklahoma will graduate approximately 30,915 seniors. As mentioned above, an Oklahoma State Regents Student Data Report (1992, p. 125) recounts similar information and further projects an increase in the number of graduating seniors to 38,101 (approximately the 1988 number) from the 1993 low before declining to 30,538 in 2006 (Figure 3). Additionally, the Oklahoma State University Student Profile (1992, p. 98) reports an alarming decline in Oklahoma State University's share of high school graduates. For example, the University's share fell from a high of 9.1% in 1980 to 5.7% in 1992. Thus, a 5.7% share of 1993 high school graduates would result in only 1,762 new freshmen for Oklahoma State University. The result of declines in the

numbers of graduating seniors and in the University's share of high school graduates are reflected in the number of new freshman enrolling (Figure 4). According to the Student Profile (1992, p. 59), for example, resident enrollment of new freshmen declined from 3,127 in 1982 to 1,894 in 1992, a decline of 1,233, while the retention rate remained virtually unchanged at 74.6% and 74.4% respectively (Figure 5).

In a Vanderbilt University study, Ouellette (1990) stated that the availability of traditional college age students has been in decline since the beginning of the 1980s and that economic and population issues have forced many graduating seniors to postpone or seek alternative or nontraditional methods to continue their education. This study is representative of other studies which indicate similar findings with respect to retention in higher education.

These studies suggest a trend which indicates a decline, across the nation, in the number of high school graduates available for recruitment. Thus, to maintain current student populations and prevent loss of revenue, colleges and universities must consider alternative retention methods and practices.

Ouellette (1990), Whittemore (1989), Logan (1989), and Storey (1988) assert that institutions of higher education should assist freshman students during the difficult period

of adjustment to university life to help ease the high attrition rates which are common during and shortly after the freshman year.

These interactional theories suggest that student attrition is the result of interaction between certain characteristics of the students and the institutional environment which surrounds them. Conversely, student retention must then be the result of interaction between characteristics of students and the institutional environment.

Attrition studies seek to discover the reasons students choose to leave universities. Retention studies, on the other hand, focus on the reasons students choose to remain at the university. Therefore, there are both negative and positive reasons why students choose to leave or remain at the university. The focus of this study is on the effect of alienation on the retention and attrition of university students. According to Noel (1985, p. 1), "The excitement ahead in higher education lies in what an institution can do to deliver learning - student growth and success - that leads to reenrollment, to the desire on the part of the students to come back".

Oklahoma State University has, in the past several years, conducted or sponsored a number of student retention studies. It is important, however, for Oklahoma State

University to continue to gather and analyze data on retention.

This study is an attempt to provide additional data for evaluation. It was further designed to help expand awareness of the immediate and future importance of retention practices.

# CHAPTER II

# LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to present literature relevant to this study. The review of literature has been divided into the following five parts: 1) student attrition in higher education, 2) student retention in higher education, 3) Oklahoma State University retention studies, 4) alienation, 5) summary.

## Student Attrition in Higher Education

Attrition in higher education refers to students who voluntarily or involuntarily leave the college or university. It is concerned with factors which may influence students to depart the university. It also refers to an event which has traditionally been considered an unavoidable fact - merely an acceptable consequence of the business of higher education.

The predictable increase in student numbers and resulting revenue that universities have experienced since the end of World War II is beginning to decline alarmingly. Consequently, universities must learn to identify and respond to those factors which contribute to student attrition.

Tinto (1982, p. 30) warned "Student withdrawal is a uniquely individual event". From the institutional point of

view, the departure of an individual becomes merely an addition to the attrition statistics. From the point of view of the individual, however, departure from the university often marks an event which will significantly affect the future for that individual.

Although withdrawal from the university may seem simple or routine from the institutional perspective, it is often complex and problematic from the perspective of the individual. Tinto (1982, p. 4) stated, "... a definition of dropout appropriate to the perspective of the individual is the recognition that the meanings a student attributes to his or her behavior may differ substantially from those that an external observer attaches to the same behavior. The simple act of leaving an institution may have multiple and quite disparate meanings to those who are involved in or are affected by that behavior".

Students do leave universities in vast numbers. Interestingly, according to Tinto (1985, p.32), "Nearly 85% of student institutional departures are voluntary. They occur despite the maintenance of adequate levels of academic performance. In fact, such withdrawals may involve many of the brightest and more creative students on campus, individuals whose grade point averages often exceed those of the average persister". Additionally, he states that "Involuntary departure most often takes the form of academic dismissal. Only rarely, is it due to a violation of

institutional rules".

Attrition rates vary widely from institution to institution. For example, Ross (1988) reported that the attrition rate of new freshman at Big 8 Universities during the 1986-1987 academic year ranged from 14.9% at Colorado to 25.9% at the University of Oklahoma to 33.3% at Oklahoma State University (Figure 6). Noel and Levitz (1983) found that freshman-to-sophomore year attrition rates ranged from 13% to 33% at 144 Ph.D. granting institutions in the United States.

Over the past 10 years freshman attrition rates at Oklahoma State University have ranged from a low of 25.9% to a high of 33.3% according to the OSU Student Profile (1991) (Figure 6). These percentages represent from 1,010 to 1,469 freshman students who depart the university each year. Over the past five years, an average of 1,280 freshman depart the university annually. Attrition at OSU is not exclusive to the freshman class.

Of the total student attrition, over the past five years, 33.1% is freshman, 22.3% sophomore, 23.8% junior, and 20.7% senior. The mean numbers of students represented by these percentages are 1,280 freshman, 862 sophomore, 920 junior, 803 senior, for a total of 3,864 students which equals a 24.7% university-wide undergraduate attrition rate (Figure 7).

The 1992 edition of the Oklahoma State University

Student Profile classified dropouts according to ethnic origin:

Table 2-1

Number of dropouts

| | Total Students | % Dropped | # Dropped |
|---|---|---|---|
| White - | 12,381 | 23.6 | 3,015 |
| Black - | 406 | 33.2 | 132 |
| Nat. Am. - | 851 | 27.6 | 205 |
| Hispanic - | 180 | 25.4 | 46 |
| Asian - | 247 | 20.2 | 49 |
| Non-Resident Alien - | 721 | 24.5 | 146 |
| Total - | 14,786 | 24.0 | 3,593 |

Table 2-2

Percent of dropouts

| | % Total Students | % Dropout |
|---|---|---|
| White | 83.7 | 84.0 |
| Black | 2.7 | 3.6 |
| Native American | 5.7 | 5.7 |
| Hispanic | 1.2 | 1.2 |
| Asian | 1.6 | 1.2 |
| Non-Resident Alien | 4.8 | 4.0 |

Interestingly, of the 3,593 students that dropped out, 3,015 or 84% were white, while 578 or 16% were other than white. The 3,015 students that dropped out represent 20.3% of all students, while the 578 students represent 3.9% of all students. Further, the attrition rate for all ethnic groups, except white and black, is the same or less than their percentage of the total student population.

Nationwide, Pantages and Creeder (1978) reported a 60% attrition rate over four years, i.e., 60% of all freshman students leave the university during the four years after enrollment and before graduation.

Myers (1981) concluded that the majority of freshman departures from a university occur during the first six weeks of the term. Noel (1985) agrees that the most critical time for student departures is the first few weeks of school. Tinto (1985, p. 9), supports the critical time observation, "A critical time in the student career is the period of transition between high school and college, which immediately follows entry to the institution. The first semester, especially the first six weeks, can be most difficult". This holds particularly true at large institutions where individuals are forced to transition from a secure comfortable world to the seemingly cold and impersonal world which often surrounds large universities. Tinto (1985) observes that the most frequent dropouts occur during the beginning of the first year and during the later

part of the first year. The period between the first and second year is also critical. Noel (1985) adds, that it is not difficult for recent high school graduates to retreat to safe and known support systems when faced with the challenge of starting over again in a new and unknown environment. He further suggests that universities provide comprehensive support services and activities during the first year.

Anderson (1985) postulates that there are forces which act against persistence of students at a university. The six forces he lists are: 1) Completing institutional procedures, e.g. registering and enrolling. 2) Selecting appropriate courses, e.g. selecting courses required for graduation. 3) Reading and analyzing college level texts, e.g. estimates that 24,000 to 40,000 pages of reading required for a B.A. degree. 4) Achieving on tests, e.g. estimates of 100 to 200 tests during a college career. 5) Completing research and written assignments, e.g. meeting academic standards and expectations. 6) Performing in laboratories, e.g. demonstrating ability. He adds, " The obstacles account for some of the reasons that students leave college, but they cannot fully explain poor student performance or high attrition rates. Just as there are external and internal forces which influence student's decision to go to college, there are external and internal forces that tend to push a student out of college or at least militate against academic success".

Tinto (1975, p. 89-125) suggested that student attrition is very much like Durkheim's theory concerning suicide. He stated,

> "According to Durkheim, suicide is more likely to occur when individuals are insufficiently integrated into the fabric of society. Specifically, the likelihood of suicide in society increases when two types of integration are lacking - namely, insufficient moral integration and insufficient collective affiliation ... When one views the college as a social system with its own value and social structures, one can treat dropout from the social system in a manner analogous to that of suicide in the wider society".

Findings and conclusions identified in the above mentioned studies are consistent with information contained in similar studies.

Students who become attrition statistics - who depart the university - have been found by many researchers to share certain traits, characteristics, or habits. For example, Ross (1988) observed that academic history, race, gender, ACT scores, and high school grade point average were significant predictors of attrition at Oklahoma State University. Noel (1985) found that ACT scores, career goals, uncertain academic major, poor instruction, poor advising, unrealistic expectations, poor academic preparation, university staff, university services, and content relevancy were significant, among others.

Other researchers including Astin (1977) summarized the characteristics of high risk freshman. These

characteristics are: poor academic records, low or unknown aspirations, poor study habits, and low parental educational level.

Simpson (1977) reported that dropouts have families from the lower end of the socioeconomic and educational scales, have lower IQ scores, poor academic preparation, lower ACT scores, a small town background, low expectations, poor study habits, are lacking in social skills, and are less satisfied in general.

A 1990 Maryland study identified family status, aptitude test scores, high school class rank, emotional adjustment, and employment as significant retention factors. Murray (1990) reported that a combination of unrealistic expectations, non-involvement, poor academic performance, and low involvement in university life were major determinants of student attrition. Goldman (1989) found that change of major, course load patterns, housing location, and grade point average affected attrition.

Barton (1988) observed that high school grade point average, ACT composite score, high school curriculum, academic expectations, employment, college grade point average, use of campus support services, and overall satisfaction with the university were significant factors in student attrition. McElroy (1988) listed academic major, advisor, quality of instruction, extracurricular activities, housing, finances, and expectations as significant.

Simpson (1977) listed grade point average, credit hours attempted/completed, and enrollment status as attrition variables among university students.

Additionally, Storey (1988) identified institutional fit, academic integration, social life, faculty contact, finances, outside influences, educational goals, and institutional commitment as significant. Logan (1989) mentioned environmental fit and social and social adjustment factors as important. And, Nicholas (1990) studied the intent to remain, expectations, congruence with expectations, early involvement, declaration of a major, and early satisfaction with respect to attrition of university students.

To briefly summarize the major significant characteristics associated with university student attrition, the following list is presented:

academic record,
major area of study,
orientation programs,
advisor interaction,
friends,
expectations,
family support,
ACT scores,
race,
transition to college,
high school preparation,
university staff and services,
faculty interaction,
quality instruction,
school and social activities,
importance of education,
finances,
grade point average,
gender,
alienation,

investment in undergraduate experience,
and overall satisfaction with the university.

Attrition studies have not been able to identify any single characteristic which, in itself, explains or predicts attrition. A variety of factors or characteristics, working together to varying degrees, seem to best account for attrition. Therefore, several interactional theories have become popular. These theories postulate that a variety of forces or characteristics interact to influence attrition.

Rootman (1972) asserted that the "person-role fit" described the relationship between individual characteristics and the requirements of the institution, i.e. how well the students fits the institution. He also stated that the characteristics of the student were psychological and may be identified through the use of psychological tests.

Spady (1970) suggested that social and academic integration correspond to shared values and influence attrition decisions. He added that background characteristics are important in the longitudinal dropout process, e.g. family background, socioeconomic status, and academic ability and potential. This attrition model indicates that these characteristics lead to greater social integration which increased satisfaction, which increased institutional commitment, which, in combination, greatly influenced the departure decision.

Tinto (1975) produced the most popular attrition model. It springs from the work of both Durkheim and Spady, and is very similar to their models. He states that in the social system of the university, goal commitment leads to institutional commitment. Institutional commitment leads to peer group and faculty interactions which leads to social integration which leads to increased institutional commitment. This circular model, therefore, reduces the chances of the student deciding to depart the university.

Pascarella (1980) built upon the preceding models but added the importance of student interaction with the faculty. Outcomes are expected to be indirectly influenced by faculty interaction with students. Thus, the possibility of student attrition will be greatly reduced.

These models suggest that students, along with their particular set of characteristics, interact with the social and academic characteristics of the university to produce a fit between student and university. Therefore, it seems that an interrelationship and interdependence exists between the student and the university environment. The overall strength of which may be said to influence student attrition.

## Student Retention in Higher Education

Student retention in higher education refers to students who choose to remain at the university. It is

concerned with factors which influence students to remain at the university rather than those which influence students to depart the university.

Many of the factors which influence student retention are similar to those factors which influence student attrition. They are presented separately in this study to insure that a clear distinction is drawn between the two. Further, for the sake of clarity and ease of understanding, the separation of the two seems necessary.

Like people, universities get only one chance to make a good first impression. Unfortunately, that first impression is often lacking in the essential elements of comfort, warmth, and friendliness. In other words, university students are not made to feel a part of the university - they are not allowed to become a member of the university community.

There exists an implied bargain or contract between the student and the university. This implied contract, if not legal, may be considered morally binding. The ingredients of a valid legal contract are "offer, acceptance, and consideration". For example, the university "offers" to provide the student with and education. "Acceptance" is satisfied upon enrollment, and "consideration" is fulfilled when the student pays money to the university. Included in the offer are educational expectations, social expectations, and expectations that full membership in the educational

community will be forthcoming.

Tinto (1985, p. 35) reinforced this thought, "In a very real sense, the process of persistence in college is very much like that of establishing competent membership, that is, becoming integrated in the communities of the college". Noel (1985, p. 18) adds,

> "The communities of memory that tie us to the past also turn us toward the future as communities of hope. They carry a context of meaning that can allow us to connect our aspirations for ourselves and those closest to us with the aspirations of a larger whole and see our own futures as being, in part, contributions to a common good".

As stated earlier in this study, universities, to maintain viability in the future, must become more proficient at retaining students. Patrick Terenzini (1982) stated the necessity to conduct retention studies is that educational administrators recognize that it is less costly and more efficient to retain students rather than recruit new or even transfer students.

An emerging theme in recent retention studies is that of the importance of quality in education. Tinto (1982) stated, that the quality of education is a valid retention concern. Noel (1985), added that quality education and student learning leads to student success and satisfaction which, in turn, leads to student persistence. Noel continues, "Reenrollment or retention is not then the goal; retention is the result or by-product of improved programs

and services in our classrooms and elsewhere on campus that contribute to student success".

Conversely, students who find themselves isolated from the mainstream of the social and academic aspects of the university become a higher withdrawal risk than students who are well integrated. Additionally, Rodriguez (1978), Peterson (1978), Goodrich (1980), and Suen (1983) conducted studies related to the effect of alienation upon retention and attrition. These studies contradicted Burbach and Thompson's (1973) study which reported that there was no relationship between obtained scores on an alienation scale and student attrition or retention. The Suen study in particular had a much larger sample size and much more rigorous methods than the Burbach and Thompson study. Therefore, a feeling of isolation or alienation probably has some influence upon the retention of university students.

As stated earlier, the feeling of isolation, alienation, not belonging, or person-institutional incongruence manifests itself early in the career of a university student. Tinto (1982) pointed out that the most frequent dropout periods are the beginning of the first year and the later part of the first year. A number of characteristics have been identified by researchers which have been found to influence retention. Studies indicate that a combination of these characteristics, or an interaction between the characteristics possessed by the

individual student and the institutional environment, affect retention. Therefore, a careful examination of these characteristics is necessary.

Bean (1980, p. 27) noted a variety of variables which are presumed to have significant influence on student retention. He arranged them into four relevant categories. They are as follows:

Background Variables:

- Mothers education
- Fathers education
- High school grades
- Achievement test scores

Environmental Variables:

- Opportunity
- Family approval
- Likelihood of marrying

Organizational Variables:

- Close friends
- Contact with faculty
- Grades
- Membership in organizations
- Curriculum

Attitudinal Variables:

- Practical Value
- Boredom
- Confidence
- Certainty of choice
- Loyalty
- Certainty of major
- Educational goals
- Absenteeism

Barton (1988) conducted a study of 387 returning students and 387 non-returning students at a major university. Analysis of the data revealed that high school grade point average, ACT composite score, high school curriculum employment, college grade point average, and overall satisfaction with the university were strongly related to retention.

The relationship of gender to retention is mixed. For example, Cope and Hannah (1975) reported that males and

females were retained in equal proportions. Astin (1981) found that females are retained at higher rates than males, while Tinto (1982) found that males had higher retention rates than females. And Ross (1988) reported that females maintained slightly higher retention rates than males. Thus, at present, it appears that gender is not a significant factor in the retention of university students.

Another factor which seems to impact retention among university students is their perception of institutional or educational quality. As Noel (1985, p. 24) commented, "The emphasis on outcomes and the emerging themes of attrition mean that the key to attracting and retaining students in the 1980s [and perhaps beyond] is going to be quality". Vincent Tinto (1982) echoed much the same opinion when he stated that high retention rates may be achieved by establishing programs which illustrate genuine concern for the development and education for all students. Institutions, then, should be concerned with fulfilling the educational responsibilities that students deserve. Noel (1985) added that student learning leads to success, satisfaction, and retention.

Wilder (1987) conducted a study of 435 students to determine the importance of commitment to college. Results of this study revealed that students who had strong commitments to the importance of a college education were retained at higher levels than those with lesser

commitments. Additionally, Anderson (1985) listed factors which strengthened commitment or decision to attend college. These factors include: parents, peers, cultural values, availability of college information, teacher confidence, exposure to college educated people, academic skills, motivation, interest in college, career aspirations, self confidence, college educated role models, enjoyment of learning, and values that recognize the importance of education.

The possession of social skills is also a characteristic of students who remain at the university. Tinto (1982, p. 6) addressed the importance of these skills,

> "... evidence abounds that social skills are equally important [to academic skills] to persistence in college. These skills enable the person to locate, interact with, and use the resources for attainment available to student within the institution. The absence of social skills, especially among the disadvantaged segments of the student body, appears particularly important in the failure to maintain adequate levels of academic performance in college."

Social skills combined with academic skills are clearly important to determining the fit between the student and the university.

Logan (1989) and Whittemore (1989) addressed the issue of institutional fit. Logan suggested that the amount of experience a student has with his environment is vital in the student's ability to adjust, succeed, and persevere in

college. Whittemore also spoke of the importance of maximizing student-environment congruence.

The significance of orientation programs, with respect to retention, were addressed by Murphy (1989), Wilkie (1991), and Ouellette (1990). The results of these studies are mixed. They reveal that orientation programs at the beginning of the freshman year have little or no effect on retention, or that students may be only slightly less likely to dropout. They do mention, however, that new students require a period of adjustment to university life. They suggest that orientation programs may help ease the adjustment for new students.

This period of adjustment also involves adjustment to the college classroom environment. College classrooms and high school classrooms differ greatly in makeup, order, and instructional techniques. Noel (1985, p. 21) presented his view of the importance of first class sessions. He stated "A key step in improving retention is then recognition of the fact that those first sessions taught in freshman courses are probably the most important class sessions students will encounter during their college days". The first academic class sessions may then set the tone or the level of expectation for the remainder of the student's college career.

Other characteristics identified by researchers including Noel (1985), Ross (1988), Astin (1981), Murray

(1990), Barton (1988), Simpson (1988) Tinto (1982), Storey (1988), Logan (1989), Nicholas (1990), Pascarella (1977), Terenzini (1977), Bean (1978), and Spady (1970) to be significant factors in the retention of students are: academic record, high school preparation, major area of study, university staff and services, orientation programs, interaction with faculty, interaction with advisor, quality of instruction, friends, school and social activities, expectations, importance of college, family support, finances, ACT scores, grade point average, race, gender, transition to college, alienation, social skills, investment in undergraduate experience, and overall satisfaction with the university.

As with attrition studies, no single characteristic has been found to explain retention. Rather, a variety of these characteristics, working in concert, seem to have great influence.

The interactional nature of these characteristics and the subtle forces which govern their influence can be manipulated. For example, Tinto (1982) suggested that relatively modest and simple interventions can produce significant retention gains. He added that the use of counseling sessions, advisors, and faculty interaction are examples of successful and proven interventions. These, and similar interventions help ease the student's adjustment to college life. Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) also urged

that increased integration by students into college life will increase retention.

Pascarella (1982, p. 74) stated, "The ultimate purpose of retention studies and programs is to implement intervention strategies that can or will make a positive difference in retention rates." Therefore, intervention at critical points of a student's college career is called for.

However, there may be certain barriers to retention efforts. As Kermerer, Baldridge, and Green (1982, p. 68) explained when contrasting recruiting and retention,

> "By contrast, retention has almost exactly opposite organizational and administrative characteristics. Who is in charge of retention? How do you evaluate the effort, and what administrators can be held responsible? Just how visible is the effort to the campus community? The answers to these questions suggest that retention efforts are decentralized, difficult to evaluate, not under the jurisdiction of a single administrator, are an administrative nightmare, and they do not have a focal point".

Certain tactics, however, may be employed to combat poor retention. For example, Lenning, Beal, and Sauer (1980) listed six possible tactics to improve retention. These tactics are:

1) improved student/faculty interaction
2) improved peer interactions
3) better responsiveness to student needs and complaints
4) employment opportunities
5) present a meaningful view of the institution
6) better instruction.

Further, Noel (1978) presented 14 tactics to improve retention. They are:

1) establish steering committees
2) determine dropout rate
3) conduct dropout study
4) conduct self-study
5) establish task committees
6) increase faculty and staff awareness
7) use marketing approach
8) meaningful orientation program
9) establish strong counseling/advising program
10) provide career planning
11) provide remedial support
12) establish an early warning system
13) require exit interviews
14) establish a reward system for good advising and teaching

Additionally, Beal and Noel (1980), stated that a caring attitude of faculty and staff is viewed as the most potent retention force on campus.

A final aspect of retention that should be discussed is the manner in which educators speak of retention and attrition. Word usage affects individual perceptions and is a reflection of the philosophic posture of the person using the word. According to Dobson, Dobson, and Koetting (1985, p. 5), "The power of words is probably the most overlooked, least understood, and ultimately most neglected phenomenon in the field of education". Apple (1979) contends that words created to explain reality have, in fact, become reality. Thus, words tend to freeze reality into patterns or habits of thought. These perceptions of reality impact experience and thus may determine human behavior.

The words and language associated with retention and attrition studies may not be appropriate to describe the subtle relationship which exists between the student and the

university. For example, a common educational metaphor equates education to an industrial enterprise. This industrial metaphor suggests that education be conducted as a manufacturing process. In a manufacturing process, raw material is converted to a finished product through the application of a rigid procedure. Imperfect products are routinely recycled or discarded. Some words associated with this metaphor are: efficiency, cost effective, manage, management, programing, output, input, measure, objective, product, quality control, defective, feedback, control, and process.

Student attrition fits nicely within the framework of the industrial metaphor. Students who leave the university may be thought of as imperfect material to be recycled or discarded. Universities report attrition rates as percentages of students who leave the university just as industrial enterprises report the percentage of product damage or loss during the manufacturing process.

Perhaps a more appropriate metaphor should be adopted to help describe student retention. This metaphor should incorporate words which lend themselves to the promotion and accommodation of individual attitudes and differences rather than group trends. Some words that may be associated with this metaphor are: individual, respect, promise, potential, dialogue, care, hope, compassion, justice, safety, growth, and joy.

The retention literature suggests that the adoption of a more personal approach to retention would produce the most effective results. For example, studies indicate that faculty and advisors can significantly impact student retention rates. Therefore, the adoption of a different, more individually oriented metaphorical base with respect to retention seems necessary.

## Oklahoma State University Retention Studies

Student retention and attrition issues have long been of concern at Oklahoma State University. Ross (1988) described a sequence of studies dating to 1972. The retention study conducted by Ross (1988) summarized five studies conducted over a 16 year period. It also presented a comprehensive set of statistics regarding student characteristics, and concluded with eight specific proposals to improve retention at OSU. They include:

1. Adopt the increased retention of qualified students through sound educational practices as a stated University priority.
2. Establish a University-wide Action Commission on Retention.
3. Target high risk students for special attention.
4. Administratively track students throughout their academic careers.
5. Reinstitute the Early Alert System.

6. Recruitment of potential students should be targeted to those students with whom OSU can form mutually reciprocal and successful relationships.

7. Appoint an ad hoc committee to investigate the social and personal aspects of student persistence at OSU.

8. Establish a Peer/Student Support Network.

The 1972 retention study is remarkable only in that it seems to serve as the point at which retention and attrition matters first became an issue of concern. An OSU report (1991) additionally indicates that the year 1972 showed a decline of 500 students from the previous year.

The studies submitted in 1981 and 1982 summarized attrition statistics and called for the establishment of several committees and the development of a variety of programs.

A 1986 study, which sprang from a visit by the widely known retention expert, Dr. Lee Noel, proposed changes in the areas of freshman instruction, academic advising, orientation activities, developmental programs, and marketing. These recommendations contained a number of excellent strategies but, according to Ross (1988), "None of the recommendations were approved or implemented from the report".

A 1986 report titled "New Initiatives for Retention"

was presented by Dr. Smith Holt, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. This report contained two sections which clearly outlined specific and thoughtful tactics for improving retention. The two sections were titled "Pre-College Activities" and "Activities for Currently Enrolled Students".

Notably, this report was the first to focus entirely on retention issues. It did not make the common error of confusing retention with attrition. Also, it proposed several outstanding tactics which included proposals on academic advising, freshman orientation, intrusive advising, and enrollment follow-up.

The most comprehensive retention study to date was published by Cindy Ross and Bob England in 1988. This report is significant for three reasons. First, it consolidated retention information at OSU into a single organized document. Second, it provided the impetus for additional study and positive action. And third, it presented several tactics which may have great potential. These tactics include the reinstitution of an early alert system, the need to investigate the social and personal aspects of student persistence, and the establishment of a peer support network.

Another excellent source of retention and attrition data at OSU is the annual Student Profile published by the Oklahoma State University Office of Institutional Research.

This document provides a wealth of statistics which reveal a large combination of student characteristics and trends.

Oklahoma State University has the information on hand to understand the dynamics of attrition and retention. The next step seems to call for positive action.

## Alienation

The meaning of alienation has changed over time. Schacht (1970) states that alienation has no general meaning. He asserts that alienation has meaning only in context. Specifically, he wrote that alienation means only the separation of something from something. Generally, something has no meaning but, in context, something takes on a very specific meaning.

According to Schacht (1970), the origin of alienation can be traced from early theology. Theologians used the word to describe man's separation from nature (God), or the separation from one's own nature.

Rousseau (1947 ed.) was the first to link alienation and community. He believed that alienation was an individual event but felt that the community should become involved when an individual violated the terms of a social contract.

Hegel (1965 ed.) used alienation in two ways. First, he used alienation to refer to the separation of an individual in the social context. Second, he referred to

the separation or distance between the actual condition of an individual from the individual's true or essential nature. Generally though, Hegel believed that alienation defined the separation or isolation of man from the way things should be.

Marx (1963 ed.), while strongly influenced by Hegel, used alienation in many, and often contradictory, ways. Essentially, however, he combined Hegel's dual definitions of alienation. Marx felt that alienation or separation occurred through man's surrender of control over his own environment. For Marx, separation or alienation was merely a result of surrender.

The modern use of alienation springs mainly from Sociological literature and from Existential philosophy. The more recent literature differs from the earlier view of alienation in that it may be common for modern man to be unaware of their alienation.

Some Sociologists, including Blauner (1964), Dean (1961), and Middleton (1963), have linked alienation with a variety of individual and social problems including: loneliness, dissatisfaction in social relations, dissatisfaction with work, feelings of powerlessness, distrust, apathy, meaninglessness, family, individual and societal values, and the role of the individual in society.

DeGrazia (1948), speaking of Durkheim's definition of alienation, stated that the three components of alienation

were anxiety, separation, and a feeling of pointlessness. Additionally, Seeman (1959) classified the components of alienation as powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and self-estrangement.

Alienation is also an important concept in Existential philosophy. For example, Winthrop (1964) stated that alienation is the central problem of mass society. According to May, Angel, and Ellenberger (1958), alienation for the existentialist is separation or isolation from the human and natural world or, for modern man, the loss of world. Alienation from the natural world can create a condition of epistemological loneliness or the inability on the part of the individual to establish a true relationship with the natural world. Morris (1966) defined alienation as the "metaphysical blues".

Interestingly, Maslow (1962) stated that existential philosophy may provide psychology with the underlying philosophy that it currently lacks. He accused psychologists of avoiding responsibility by practicing a form of academic leftism, i.e. they point out the problems but not the solutions. He added that many psychologists are afflicted with the Ishmael Complex, i.e., they sulk in their tents and dream of world conquest. Maslow's opinion of Kuhn's (1962) theory of paradigm formation is unknown.

May (1953), speaking of society and alienation, stated:

> "Society has forced man to fear being alone. It is permissible to say that you are lonely because that is a way of admitting that it is not good to be alone. It is not permissible, therefore, to say that you like to be alone. Social acceptance has the power to hold feelings of loneliness at bay".

A number of studies have been conducted on the subject of alienation as it relates to retention and attrition. Specifically, Burbach and Thompson (1973) conducted a study of university students which sampled the student's feelings of alienation. This study was concerned with problems of attrition among university students. They constructed an instrument which claimed to measure the student's feelings of alienation in three areas - meaninglessness, powerlessness, and social estrangement. The instrument also provided an overall measure of alienation. Results of this study revealed no relationship between scores obtained on the Burbach University Alienation Scale and student attrition.

Rodriguez (1978), Peterson (1978), and Goodrich (1980) also conducted studies concerned with attrition of university students. They employed a variety of self-made instruments to measure student attitudes toward alienation. The results of these studies demonstrated a strong relationship between scores on the various instruments and student attrition.

Suen (1983) conducted a study that was very similar to the study conducted by Burbach and Thompson. Suen provided

a much larger sample size for his study, however. He employed the Burbach University Alienation Scale as the primary instrument to measure student attitudes toward alienation. In terms of methods and procedures, this study was much more rigorous than the other studies mentioned above. Suen found that a strong relationship existed between obtained scores - feelings of alienation - and attrition among university students.

## Summary

The preceding literature review concerning student attrition, student retention, Oklahoma State University retention studies, and alienation is but a small sample from the available literature. This review was an attempt to identify and examine the critical issues involved.

The literature contained herein is a fair and representative summary of information available in the field.

Retention and attrition problems can be lessened. The problems must be defined, a plan must be established, and action must be taken. The current literature clearly outlines the characteristics associated with retention and attrition. From these characteristics, the image of the

problem comes more clearly into focus. The literature suggests that, with careful planning and aggressive execution, the problems can be overcome.

# CHAPTER III

# METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the population and sample, the survey instrument, data collection, and data analysis methods and procedures used in this study.

## Population and Sample

The population of this study was comprised of Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, and Senior undergraduate students enrolled at Oklahoma State University (OSU) during the Fall 1992 semester and the Spring 1993 semester. Oklahoma State University was selected because it is representative of a large university with a high undergraduate attrition rate (25%). According to the 1991-1992 edition of the Oklahoma State University Catalog, 90% of the University's 20,000 students are from Oklahoma; 6% from other states; and 4% from 25 different countries. Of the undergraduate population, 56% are male and 44% are female. Minority students total 9% of the student body.

Specifically, according to the University Student Profile (1992), the composition of the undergraduate student population at Oklahoma State University is:

Table 3-1

Composition of Undergraduate Student Population

| Variable | | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|---|
| Residency - | In-State | 12,996 | 87.9% |
| | Out-of-State | 1,069 | 7.2% |
| | Non-Res Alien | 721 | 4.9% |
| Classification - | Freshman | 3,239 | 21.9% |
| | Sophomore | 3,291 | 22.2% |
| | Junior | 3,675 | 24.8% |
| | Senior | 4,282 | 28.9% |
| | Special | 20 | |
| | Total | 14,507 | |
| Sex - | Male | 7,938 | 53.7% |
| | Female | 6,848 | 46.3% |
| Race - | White | 12,381 | 83.7% |
| | Black | 406 | 2.7% |
| | Native Am | 851 | 5.7% |
| | Hispanic | 180 | 1.2% |
| | Asian | 247 | 1.6% |
| | Non-Res. Alien | 721 | 4.8% |

Table 3-1 (Continued)

| Class | New | Return | Readmis * | Trans * | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Fresh | 2,232 | 660 | 97 | 256 | 3,245 |
| Soph | | 2,511 | 161 | 619 | 3,291 |
| Jun | | 2,850 | 217 | 608 | 3,675 |
| Sen | | 4,040 | 175 | 67 | 4,282 |
| Total | 2,232 | 10,061 | 650 | 1,550 | 14,493 |

* Readmission
* Transfer

The population sample used for this study totaled 800 undergraduate students and former students. The sample was comprised of two groups of 400 subjects. The first group included subjects who enrolled at the beginning of the academic year and maintained student status until the end of the academic year (Fall 1992 - Spring 1993). The second group included subjects who enrolled at the beginning of the academic year but departed the university before the end of that academic year (mid year graduates were not included).

Further, of the 400 subjects in each group, 100 were selected from each of the four undergraduate university classes, i.e., 100 Freshmen, 100 Sophomore, 100 Junior, and 100 Seniors. Subjects were selected by stratified random sample. For example, 100 Freshmen were selected, on a random basis, from a population that included only Freshmen which remained at the university. This process was repeated

with each group and with each of the remaining undergraduate university classes.

Random sampling, according to Gay (1987), allows every individual within a defined population an equal chance of selection. Further, a stratified random sample allows selection of equal-sized samples from subgroups within the population. This study involves multiple comparisons between various subgroups. Therefore, equal-sized samples were selected to represent the population of each subgroup.

Concerning sample size, Keppel (1982), Bartz (1988), Gay (1987), and Gronlund and Linn (1990) state that it is best to use the largest possible sample size. A larger sample helps reduce error and more clearly illustrates the distinctive traits of the selected population.

Krejcie and Morgan (1970) provided a formula and reference table to estimate a population sample size suitable for use in Social Science research activities. According to them, a population of 15,000 (OSU undergraduate students) requires a population sample of 375 subjects. For this study, 800 total subjects were selected. This was an arbitrary number selected by the researcher to ease analysis of data and to help account for an anticipated low response rate from students who departed the university. Thus, individual subjects, from each of the groups and subgroups, fairly represent the larger groups from which they were selected.

Names and mailing addresses of subjects for this study were selected by stratified random sample, using computer generated random numbers, and were provided by the Oklahoma State University Office of Institutional Research. Further, this study was authorized by the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board.

In addition to scores on the University Alienation Scale, limited biographical data were collected on each respondent. The data included gender, age, high school grade point average (GPA), ACT score, and the education levels of parents (Table 3-2).

Race was also recorded, but due to the very low response rate from minority students, was not reported (2% or 6 of 248 were minority). Of the undergraduate students enrolled at OSU, 84% are white and 16% are minority. Therefore, minority students are highly underrepresented in this study.

Gender for the Departed group was about equally divided between male and female. For the Remained group, females had a slightly higher response rate (56%). Thus, the response rate for the Departed group fairly represents the gender distribution of the undergraduate student body. Males in the remained group, in contrast, are underrepresented.

Student ages appeared higher for the departed group than for the Remained group. The differences were 3.3 years

Table 3-2

Biographical Information, Departed - Remained

By Class

| | Departed | | | | Remained | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Variable | Fresh | Soph | Jun | Sen | Fresh | Soph | Jun | Sen |
| N = | 19 | 29 | 18 | 35 | 40 | 35 | 31 | 41 |
| MALE | 30% | 59% | 36% | 67% | 40% | 36% | 44% | 54% |
| FEMALE | 70% | 41% | 64% | 33% | 60% | 64% | 56% | 46% |
| AGE | 24.2 | 23.9 | 26.5 | 29.8 | 20.9 | 22.1 | 23.0 | 26.1 |
| HS GPA * | 3.35 | 3.25 | 3.20 | 3.35 | 3.62 | 3.56 | 3.41 | 3.16 |
| ACT | 23.8 | 22.7 | 22.1 | 19.2 | 24.9 | 23.6 | 23.2 | 23.7 |
| EDUCATION LEVELS | | | | | | | | |
| MOTHER | 13.3 | 13.7 | 13.7 | 13.1 | 14.0 | 14.1 | 13.6 | 14.0 |
| FATHER | 14.4 | 14.2 | 14.3 | 13.6 | 14.1 | 15.2 | 14.5 | 14.9 |

* HS GPA on 4.00 scale

for Freshman, 1.8 for Sophomores, 3.5 for Juniors, and 3.7 for Seniors. A t-test at the .05 level of significance revealed a significant difference between Juniors who departed and Juniors who remained and between Seniors who departed and Seniors who remained.

ACT scores also appeared higher for the Remained group than for the Departed group. The differences were 1.1 for Freshman, .9 for Sophomores, 1.1 for Juniors, and 4.5 for Seniors. Through the use of a t-test at the .05 level of significance, a significant difference was found between Seniors who departed and Seniors who remained.

Parent education levels seemed higher for the Remained group than for the Departed group. The differences for the mother were .7 for Freshman, .4 for Sophomores, -.1 for Juniors, and .9 for Seniors. The differences for the father were -.3 for Freshman, 1.0 for Sophomores, .2 for Juniors, and 1.3 for Seniors. Significant differences were detected by t-test at the .05 level of significance for the education levels of both mother and father between Seniors who remained and Seniors who departed.

Therefore, Juniors and Seniors who remained are younger than Juniors and Seniors who departed. Further, Seniors have higher ACT scores, higher education level for both the mother and father.

## Instrument

The survey instrument (questionnaire) was carefully selected as the instrument best able to measure and provide insight into student's feelings of alienation.

The University Alienation Scale, developed by Harold Burbach in 1973, was selected as the best available instrument to collect the data. The Dean Alienation Scale, developed by Dwight Dean in 1961, was given some initial consideration for use in this study. The Dean Alienation Scale, however, was designed as a context-free measure of alienation. Specifically, the Dean Scale was constructed to measure alienation of a general and very broad population. The Dean Alienation Scale score reports a reliability of .78 and correlation coefficients ranging from .23 to .37 when compared with several Authoritarianism Scales. Burbach's University Alienation Scale, in contrast, was constructed to measure alienation of a smaller, more rigidly defined population. The University Scale was specifically designed to measure alienation within the context of a university.

The University Alienation Scale (UAS) was developed from the theoretical basis provided by Dean (1961), Seeman (1959), and Middleton (1963). It is comprised of 24 items designed to provide a total score as well as three area scores. The area scores may be combined to determine the total score or each item score may be added to determine the overall or total score.

Of the area scores, eight items comprise the Meaninglessness area, nine items the Powerlessness area, and seven items the Social Estrangement area. Each area score, within the context of the university, is designed to measure a lack of meaning to university life, a lack of power to control environment, and a lack of social acceptance. In this study, the total Scale score as well as the three area scores were computed and analyzed.

The total UAS score provides one score per subject for analysis and comparison. The possible scores range from 24 to 120. A higher numerical value represents a stronger feeling of alienation. Conversely, a lower numerical value represents a lesser feeling of alienation. The total UAS score combined with the three area scores provides four separate measures for each subject. These scores may be analyzed to furnish a comprehensive view of each subject.

The 24 items which comprise this scale are arranged to provide answers from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1). The Likert type summative scale selected for use in the UAS allows for five possible answer choices.

Isaac and Michaels (1990) stated that a summative type rating scale assigns numbers by rule and thus indicates the amount of what is intended to be measured. They add that summative rating scales are the most useful in behavioral research.

With respect to the use of a survey questionnaire,

Isaac and Michaels (1990, p. 128) stated, "Surveys are the most widely used technique in education and the behavioral sciences for the collection of data". They added that surveys allow a researcher to measure trends across time and to describe what exists. Zemke and Kramlinger (1990, p. 158) agree, "All things considered, though, the survey is and will continue to be the most useful and most used information-gathering tool available for tapping the thoughts, opinions, and needs of large populations".

Reliability of the UAS was determined through the use of the split-half technique. Reliability coefficients were .79, .89, and .72 respectively for the powerlessness, meaninglessness, and social estrangement areas. The corrected (Spearman-Brown) reliability of the total scale was .92.

The validity of the UAS was determined in three ways. Construct validity was determined through the use of item-to-total analysis and factor analysis. Criterion related validity was determined by correlating the UAS with the Dean Alienation Scale.

Alienation is the mental construct validated through the use of item-to-total analysis and factor analysis. A positive item-to-total correlation indicates that items contribute to the measurement of alienation. All items on the UAS were found to be significant at the $p < .01$ level. Factor analysis was further used to determine and verify

construct validity of the UAS. Factor analysis was conducted by applying the scree test to a 24 X 24 correlation matrix. The strength of the relationship among the three factors indicated were Factors I & II, r = .69, Factors II & III, r = .46, and Factors I & III, r = .68. The results of the factor analysis support the interrelatedness and multidimensional structure of alienation.

Further, the correlation coefficient between the UAS and the Dean Alienation Scale of .58 was found to be significant at the $p < .01$ level. This suggests that both scales provide a valid measure of alienation and supports the UAS scale's criterion-related validity.

Additionally, biographical data, in the form of six variables, were collected. These variables are: gender, race, age, high school grade point average, ACT/SAT score, and education level of mother and father. This information will provide valuable data for analysis.

## Data Collection

Data were collected through the use of a single questionnaire. The questionnaire, the University Alienation Scale, was comprised of 24 items. It was mailed to 800 subjects selected as the population sample. Each subject was provided with a questionnaire, a letter asking for their cooperation in the study, and a stamped return envelope.

Subjects were not asked to identify themselves in any manner. To maintain confidentiality each questionnaire was marked in an alpha numeric sequence to allow the researcher to determine group membership, class level, and response rate only. The code is known only to the researcher.

After 15 days, the total number of subjects that responded to the questionnaire was:

Table 3-3

Student response after 15 days

| | FRESH | SOPH | JUN | SEN | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Departed: | N= 12 | N= 21 | N= 11 | N= 26 | N= 70 |
| | %= 12 | %= 21 | %= 11 | %= 26 | %= 18 |
| Remained: | N= 33 | N= 24 | N= 26 | N= 35 | N=118 |
| | %= 33 | %= 24 | %= 26 | %= 35 | %= 30 |

A reminder letter was then mailed to the students who did not respond to the first mailing. This follow-up package contained the same information as detailed above with the addition of a letter asking that the questionnaire be completed and returned. Additionally, initial and follow-up mailings were also repeated for questionnaires returned with forwarding notices expired. Further, approximately 7% of the questionnaires were returned due to

no forwarding address. Results of the follow-up mailing included:

Table 3-4

Response to follow-up mailing

| | FRESH | SOPH | JUN | SEN | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Departed: | N= 7 | N= 8 | N= 7 | N= 9 | N= 31 |
| | %= 7 | %= 8 | %= 7 | %= 9 | %= 8 |
| Remained: | N= 7 | N= 11 | N= 5 | N= 6 | N= 29 |
| | %= 7 | %= 11 | %= 5 | %= 6 | %= 7 |

Total response to the questionnaire, from both groups and all class levels, included:

Table 3-5

Total student response

| | FRESH | SOPH | JUN | SEN | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Departed: | N= 19 | N= 29 | N= 18 | N= 35 | N= 101 |
| | %= 19 | %= 29 | %= 18 | %= 35 | %= 25 |
| Remained: | N= 40 | N= 35 | N= 31 | N= 41 | N= 147 |
| | %= 40 | %= 35 | %= 31 | %= 41 | %= 37 |
| TOTAL: | N= 59 | N= 64 | N= 49 | N= 76 | N= 248 |
| | %= 30 | %= 32 | %= 25 | %= 38 | %= 31 |

These totals do not include those questionnaires which were returned but not used in the study. They included questionnaires which were incomplete or unsuitable for use. Questionnaires returned, but not used totaled 11 or 1.5% of the sample. Thus, 66 questionnaires (7% no address and 1.5% unsuitable) or 8.5% of the sample were eliminated from the study.

## Data Analysis

The t-test and analysis of variance (ANOVA) methods were employed to determine if significant differences existed between group means. Further, the Tukey Post Hoc analysis was applied to determine specific significance of group means. Additionally, descriptive research was also employed.

Gay (1987), Bartz (1988), and Isaac and Michael (1990) state that descriptive research measures attitudes or opinions and should accurately reflect matters as they currently stand. Descriptive research is an attempt to systematically determine the status of a population with respect to selected variables.

The t-test and analysis of variance, provide the ability to determine if the observed differences between group means are significantly different. According to Gay (1987), the t-test allows comparison between two group means, while the analysis of variance allows comparison

between three or more group means. In this study, the t-tests were used to determine if significant differences exist between means at the subgroup or class level. For example, the group mean of Freshmen that remained at the university will be compared with the group mean of Freshmen that departed the university.

The analysis of variance were used to determine if significant differences exist between subgroups or classes within the two major groups. For example, Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, and Senior group means of subjects that departed the university were compared to determine if the observed means are significantly different. If differences are found to exist, the Tukey will be applied to determine the location of the differences.

The purpose of this study is to determine the influence of alienation upon the retention and attrition of undergraduate university students. The purpose, then, is to accurately determine and describe the degree to which current and former undergraduate students are influenced by feelings of alienation. An additional benefit of these methods is that they will provide information about the undergraduate student population which is not easily retrievable from any single source.

Selected research methods will allow data to be collected and presented in a clear and concise manner. Interpretation of data, therefore, will clearly display or

expose a profile of students with respect to their feelings of alienation and its influence on retention and attrition.

# CHAPTER IV

# ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

## Introduction

The results of this study, along with statistical analysis, are presented in this chapter. The purpose of this study is to examine the effect of alienation on the retention and attrition of undergraduate university students, across university classes, and to gather meaningful information which may benefit Oklahoma State University retention efforts.

Scores from the University Alienation Scale were obtained from a sample of each university class of students who remained and departed the University. The descriptive statistics acquired from these scores were tested using t-Tests, Analysis of Variance, followed by the Tukey Post Hoc analysis.

## Descriptive Data

As an initial step, descriptive data were collected by group (remained and departed) and class level. Data were obtained from administration of the University Alienation Scale. The N (sample size), mean, and standard deviation were reported by group and class level on the Total, Social Estrangement, Powerlessness, and Meaninglessness scales

(Table 4-1, 4-2, 4-3, 4-4).

The N, or total number of subjects, in the Departed group was lower than the N of the Remained group. The Departed group totaled 101 or 41% of the combined N of 248 while the Remained group totaled 147 or 59%. The combined N of 248 was 31% of the 800 subjects selected to represent the undergraduate population.

Group mean scores for the Departed group on the Total and Social Estrangement scales were: 70.08 vs 68.55 and 19.38 vs 18.95 respectively (Tables 4-1, 4-2). The Remained group, however, seemed to have higher means on the Powerlessness and Meaninglessness scales, 28.48 vs 28.31 and 22.82 vs 22.40 respectively (Tables 4-3, 4-4).

Junior students from both groups seemed to consistently record lower means than other classes with the single exception of Juniors from the Departed group on the Social Estrangement scale. Junior students from the Remained group appeared to have lower means than all other classes except on the Powerlessness scale.

A summary of the descriptive data shows that the Departed group appears to have lower N, higher means, and smaller standard deviations than the Remained group. Moreover, Junior students, from both groups, seem to have lower mean scores than the other university classes.

Further, when the Remained and Departed group scores are combined to produce a single score on the four UAS

Table 4-1

University Alienation Scale

Total Score

| Group | N | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| Departed | 101 | 70.08 | |
| Freshmen | 19 | 71.53 | 9.91 |
| Sophomore | 29 | 70.69 | 10.82 |
| Junior | 18 | 67.17 | 8.65 |
| Senior | 35 | 70.29 | 11.58 |
| Remained | 147 | 68.55 | |
| Freshmen | 40 | 69.28 | 12.55 |
| Sophomore | 35 | 70.63 | 12.18 |
| Junior | 31 | 63.74 | 12.99 |
| Senior | 41 | 69.71 | 13.40 |

Table 4-2

University Alienation Scale

Social Estrangement

| Group | N | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| Departed | 101 | 19.38 | |
| Freshmen | 19 | 20.16 | 2.08 |
| Sophomore | 29 | 19.17 | 2.12 |
| Junior | 18 | 19.22 | 1.83 |
| Senior | 35 | 19.20 | 2.62 |
| Remained | 147 | 18.95 | |
| Freshmen | 40 | 19.00 | 2.65 |
| Sophomore | 35 | 19.31 | 2.49 |
| Junior | 31 | 18.10 | 2.51 |
| Senior | 41 | 19.22 | 2.77 |

Table 4-3

University Alienation Scale

Powerlessness

| Group | N | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| Departed | 101 | 28.31 | |
| Freshmen | 19 | 28.11 | 4.08 |
| Sophomore | 29 | 28.24 | 3.39 |
| Junior | 18 | 27.11 | 4.06 |
| Senior | 35 | 29.09 | 3.83 |
| Remained | 147 | 28.48 | |
| Freshmen | 40 | 28.95 | 5.25 |
| Sophomore | 35 | 29.26 | 4.62 |
| Junior | 31 | 27.29 | 5.64 |
| Senior | 41 | 28.27 | 5.02 |

Table 4-4

University Alienation Scale

Meaninglessness

| Group | N | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| Departed | 101 | 22.40 | |
| Freshmen | 19 | 23.26 | 3.84 |
| Sophomore | 29 | 23.28 | 5.43 |
| Junior | 18 | 20.83 | 2.96 |
| Senior | 35 | 22.00 | 5.40 |
| Remained | 147 | 22.82 | |
| Freshmen | 40 | 21.33 | 4.73 |
| Sophomore | 35 | 22.09 | 5.18 |
| Junior | 31 | 18.36 | 5.03 |
| Senior | 41 | 22.22 | 5.70 |

scales, Junior class scores appear to be lower than the other three university classes (Table 4-5).

Table 4-5

Combined observed scores

| CLASS | SOCIAL | POWER | MEANING | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Freshman | 19.37 | 28.67 | 21.95 | 70.00 |
| Sophomore | 19.25 | 28.80 | 22.62 | 70.66 |
| Junior | 18.51 | 27.22 | 19.26 | 65.00 |
| Senior | 19.21 | 28.64 | 22.12 | 69.97 |

## Test of Research Questions

Analysis of Variance was conducted to determine if there were significant differences amoung class levels within each group on any of the four UAS scales (Table 4-6).

The Departed group was evaluated at 3/97 degrees of freedom at the .05 level of significance against a Table F value of 2.60. No significant differences were found on any of the scales.

Table 4-6

Analysis of variance - meaninglessness

| Source | SS | df | MS | F |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | 322 | 3 | 107.33 | 3.994* |
| S/A | 3842 | 143 | 26.87 | |
| Total | 4164 | 147 | | |

*p < .05

The Remained group was evaluated at 3/143 degrees of freedom at the .05 level of significance against a Table F value of 2.68. A significant F value (3.994) was exposed in the Meaninglessness scale.

A Post Hoc investigation was conducted with the Tukey of the Meaninglessness scale for the Remained group (Table 4-7). The group pairings were evaluated at the .05 level of significance against a Table q value of 3.63. The Tukey, revealed significant differences in the Freshman - Junior (3.877), Sophomore - Junior (4.554), and Junior - Senior (5.132) pairings. Thus, the Junior class mean is significantly different from the means of the other university classes on the Meaninglessness scale.

The t-Test was employed to investigate possible differences between the means of the two groups by class

Table 4-7

Tukey Post Hoc Investigation

Meaninglessness - Remained

| Pairs | Difference | q |
|---|---|---|
| Freshman - Sophomore | .76 | 1.048 |
| Freshman - Junior | 2.97 | 3.877 * |
| Freshman - Senior | .89 | 1.352 |
| Sophomore - Junior | 3.73 | 4.554 * |
| Sophomore - Senior | .13 | .182 |
| Junior - Senior | 3.86 | 5.132 * |

Table q = 3.63 * p < .05

level e.g., Juniors that Departed and Juniors that Remained at the University. Total as well as all scale scores were compared for both groups.

Pairings, including group-to-group and class-to-class were evaluated at the .05 level of significance. A significant difference was found in the Junior Departed (20.83) - Junior Remained (18.36) pairing on the Meaninglessness scale (Table 4-4). No other pairings were found to be significant.

Juniors who departed the university, therefore, experienced significantly stronger feelings of meaninglessness than Juniors who remained at the University.

# CHAPTER V

# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the conclusions of this study and to make certain recommendations based on those conclusions.

This study was designed to examine the effect of alienation on retention and attrition, assess the effect across university classes, and gather meaningful information which may benefit future retention efforts.

## The Effect of Alienation on Retention and Attrition

Results of this study cannot confirm the existence of a relationship between alienation and the retention and attrition of university students.

Of the four possible scores for each group and class level, a significant difference was found to exist on the Meaninglessness scale only. A t-test exposed a significant difference on the Meaninglessness scale between the scores of Junior students who departed the university and Junior students who remained at the university.

Additionally, analysis of the biographical data disclosed significant differences between the ages of both

Juniors and Seniors that remained and departed the University as well as for ACT scores and parental education levels between Seniors that remained and departed.

An Analysis of Variance conducted on the four class levels of the Remained group indicated the existence of significant differences. Subsequent Post Hoc investigation revealed that the scores of Junior students who remained at the university were significantly different from other university classes within the Remained group.

Thus, Junior students who remain at the University perceive a lesser degree of meaninglessness than other students. Further, Junior and Senior students who remained are younger than students who departed. Also, Senior students who remained have higher ACT scores and higher parental education levels.

Any number of variables could account for the significantly lower scores of Juniors. The interactional theories detailed in Chapter II of this document seem to be the most appropriate. These theories suggest that the interaction of several variables, not a single variable, influence retention and attrition. For example, Juniors are younger and into their third year of university life. They know the campus and have made friends. They are beginning serious work in their major field of study and have increasing contact with faculty members. They are comfortable in the university environment and have goals

firmly in mind. The interaction of these variables could possibly account for the lower Junior class scores.

## Observed Scores

A single significant score for Junior students who remained at the University does not confirm a relationship between alienation and retention and attrition. The combined observed scores (scores, before analysis, of university classes combined to form a group - Remained or Departed) of students who Remained and students who Departed the University, however, may provide a measure of those unknown interactional variables which influence student perceptions of their role within the university. Moreover, combined observed scores across class levels may furnish a framework or model to better understand student congruence with the university community. Spady (1970), for example, suggested that social and academic integration correspond to shared values which influence attrition and retention. Integration, therefore, into the social and academic population of the university community may reduce attrition and increase retention. Additionally, Simpson (1977) stated that academic and family background, including social skills, influence attrition and retention. The combined observed scores may then be an indication of the influence of those variables contained in the integration and background theories (Table 4-5, pg. 67, Figure 8).

Students begin the Freshman year filled with idealism and visions of lofty goals. For many, feelings of excitement and enthusiasm are high. Expectations of university life differ from student to student. Some students bring reasonable expectations to the university and are thus prepared to assume membership in the university community. Others bring expectations which are unreasonable and must learn to adapt to university life to lessen their chances for failure.

All students must, in some ways, accommodate their expectations to the reality of life at the university. It is reasonable, then, to expect stronger feelings of alienation among freshman students who are seeking a place within the university community. The high observed scores on the Total and sub scales support this assumption. New Freshman students, for example, must find new friends from an exotic group of strangers to replace those left behind. They must learn to move from place-to-place in a foreign and sometimes threatening environment. Their safe and comfortable hometown academic and social life has been replaced by anxiety and the unknown qualities of life among strangers. Some cannot adjust to the demands of university life and quickly depart the university. Noel (1985) observed, for example, that 50% of freshman dropouts occur during the first six weeks of the semester.

Similarly, Sophomore students have yet to become fully

integrated into the university community. Friends and associations remain uncertain and their support system is still in a developmental stage. Classes are often large and impersonal allowing little, if any, personal interaction with the faculty.

Like the Freshman class, the observed scores of Sophomores were high on all scales of the University Alienation Scale (UAS). In fact, scores showed a slight increase from Freshman scores.

Both Tinto (1982) and Whittemore (1989) postulate that students who do not become integrated into the university community fail because of personal incongruency or isolation from the academic and social segments of the university.

Clearly, the interaction of background, personal, and institutional variables combine to produce similar feelings of alienation as measured on the UAS.

While Freshman and Sophomore student scores appear to be similar on the surface, they may, in fact, be a reflection of the interaction and influence of a different set of variables or, the same variables may be weighted differently. For example, the lack of friends and an unfamiliar environment cannot fully account for the equally high Sophomore scores. Student perceptions of experiences are an uniquely individual event. Thus, the relative weight of the interactional variables may strongly depend on individual perception.

Junior students are atypical of the other three university classes. The combined observed scores for Juniors are markedly lower, on all scales, than those of the other classes (Table 4-5,pg. 67, Figure 8). Evidently, Juniors experience feelings of alienation to a lesser degree than other students.

Further, they are into their third year of school, they know the campus, they have acquired strong friendships, their support system is fully intact and operational, they are well into serious exploration of their major field of study, they experience more frequent contact with faculty members, and they have future goals well in mind. Additionally, they are, or are nearing their 21st birthday which, for many, is a symbol of independence and increased control.

Junior students feel comfortable and sure. They are firmly enmeshed in the web of the university community. While similar variables may interact to influence Junior student's perception of alienation, undoubtedly they do not carry the same weight as the variables which influence Freshman and Sophomore students.

Unexpectedly, Senior student observed scores were remarkably similar to Freshman and Sophomore scores. Popular retention and attrition models cannot account for high Senior scores. In fact, significant background differences detected for Seniors who remained are

contradictory. Theory suggests that Senior scores should be comparable, if not lower, to Junior scores. Certainly, they should be lower than Freshman and Sophomore scores.

Conceivably, Senior scores - feelings of alienation - may be influenced by the growing awareness of the disintegration of the student's place within the university community.

For example, Seniors watch older friends graduate and leave the university, the pressures associated with employment or graduate school admission become more intense, and the promise of an uncertain future may cause anxiety. Moreover, by Senior year, they may begin to perceive the faults of the university with more clarity.

Seniors are more mature and, supposedly, more highly developed intellectually, morally, and emotionally than students from the other university classes. They are older and are beginning to think about life after college more and more.

Their concerns are not the concerns of Freshman and Sophomores. The same set of variables may interact to influence Seniors, but they are not weighted the same. High Senior scores may illustrate strong feelings of alienation due to the deterioration of an established community as opposed to the feelings of alienation experienced by Freshman students who are concerned with the formation of a community.

## Community

The concept of "community" is difficult to precisely define. The word is not used consistently in the literature related to retention and attrition. Adler (1979), for example, uses the words social interest or Gemeinschaftsgefuhl; Miller (1991) refers to the interaction between attributes of students and the institutional environment; Storey (1988) mentions institutional fit; and Whittemore (1989) states the importance of maximizing student-environment congruence. Clearly, the preceding phrases refer to experience of community.

Human behavior is difficult to understand outside the social context. Humans, of necessity, are members of small groups which reside within the confines of the larger society. These small groups may be defined in geographic, ethnic, socioeconomic, religious, vocational, or social terms. This study is specifically concerned with university students within the educational community.

It is impossible to deny the role of universities in society. Literature is ripe with references to events, associations, experiences, and relationships of university students. Bonds are created and attitudes developed that often span a lifetime. Most leaders in business and government begin their careers at a university.

University years, for some, are filled with joy, excitement, and adventure. They are challenged and

ultimately rewarded with a diploma which allows them access to the possibility of fulfilling dreams of success and glory.

Others, sadly, are turned away with shattered dreams. They return to their homes in failure, carrying a sense of shame and loss that can never quite be put aside. In many cases, they are denied access to levels where accomplishments are highly rewarded. They will probably never be in a position to realize their full potential.

It may be that an economic or consumer model drives some higher education institutions. Students, as individuals, may be considered consumers of educational services, but not an integral part of the university. There may exist a sense that the students are merely passing through, and not becoming a part of the growing university body.

When students are denied membership in the full university community, an intangible distance is created between the student and the university. This distance allows the formation of a feeling of separateness or alienation in the student. Students quickly learn that they are on the fringes rather than at the center of the university. They are outside the loop; they are not allowed to participate as full members.

Butts (1980) referred to the web of moral understanding and commitments that bind people to the community. This

does not suggest that a community is formed of like-minded or homogeneously grouped individuals. Rather, it implies that diversity is a requirement of a viable community. It further implies that members of a community must accept others and, at the same time, make a commitment to them while remembering that they, in turn, are also providing acceptance and commitment.

An educational community extends beyond the confines of the university campus. In fact, its influences are felt regionally and perhaps nationally. Its members are parts of an ever-expanding extended family and, as such, should be treated with care.

## Conclusions

During the process of conducting this study, it became apparent that many of the variables, including alienation, which influence retention and attrition can be manipulated and controlled. Most can be addressed by presenting methods to foster the establishment of a strong and proactive university community. A review of relevant literature, along with analysis of data collected during this study, suggests possible interventions which may improve retention at Oklahoma State University.

Therefore, the following recommendations are introduced for review:

1. Faculty Interaction: Develop a program that would increase the quantity and quality of faculty-student contacts. Students who have significant contact with the faculty are more likely to remain at the university. Contact should be both professional and social in nature.

2. Advisor: The role of student advisor is critical to student contentment and comfort. An advisor should go beyond the traditional role of academic counselor. Helping students construct their plan of study should be undertaken thoughtfully and with care. The advisor should also be available to help students solve major or minor problems concerning adjustment to university life as they arise.

3. Quality of instruction: Faculty should be made aware of the importance of quality instruction to student retention. The first few class session are especially important. In fact, they may set the tone, with regard to student expectations and commitment, for the semester or the student's entire university career.

4. Clarify expectations: Counselors should insure that students, especially new students, are provided realistic and uniform expectations. This may be accomplished through the distribution of detailed printed material, video material, or face-to-face discussion.

5. Student-to-student support system: Create a system which matches newer students with more experienced students. The older students should act as a guide or mentor at least during the first few critical weeks. Numerous problems encountered by new students could be overcome in this manner.

6. Intervention system: Create a system which would allow student advisors to be warned of potential problems. For example, repeated class absence, especially early in the term, may indicate the need for rapid and aggressive intervention. By the time advisors are furnished with mid term grades, it may be too late to successfully intervene.

7. Career planning: Develop a formal career planning program which begins early enough in a student's academic tenure to insure that reasonable expectations are formed. Thus, the student's plan of study could be developed with increased assurance that it would meet the student's needs.

8. Exit interview: Require an exit interview for students that do decide to leave the university. This would serve dual purposes. First, it would provide the university administration a means to determine attrition variables. Second, it would help increase the knowledge that a significant number of students depart the university each

year without graduating.

9. Additional research: Additional research is indicated in the following areas:

a. Construct a research plan which would accurately determine the variables which influence Junior and Senior students to score low and high, respectively, in feelings of alienation.

b. Design a research plan to determine the weight of variables across university classes.

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# APPENDIX A

# FIGURES

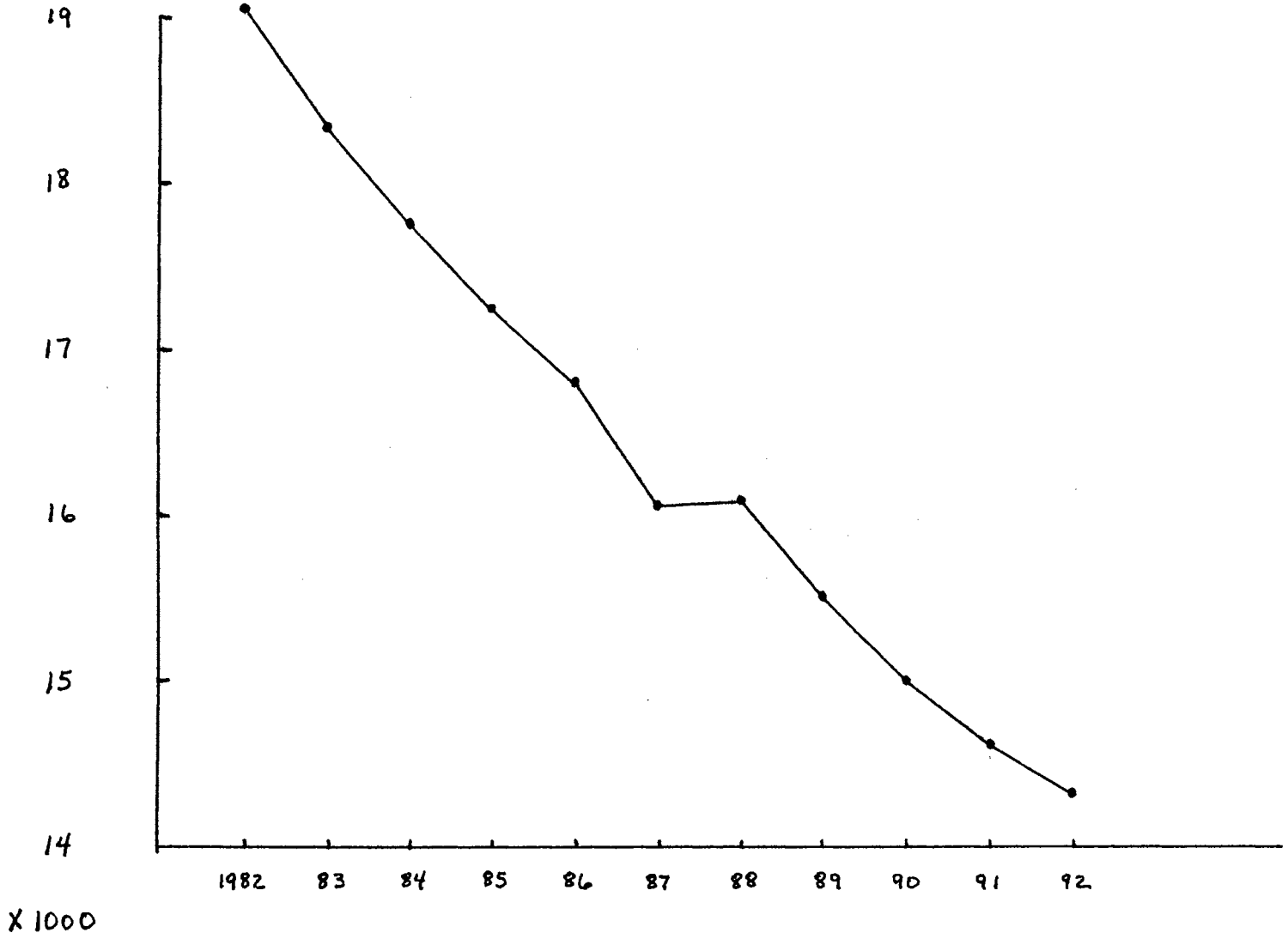


Figure 1. Undergraduate Student Enrollment

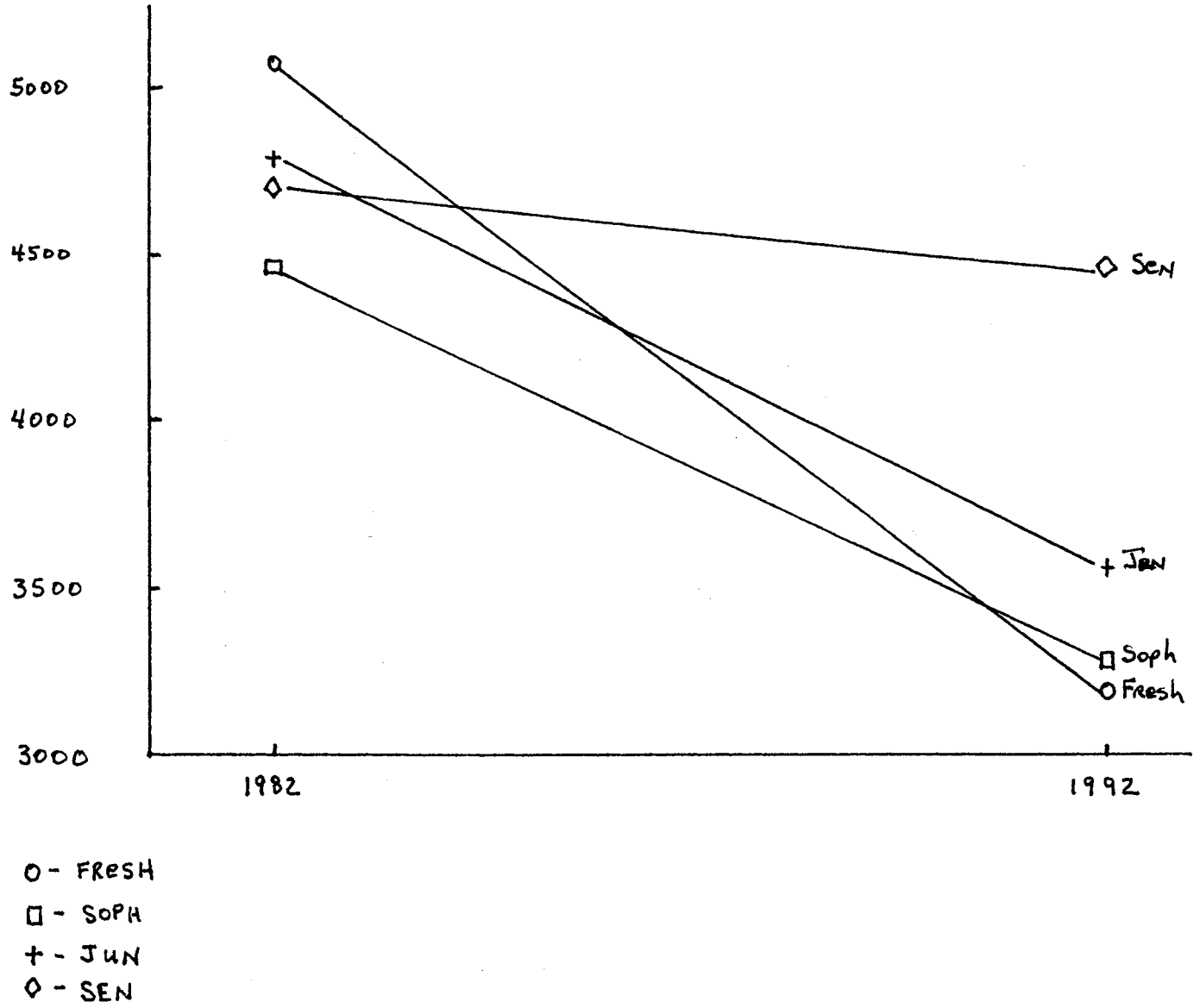


Figure 2. Undergraduate Class Enrollment

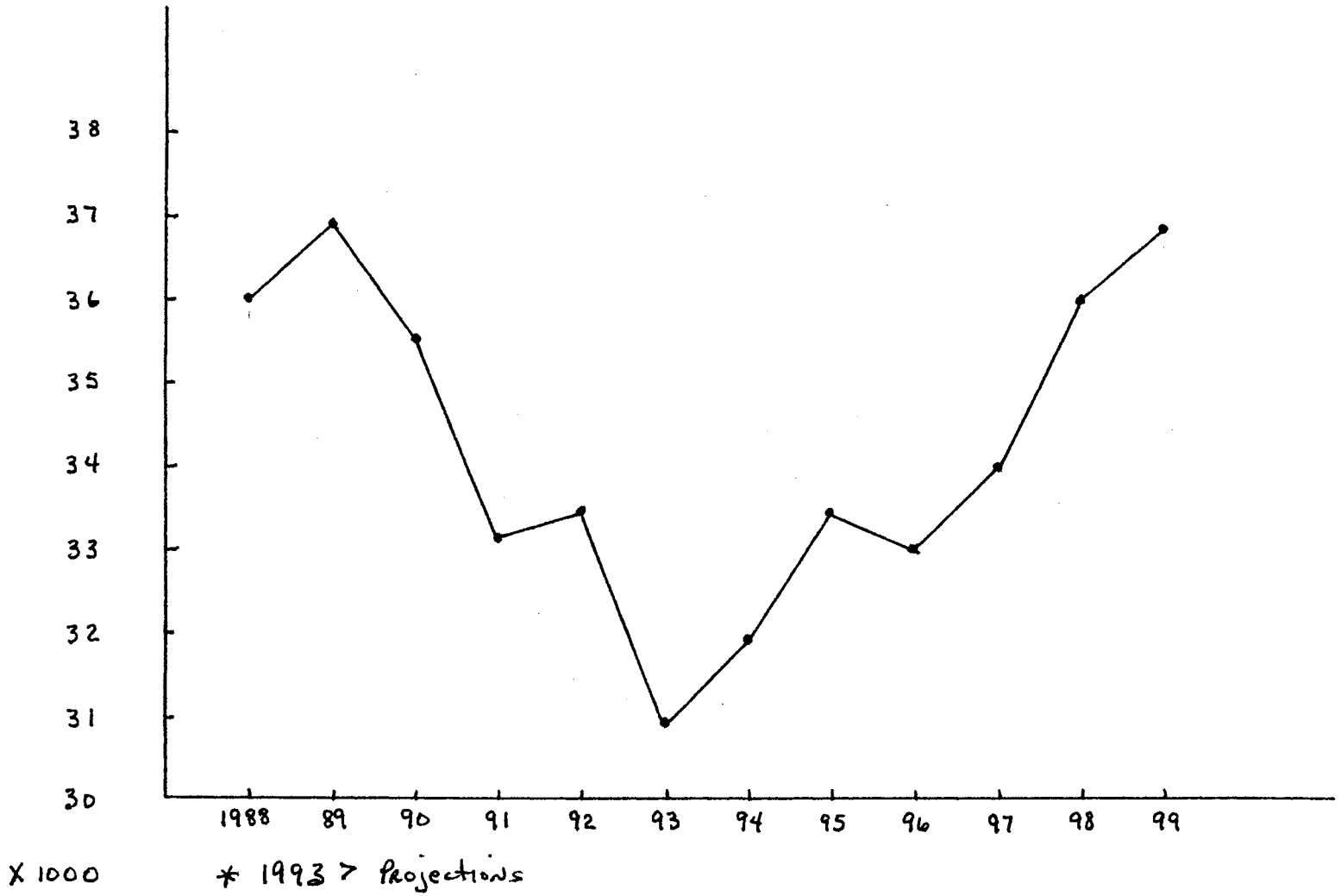


Figure 3. Oklahoma High School Graduates

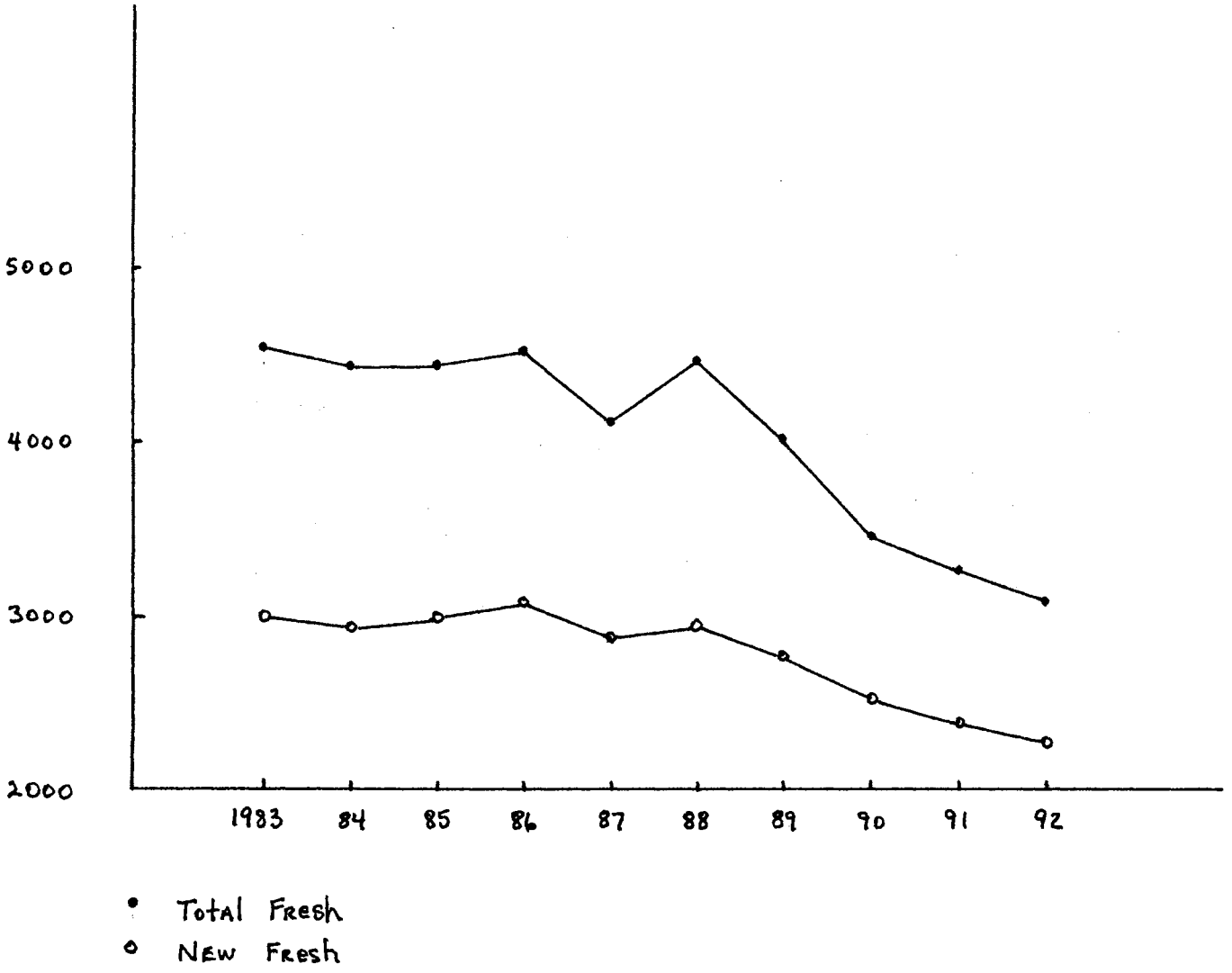


Figure 4. Freshman Students

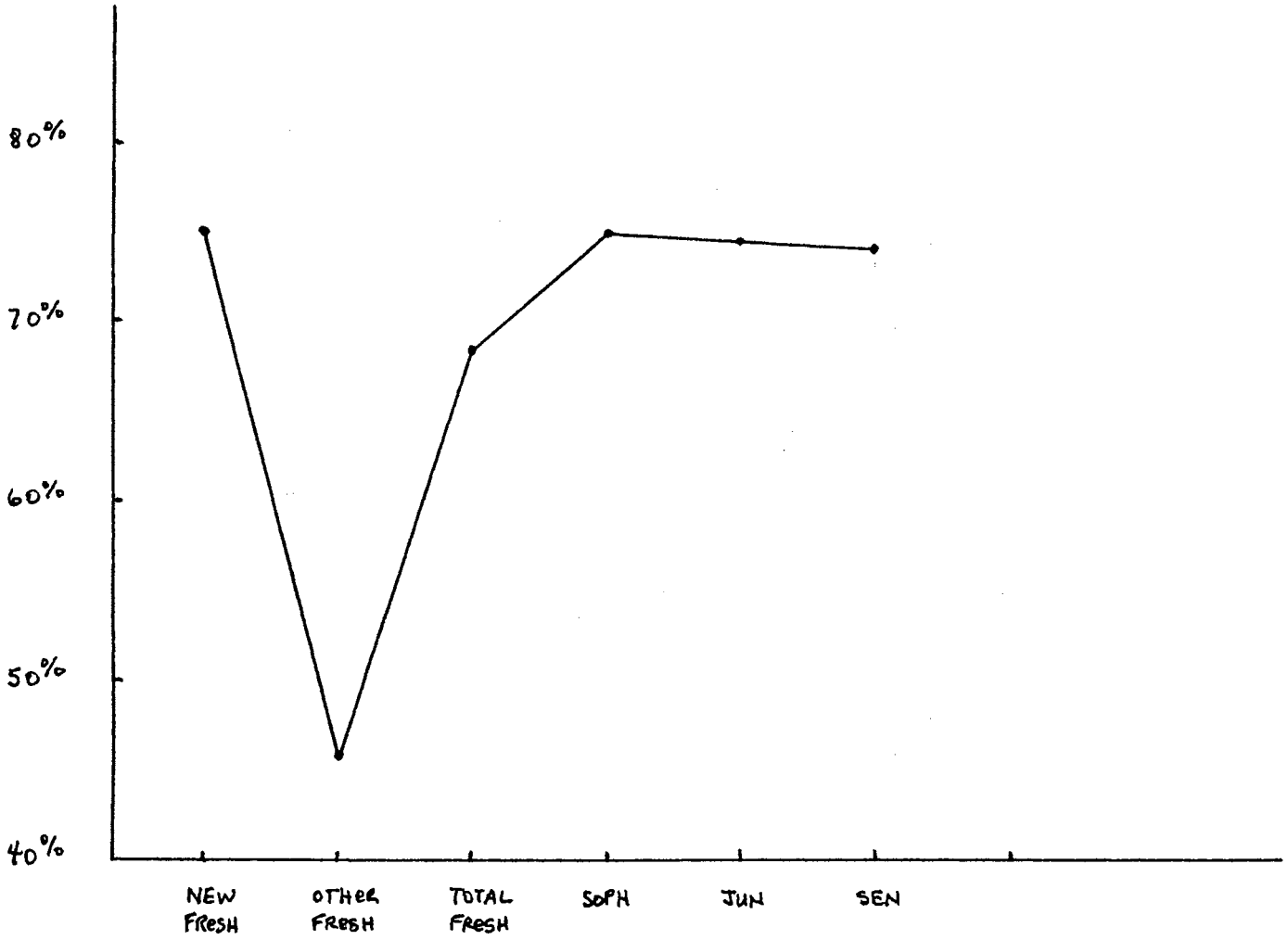


Figure 5. Percent Retention - Five Year Average

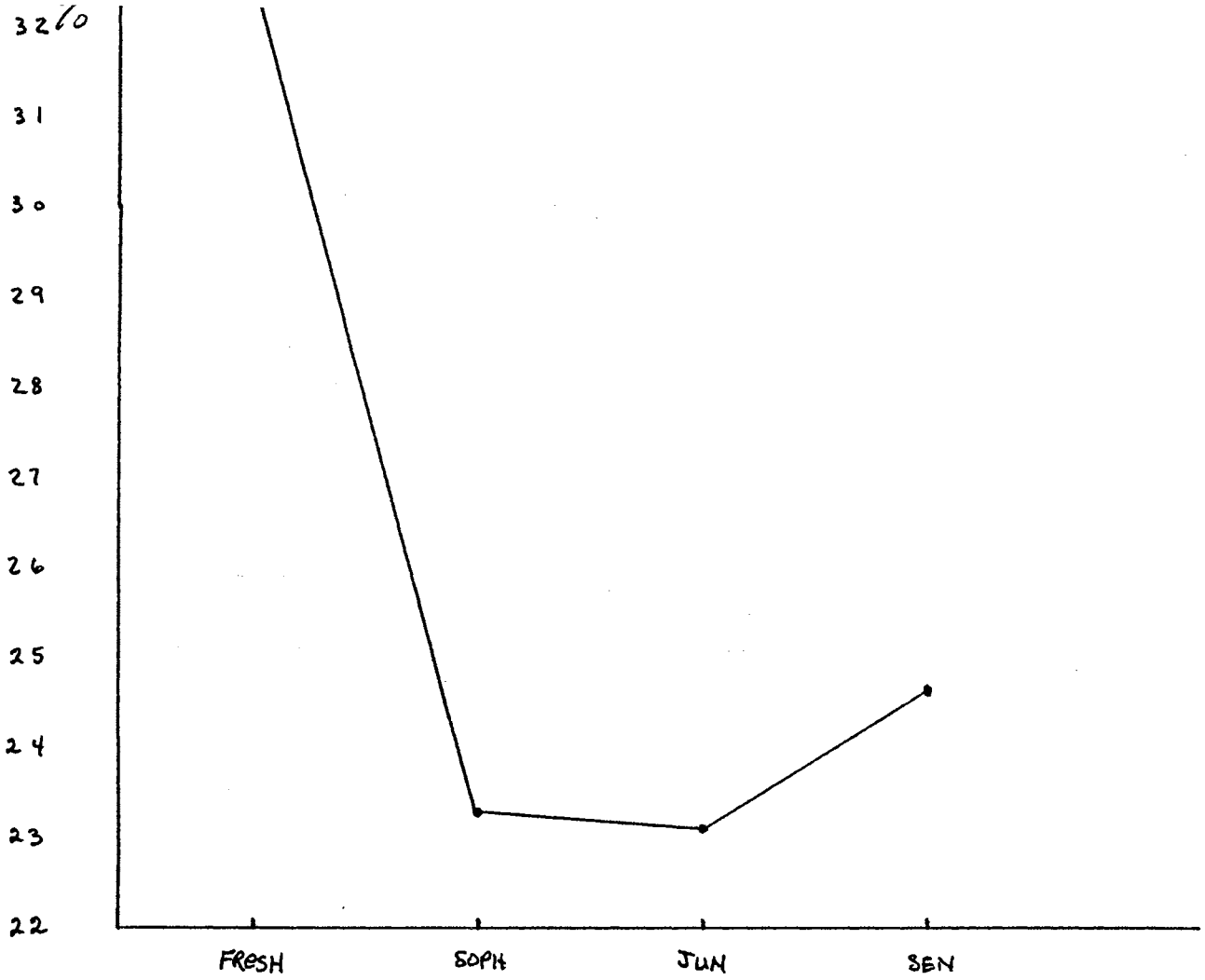


Figure 6. 1991 Attrition

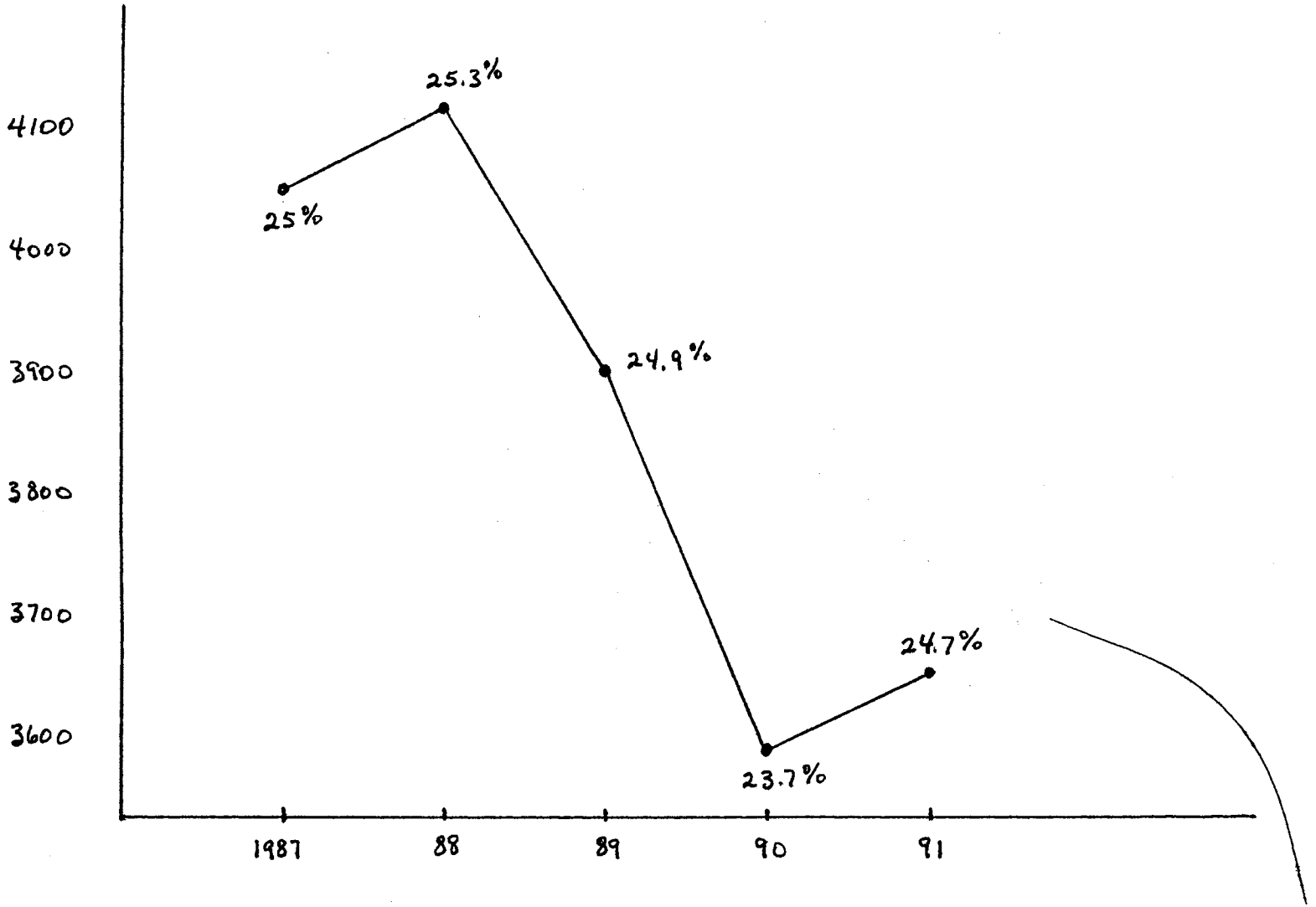


Figure 7. Total Students Dropped - Percent of All Students

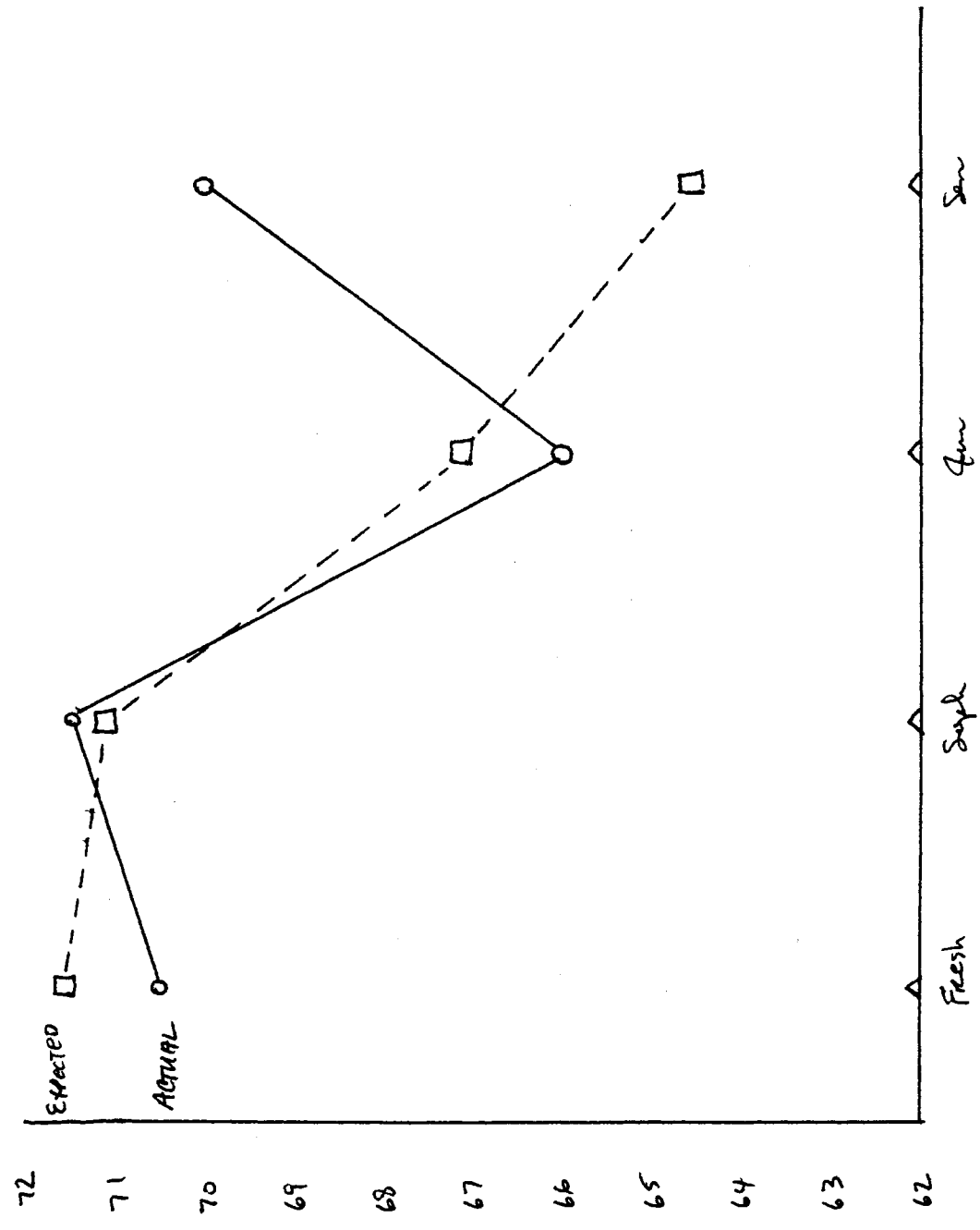


Figure 8. Combined Observed Scores from UAS

# APPENDIX B

## CORRESPONDENCE AND QUESIONNAIRE

(Initial Letter)

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

Dear Student:

You have been selected to represent other Oklahoma State University students in a study to determine your feelings toward the university experience.

I ask that you take a few minutes to complete and return the enclosed questionnaire. An addressed, postage paid envelope is also enclosed.

Your participation in this study will help OSU learn ways to better serve and retain you and future students. Your opinions are valuable.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Bert Thomas
Doctoral Student

Enclosures

(Second Letter)

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

Dear Student:

You were recently selected to represent other Oklahoma State University students in a study concerning your experiences at OSU.

To complete a valid study, it is very important that your response be received within the next five (5) days.

An additional copy of the questionnaire, together with an addressed envelope, is enclosed. Thank you for your prompt attention.

Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Bert Thomas
Doctoral Student

Enclosures

UNIVERSITY ATTITUDE SURVEY

Directions: Please circle the response which best describes your attitude with regard to the following.

SA = Strongly Agree
A = Agree
U = Undecided
D = Disagree
SD = Strongly Disagree

1. The size and complexity of this university make it very difficult for a student to know where to turn. SA-A-U-D-SD

2. It is only wishful thinking to believe that one can really influence what happens at this university. SA-A-U-D-SD

3. Classes at this university are so regimented that there is little room for the personal needs and interests of the student. SA-A-U-D-SD

4. The faculty has too much control over the lives of the students at this university. SA-A-U-D-SD

5. The bureaucracy of this university has me confused and bewildered. SA-A-U-D-SD

6. I feel that I am an integral part of this university community. SA-A-U-D-SD

7. Things have become so complicated at this university that I really don't understand what is going on. SA-A-U-D-SD

8. I seldom feel lost or alone at this university. SA-A-U-D-SD

9. Students are just so many cogs in the machinery of this university. SA-A-U-D-SD

10. I don't have as many friends as I would like at this university. SA-A-U-D-SD

11. Most of the time I feel that I have an effective voice in the decisions regarding my destiny at this university. SA-A-U-D-SD

12. Life at this university is so chaotic that the student really doesn't know where to turn. SA-A-U-D-SD

13. Many students at this university are lonely and unrelated to their fellow human beings. SA-A-U-D-SD

14. More and more, I feel helpless in the face of what's happening at this university today. SA-A-U-D-SD

15. There are forces affecting me at this university that are so complex and confusing that I find it difficult to effectively make decisions. SA-A-U-D-SD

16. I can't seem to make much sense out of my university experience. SA-A-U-D-SD

17. My experience at this university has been devoid of any meaningful relationships. SA-A-U-D-SD

18. The administration has too much control over my life at this university. SA-A-U-D-SD

19. This university is run by a few people in power and there is not much the student can do about it. SA-A-U-D-SD

20. The student has little chance of protecting his personal interests when they conflict with those of the university. SA-A-U-D-SD

21. In spite of the fast pace of this university, it is easy to make many close friends that you can really count on. SA-A-U-D-SD

22. My life is so confusing at this university that I hardly know what to expect from day to day. SA-A-U-D-SD

23. In this fast-changing university, with so much conflicting information available, it is difficult to think clearly about many issues. SA-A-U-D-SD

24. This university is just too big and impersonal to provide for the individual student. SA-A-U-D-SD

VITA

ALBERT CARL THOMAS

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis: THE EFFECT OF ALIENATION ON THE RETENTION AND ATTRITION OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Major Field: Applied Behavioral Studies

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in McAlester, Oklahoma, May 26, 1948, the son of Albert and Marjorie Thomas.

Education: Graduate from McAlester High School, McAlester, Oklahoma, 1966, received Bachelor of Arts degree from Southestern Oklahoma State University in Durant, Oklahoma in 1978; received Master of Science degree from Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, Oklahoma in 1990; completed requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree from Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, Oklahoma in December, 1994.

Professional Experience: Director of Operations for Jetaway, Incorporated, 1979-1984; Chief Operating Officer for Trans Central Airlines, 1984-1985; President of Jetaway, Incorporated, from 1985-1989; Instructor, Tulsa Junior College, 1990-1994; Instructor, InDex Program, 1990-1993.