UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

INTEGRATION AND MARGINALITY: NARRATIVES OF COMMUTER STUDENTS

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

By

CRAIG DEAN ELDER
Norman, Oklahoma
2006

Downloaded from SHAREOK. Persistent Handle URL: https://hdl.handle.net/11244/984

UMI Number: 3207056

Copyright 2006 by
Elder, Craig Dean

All rights reserved.



UMI Microform 3207056
Copyright 2006 by ProQuest Information and Learning Company.
All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

ProQuest Information and Learning Company
300 North Zeeb Road
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

INTEGRATION AND MARGINALITY: NARRATIVES
OF COMMUTER STUDENTS

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY STUDIES

BY

_____
Dr. Rosa Cintron, Chair

_____
Dr. Neil Houser

_____
Dr. Tom Owens

_____
Dr. David Tan

_____
Dr. Debra Gutierrez

© Copyright by CRAIG DEAN ELDER 2006
All Rights Reserved

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research product presented here would not have been possible without the contributions of the many people who have been instrumental in its creation. My sincerest appreciation goes to my Committee chairperson, Dr. Rosa Cintron, who diligently and gracefully challenged and encouraged me throughout both this process and my entire doctoral program. She invested her time and energy, as if I was her only student, and for that I am eternally grateful. Dr. David Tan, Dr. Tom Owens, Dr. Debra Gutierrez, and Dr. Neil Houser provided invaluable direction, clarity, and unwavering support.

My colleagues, Dr. Linda Crumb and Dr. Jennifer Long endured my periodic psychotic episodes, with reassuring words, pats on the back, and occasional reminders that suck it up and get it done. A special thanks to Dr. Sanders Huguenin for the countless hours spent editing the various drafts that resulted in this final version.

To my cohort mates, Dr. Kathryn Garlough and Dr. Jay Corwin, who demonstrated, in clear and concrete steps, the road to our final destination. For the past few

months as I have worked toward completion, Jay's encouragement to "get the book on the shelf", has been stuck in my mind.

The end of this journey would not have been possible without the encouragement and love for learning that my parents gave when I was younger. Above all worldly things my father cherished education. A hard working man who had little education, but would never let me consider stopping. Mom always had a book in her lap and she passed her love for reading to all her children. My greatest disappointment is that they are not here to witness the fruit of their labor.

Finally, to my family, thank you for never letting me give up. To Tonya, who played too many roles in our home so that I could chase this dream. For each of the kids that to often heard "sorry, Daddy has to study", but still brought dinner, a drink or a much needed hug, I love you with all my heart and soul.

Table of Contents

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	iv
ABSTRACT	viii
CHAPTER I	
INTRODUCTION	1
VIGNETTE	1
PROBLEM STATEMENT	6
IMPLICATION	17
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	19
RESEARCH QUESTIONS	23
ASSUMPTIONS	24
LIMITATIONS	25
DEFINITIONS	26
DISCLOSURE OF PERSONAL INTEREST	26
SUMMARY	28
CHAPTER II	
REVIEW OF LITERATURE	30
RETENTION	31
COMMUTER STUDENTS	35
COMMUTERS AND RETENTION	36
COMMUTERS AND PEERS	44
COMMUTERS AND ACHIEVEMENT	50
COMMUTERS AND DEVELOPMENT	59
MARGINALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION	72
SUMMARY	80
CHAPTER III	
METHODOLOGY	81
QUALITATIVE RESEARCH	83
PHENOMENOLOGY	88
DATA COLLECTION	90
DATA SOURCES	98
METHOD OF ANALYSIS	100
SUMMARY	104

CHAPTER IV
PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION
OF RESEARCH FINDINGS
INTRODUCTION 107
THE NARRATIVES OF TWO SENIORS
LESLIE 108
JUSTIN 115
THE NARRATIVES OF TWO FRESHMEN
SHEILA 124
NED 129
THE NARRATIVES OF TWO DROPOUTS
ALLISON 135
BRYAN 140
FOCUS GROUPS 146
SUMMARY 148
ATTENTION 151
IMPORTANCE 152
DEPENDENCE 153
APPRECIATION 154
EMERGENT THEMES 155
SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENTS 155
STRATEGIES FOR COPING 156
LACK OF COMMUNICATION 158

CHAPTER V
CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE,
AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER EXAMINATION
INTRODUCTION 160
CONCLUSIONS 162
IMPLICATIONS 165
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER EXAMINATION 169
VIGNETTE CONTINUED 175

REFERENCES 176
APPENDIX A 186
APPENDIX B 187
APPENDIX C 189

ABSTRACT

INTEGRATION AND MARGINALITY:
NARRATIVES OF COMMUTER STUDENTS

BY: CRAIG D. ELDER

MAJOR PROFESSOR: DR. ROSA CINTRON

The purpose of the proposed study was to investigate the experience of the commuter student attempting to integrate and adjust to the social and academic environment of higher education. Many students fail to make this adjustment and do not persevere in their education. This entails significant losses to the individual students, their institutions and society at large.

While this study was based on Tinto's model of attrition and Kalsner's reoccurring themes of student attrition, it sought to fill a void that exists in the research. It was proposed that the experiences of commuter students may lead to feelings of marginality that moves them toward a greater likelihood of attrition.

As an attempt to understand the experience of the commuter, a qualitative design was selected, with a phenomenological approach. Six commuter students, between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four, were selected to participate in three separate interviews: two freshman, two seniors and two college dropouts.

Additional data were collected from two focus groups designed to mirror the makeup of the interviewees. The collected data were transcribed and coded in a constant comparative approach.

Some of the findings suggest that the commuter students experienced a degree of marginality. Of four themes identified by Schlossberg, Rosenberg and McCullough three were apparent in the participants. These were: importance, appreciation, and attention. Also, three emergent themes developed in the course of the study: the interaction of the social and academic environments, lack of communication directed toward commuters, and commuters' approach to dealing with the lack of social engagement.

Chapter I

Introduction

Vignette

Outside the window of the Vice President's second floor office she could see the dark clouds billow and rise in the sky. Three years in the Southwest had taught her to recognize the signs of an approaching storm, and this appeared to a big one. As her mind drifted back to the present, her eyes settled on the report occupying the large mahogany desk.

As her mind moved to the figures gathered by the commuter student retention committee, she thought to herself, "What have we missed? Two years of increased programming and extra effort and still the numbers aren't changing." As the numbers swirled in her head, they were replaced with faces.

Jenilee had entered the university the previous Fall from one of the many small rural communities that surrounded the city. Graduating second in her high school class with a 3.97 GPA and sporting a 28 on the ACT, she represented the type of student the university worked to recruit. Faced with rising tuition and fees and unwilling to borrow to pay for her education, her parents had made the decision to commute.

Now at the close of the Spring semester, Jenilee was no longer on campus. Her transcript revealed that she had performed well in her classes, completing 15 hours with a 3.55 GPA. But when it came time to enroll for the new semester she had disappeared.

With the Regents' meeting quickly approaching and a report on the progress in commuter retention expected the Vice President collects her thoughts. The weather outside is not the only thing threatening, feeling a second storm brewing. "If we can't succeed with the good students, what can we expect with the less capable?"

Quickly she rearranges the papers for her presentation and slides them into the center of her briefcase. After a moment spent checking her appearance she smiles and walks briskly toward the President's conference room, rapidly formulating a plan to put a positive spin on a ten percent higher attrition rate for commuters.

In the past a central focus of most institutions of higher education has been the recruitment of students. As the pool of potential students has declined nationally and funding agencies have stressed a greater return on investments in higher education this emphasis has shifted. Retaining the students that colleges attract has become a key issue.

In an effort to maintain students on campus, many strategies have developed including learning communities, tuition credits, clusters of courses, and a redesigning of freshman experiences. The importance of retention is highlighted by a study completed in 1998, which included 2,540 two and four year institutions. Based on selectivity, the dropout rate for freshmen ranged between 8.8% for highly selective institutions and 46.2% for open enrollment institutions (Reisberg, 1999).

In a report on college retention, Cambiano, Denny, and Devore (2000) explained the process through which students leave college by reviewing the work of two major contributors, Tinto and Kalsner. The first, Tinto, stressed the importance of academic integration and

social integration in predicting retention. According to Tinto, there are two factors that cause a lack of integration into the university community. They are *incongruence* and *isolation*. *Incongruence* occurs when students feel that they are at odds with the institution and *isolation* when they are disconnected from the institution (Cambiano et al., 2000).

Kalsner, the second scholar, whose research findings suggest that, contrary to common belief, most students do not drop out because of academic failure. In a 1991 study he found that there were four recurring themes in student attrition. The four themes were uncertainty of what to expect from college, adjustment issues, financial constraints, and academic under preparation (Cambiano et al., 2000).

Kalsner (1991) develops these four themes by reporting on the major retention and attrition research to date. Uncertainty of what to expect from college is underscored by a significant portion of students leaving because they choose the wrong institution (20 percent).

In addition, many beginning students are uncertain of the benefits of a college education through a college education.

For those students that do come with realistic expectations, those expectations themselves may be a problem. It is reported that over the last several decades, student attitudes have changed significantly. Two of these changes are presented by Kalsner:

> Over the past 15 years the personal values showing the greatest decline in student endorsement is “developing a meaningful philosophy of life.” The value showing the strongest upward trend is “being very well off financially. (p. 1)

This suggests a change toward a greater emphasis on careerism. This is magnified by a high degree of uncertainty among new students regarding their choice of major field. Seventy-five percent of students that enter with a specific major will change before graduation.

The second factor identified by Kalsner is difficulty in adjusting to a new environment. Research supports that perseverance in college requires some degree of social and academic change. More than thirty percent of students do not return by the beginning of the sophomore year. The primary cause is difficulty with this adjustment period, which often occurs during the freshman year. Two key factors that mitigate this adjustment are interaction with faculty and involvement in the campus social life.

While there is debate on this issue, financial difficulties are acknowledged by Kalsner as one of the reoccurring themes of attrition. Financial problems are one of the key characteristics of students that dropout. In fact, they are the most cited reason for withdrawal among unsuccessful students.

The final factor proposed by Kalsner is students' lack of preparation for the rigors of college academics. She argues that this is not just

a concern for those institutions that have open enrollment. Even in the most selective schools, a percentage of the students will be less prepared relative to their classmates.

The purpose of this study is to aid institutions and practitioners in understanding the process of attrition for a specific group, the commuter. While they are a majority population in higher education, and much is know about the differences in their performance and retention difficulties, little research has been conducted to identify factors that contribute to college success or failure among this unique, but significant, subset of the student population.

Problem Statement

As early as the 1980s, institutions began to experience pressure to improve the quality of their programs. After four decades of rapid growth in student numbers and financial resources, driven first by the

influx of GIs in the late forties and fifties and then by the baby boomers of the sixties and seventies, conditions in higher education were changing. Smaller numbers of incoming students, along with national economic woes, demanded a reevaluation of the higher education system. After a period of prosperity and expansion, institutions where being asked to justify the funds that they were receiving (Altbach and Berdahl, 1981, pp. 109-115).

An area that has received increased attention is graduation rates. Currently, thirty-six states tie a portion of state funding for higher education to institutional performance. While there are many factors that have been considered, most states have reduced the number of indicators to 10 or less, including graduation and retention rates (Schmidt, 2002).

Institutions of higher education find themselves struggling with two major forces in satisfying the needs and expectations of students and society. These are highlighted in the words of Harland Cleveland (as cited in Bowen, Clecak, Doud, & Douglas, 1997, p. 137).

> The outsiders want the students trained for the first job out of college, and academics inside the system want the student educated for 50 years of self-fulfillment. The trouble is the student wants both. The ancient collision between each student's short-term and long-term goals, between "training" and "education," between "vocation" and "general," between honing the mind and nourishing the soul, divides the professional educators, and divides the outside critics and supporter and divides the student too.

Karabell (1998, p. 221-224) identified three major benefits that society believes it receives from the current higher education system: help in overcoming the failures of primary and secondary education, training for citizenship, and the cultivation of ethics, morals and community responsibility.

It is argued by Bowen et al., (1997) that one of the major contributions that higher education makes is the influence that it has in bringing about social change.

Six key areas of change are presented as an outcome of the higher education experience: openness to change, increased involvement in public affairs, transmission of the academic ethos to the general public, a growing economic base, increased international understanding through contact, and style of living (pp. 268-274).

The previously cited authors added that education does indeed have an impact on the citizenship behavior of graduates. Voting in presidential elections, attempts to influence others in presidential elections, greater degree of involvement in political affairs, a increased sense of political efficacy, and a enhanced sense of citizen duty were all reported as positively associated with higher levels of education.

With each student that leaves college prior to graduation these possible benefits to society are lost. Institutions find that their stature in society and before government leaders are diminished. Society is left with fewer citizens that possess the characteristics needed for its continued success.

Many dropouts will find that they and their families are unprepared to reap the rewards of modern society. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991), in their review of research on the effects of college on student found that there is a strong positive effect of higher education on the future earnings of graduates in the U.S. and other developed societies. They further stated:

> …whether direct or indirect, the association between education and earning is not merely a function of the different levels of academic ability and social origin that commonly distinguish people with different levels of formal education. It persists even after such influences are taken into consideration.(p. 500)

This finding of the economic value of higher education was mirrored by Bowen et al., (1997, p. 151), which reports that while there is "no simple and clear cut conclusion about the effects of higher education on future income…virtually all studies report positive

private and social returns on investment…usually in the range of 8 to 15 percent."

In addition to the financial return, research indicates positive increases in seventeen personality dimensions that influence the future quality of life and the families of college graduates (Bowen et al., 1997, p. 221). The improvements were identified as falling into one of three categories: small increases of .10-.39 standard deviations, moderate with .40-.69 standard deviations, and large with .70-.99 standard deviations increase.

The characteristics that were identified as having a small increase were: mathematical skill, rationality, creativeness, refinement of taste and conduct, consumer behavior, and leisure time. Those with moderate increase were: verbal skills, intellectual tolerance, asthetic sensibility, life-long learning, psychological well-being, human sympathy toward groups, citizenship, economic productivity, and health. Three dimensions were

identified as having large increases. They were: substantive knowledge, personal self-discovery, and family life. These findings suggest that higher education has the ability to "hone the mind and feed the soul", in the words of Cleveland (1997, p. 137).

Despite the quantifiable benefits of a university education, a high proportion of students who enter higher education will not persevere. In the academic year 1996, in excess of one in four students that entered a four-year college in the United States did not return for the next fall (Reisberg, 1999). This affects these students for the rest of their lives, assuming they do not return at a later date. Also, society as a whole loses the advantages that accrue with an increase in the number of educated citizens. Finally, the failure to retain these students has a significant cost to institutions of higher education that find their effectiveness being questioned on a more recurring basis.

Many characteristics have been reported to place students at risk for attrition. Among the characteristics is place of residence, which research has reported is a significantly predictor variable, with commuters exhibiting a higher level of attrition when compared to residence hall students

Alfert (1966), in a study of 153 students at the University of California at Berkley, found that students living at home had a higher rate of attrition than those living in dormitories, but lower than those living in rooms or boarding houses off campus.

In another study, when comparing a sample of 150 male students, evenly divided between students living in dormitories, fraternities, and in off-campus housing, it was determined that students that lived off campus had the highest drop out rate (Dollar, 1966).

Astin (1975) in a longitudinal study on dropping out found that place of residence was a significant factor. Comparing three types of residence, in dorms, at home, and in a private room or apartment, he found that those students living at home and off campus dropped out at

higher rates. Students living at home had higher rates of attrition than dorm students, but lower than students in apartments or private rooms.

Of fourteen variables studied in 1984 (Herndon), place of residence was found to be one of three that had a significant impact in predicting attrition. The other two significant factors were college work-study award, and a measure of college eligibility.

All of these studies presented under this section indicate that retention is an important issue for everyone concerned with higher education. The research also suggests that regardless of the methodology, location, and type of institution studied, commuters are consistently retained at a lower rate.

In his book comparing resident to commuter students, Chickering (1974) explained the differences in this way:

> Students, who live at home, in comparison with those who live in college dormitories, are less fully involved in academic activities, in extracurricular activities, and in social activities with other students. Their degree aspirations diminish and they

become less committed to a variety of long range goals. They enter educationally and developmentally useful experiences and activities less frequently. They report a shrinking range of competence. Their self-ratings for a diverse array of abilities and desirable personal characteristics drop. Their satisfaction with college decreases, and they become less likely to return. Commuters and residents begin their college careers with an unequal start which strongly favors the residents. The gap between them grows. Residents have access to, find, and are forced to encounter diverse experiences and persons who spur them on their way. Access, discovery, and encounter occur much less for commuters and they continue in circumstances that add weights to their preexisting handicaps. Thus the major consequences of American higher education as it currently functions for commuters and residents are to increase the distance between them. Unto them that hath is given. From them that hath not, is taken away. (pp. 84-85)

The completion of university degree programs is important to individuals, institutions and society. As a group, commuters are at greater risk of attrition than resident students. Despite decades of study of commuters, development of models of attrition and programs of intervention, the problem of attrition still persists.

Compared to other groups that have been identified as being at a heightened risk of attrition, the number of commuters is large. In a report from the National Center for Educational Statistics on undergraduate population in 1999-2000, resident students account for only 15.7% of the total student population. In all types of institutions, commuter students were the majority population. There were only two types of institutions in which more than one third of their students were residents. They were private four year non-doctorate granting and private four-year doctorate granting, with 34.2% and 42.6% respectively.

Based on these numbers it is easy to argue that in terms of overall retention rates, the implications of

commuter attrition are of paramount importance. Research findings that would lead to even slight improvement in retention rates for commuter students would make a significant contribution to the retention efforts directed at this population.

Implications

The topic and purpose of this study have implications for two major groups: researchers and practitioners. For the researcher, it proposes to open a new realm of commuter research by introducing the issue of marginality into attrition. Findings of marginality in the commuter population would suggest that this could be the link in the process of leaving that exists between lack of social integration and attrition.

Clearly a new connective step in the process could lead to development of expanded models of attrition. Further research into causes of marginality and possible interventions would also be warranted.

For practitioners, it brings into question the current approaches to solving the problem of commuter student attrition. Ortman (1995) offers five myths that have developed in respect to commuter students that may impact institutional programming:

1. Commuter students aren't as interested in their education as residential students.
2. Commuter students are less able academically.
3. Commuter students are less committed to achieving what is required to gain an education.
4. Commuter students have no interest in the campus beyond their classes.
5. It is cheaper to educate part-time students than it is to educate full-time students.

If this research brings to light the truthes that are hidden behind these myths, then the research must redirect the approach of practitioners toward finding programs and practices to reduce feelings of marginality that exist among commuter students.

Theoretical Framework

The problems of commuter students have been researched for decades resulting in a substantial body of literature. While the research has been fruitful in identifying the ways in which commuters and resident students differ upon entering and how they develop academically, a void exists in explaining how commuters experience their education and why they drop out at higher rates.

The magnitude of the retention problems for commuter students is difficult to determine fully because of a lack of data. No national or state data are available on the retention rates of commuter students. While in many states, higher education institutions are required to report retention figures based on student characteristics such as age, race and gender, place of residence is usually not included.

There may be two explanations for this lack of data collection. First, there is little consistency in the definition of commuter. In some instances, all students

that do not live in university housing are considered commuters, in others only those that must drive to campus from out of town are included.

Then there is the issue of how to determine place of residence for students that may have lived both on and off campus. How should a student be counted that lived in the dorms for a time then were required to move home to continue their education?

Some institutions do collect data on commuters for their own use, but there is no clearinghouse to gather and consolidate the data. The institution at which this study is being conducted has collected retention data by place of residence for first-time full-time freshmen the past eight years. The finding is that the attrition rate for these commuter students averages eight percent higher than for their residential counterparts.

Flowing from Kalsner's theme of adjustment issues and Tinto's concept of isolation, this research proposes to investigate commuters' social integration. In this period of adjustment to college do they experience feelings of marginality?

In 1995, Baumeister and Leary reviewed the research on humans' need for belonging and concluded:

> At present it seems fair to conclude that human beings are fundamentally and pervasively motivated by a need to belong, that is , by a strong desire to form and maintain enduring interpersonal attachments. People seek frequent interpersonal interactions within the context of long-term caring relationships. (p. 522)

In describing this issue of belonging, Schlossberg (1989) provides two "polar extremes", marginality and mattering. She explains that people in transition, such as students going to college, may feel that they do not matter or are not important in the new environment. At the point of transition, commuter students may ask themselves if they truly belong.

Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) offer three elements of mattering: attention, importance and dependence. *Attention* is identified as "commanding the interest or notice of another person". *Importance* is a measure of a

feeling that the individual are “objects of concern”. Being seen as an “ego-extension”, with shared failure and success, is a sign of importance. *Dependence* expresses the idea that while humans are dependent on others, it is also important that others be dependent on us.

An additional element, *appreciation*, was proposed by Schlossberg (1989). In interviews the respondents cited the need to feel that their contributions to others were seen as positive.

Closely related to the concept of marginality is the notion of alienation. Dean and Middleton (1961), present three components of alienation: powerlessness, normlessness and social isolation. An individual with feelings of *powerlessness* is described as “separated from effective control over his economic destiny…of his being used for purposes other than his own”. *Normlessness* is seen as the absence of norms or values that provided purpose and direction to life and actions. Those with *social isolation* have “a feeling of separation from the group or of isolation from group standards”.

It is worth noting that research with students at the elementary and secondary level (Osterman, K. (2000); Ryan, A. and Patrick, H.(2001); Goodenow, C. (1993); Trusty, J. and Dooley-Dickey, K. (1993); Anderman, L. (1999); Goodenow, C. and Grady, K. (1993); Roeser, R., Midgley, C. and Urdan, T. (1996); Wentzel,K (1997 & 1998;)) has supported the importance of feelings and belonging in the school setting. Students that did not feel like they belonged or exhibited marginality were found to have greater problems with behavior and lower levels of achievement.

Research Questions

1. How do commuter students make sense of their adjustment (or non-adjustment) to college?
   a. Do their stories of adjustment to college include narratives of isolation and marginality?

2. What aspects of the college experience are associated with feelings of marginality that may exist?

3. What factors and experiences away from campus encourage these feelings of marginality?

Assumptions

The design of this study assumes that the research on commuters, their retention issues, and the concept of marginality have been adequately identified and reported. It is presupposed that the current research reflects the true nature of commuters, retention and the issue of marginality.

Tinto's model of attrition and Kalsner's theme of adjustment are presumed to serve as basic operational theories for explaining students' decisions to leave. This research also operates on the basic belief that the researcher will be able to create an environment of trust

with the participants and that the latter will be open and honest about their experiences.

Limitations

This study is limited by the selection of participants in that they reflect a specific segment of the total commuter population. They also attend a particular institution that may or may not be reflective of other institutions. The research is also impacted by participants' ability to recall their experiences and accurately discuss them.

The interviewing skill of the researcher may act as a limitation on the data elicited from the participants. Qualitative research requires some level of trust and comfort between the researcher and the participants. Creating trust and comfort is the responsibility of the researcher.

Definitions

While they may have differing meaning in other settings, to reduce misunderstanding and improve the clarity of this study, the following terms will be defined in these ways.

Marginality: The feeling that one is not central to the mission or purpose of the institution. It would be signified by lack of attention by others; feelings of unimportance; or little or no dependence on the student by the institution.

Commuter: Commuters will be those students between the ages of 18-25 who drive more than ten miles each way to campus.

Attrition: Failure to re-enroll for two successive semesters.

Disclosure of Personal Interest

At the onset I must confess I came to this study as a result of experiences that have impacted my view of the commuter in higher education. First, as a commuter

student through baccalaureate, masters, and now in a Ph.D. program, with the exception of one semester of undergraduate work, I have faced the issues of the commuter. During this time I have attended both a small liberal arts college and a large research institution.

In each case there were plenty of programs and activities afforded to students. But as a commuter, I never felt that I was the focus in the planning, and in many situations not even a consideration. Even simple things like campus parking and designed areas for socializing appeared to be structured around the needs of the residential students.

Now as a faculty member, a number of the students that I advise and teach face many of these same challenges. It seems in spite of the growing number of commuters and the increased level of research, little progress has been made. I have worked with good students that have failed to complete their educations largely because they couldn't overcome the trials of commuting.

Summary

As the face of higher education has changed, institutions have had to adjust to satisfy their many stakeholders. Society, the government, and students have expectations, and make demands upon colleges. Increasingly, one of the demands is that institutions find ways to retain and graduate a greater proportion of their students.

Raising retention rates has not been an easy task for many institutions and for higher education as a whole. A significant amount of research has been undertaken which has resulted in theories and models designed to address the problem of retention. Nevertheless, the numbers stay largely unchanged.

This failure to explain and improve the retention rates at colleges and universities can be explained partly by the diversity that exists. Institutions are diverse, but so are the students that comprise the student body. This research proposes to investigate one of the groups that has historically experienced higher

attrition rates and received less attention than many, the commuter.

The goal is to understand how commuters experience the higher education system. As they describe the experience does there seem to be lack of engagement, and if so, in what ways.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

As introduced in the problem statement, retention has become an increasingly important issue in higher education. Little research has been developed that considers directly the issue of commuter students and their difficulty with retention. How commuters experience and perceive their education, and indications of marginality within the population, have yet to be studied.

Three areas of research that have an influence on the focus of this study are presented below. The first is the issue of retention, which has been developed mostly along the lines of models designed to relate the factors that contribute to the decision to leave. The second area, commuters as students, discusses the research on retention, peers and relationships, achievement and development, compared to resident

students. Finally, the research on marginality in the higher education setting is detailed.

Retention

The body of research on retention is large and growing at a considerable pace. Numerous approaches have been taken and the findings have suggested that there are many variables that help explain why students do or do not persist. As of this date, there are no definitive solutions to the problem of poor retention.

In his 1987 book, Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition, Tinto frames the issue of retention this way:

> In its full form our model of student institutional departure sees the process of persistence as being marked over time by different stages in the passage of students from the past forms of association to new forms of membership in the social and intellectual communities of the college. Eventual persistence requires that individuals make the

> transition to college and become incorporated into the ongoing social and intellectual life of the college. A sizable proportion of very early institutional departures mirror the inability of new students to make the adjustment to the new world of college. (p. 126)

Various researchers have investigated the factors that influence student persistence. Cambiano et al. (2000) reported on a longitudinal study conducted over a six-year period at a mid-western university. The researchers tracked the 1989 freshmen cohort to determine influence on persistence of four factors: high-school GPA, ACT scores, age over 19, and gender.

The participants consisted of 2,499 students, 1,306 (52%) who were male and the remaining 1,193 (48%) being female. They ranged in age from 16 to 70, with a mean age of 18. For purposes of the study they were divided into two group by age, the first being those students 19 and younger (N+2356) and the second including everyone 20

or older determine if the students were on track academically.

The researchers found, through a series of logistic regressions, that higher high-school GPA and ACT scores were significant ($p<.01$) at each semester point. Gender was only an issue for females at semester 9, the beginning of the fifth year. Age was determined to be an important influence at the second semester, both entering the second semester and moving forward to the third semester. These findings for age include students from 19-24 that are relatively close to the mean age of the group. The true impact of age as a factor in persistence may be masked by inclusion of this group.

Borglum and Kubala (2000) reported a study designed to gauge the academic and social integration of students at a community college. Their purpose was to determine if the same factors that influenced persistence at four-year institutions were influential at two-year colleges. They sent Enrolled Student Satisfaction Surveys to 2,115 of 24,048 students of the Valencia Community College in Orlando, Florida.

Of the students selected, 1,204 were in their second semester and enrolled in 9-15 hours toward associate of arts or associate of science degrees. The sample was clustered from required and elective courses of the university. Of these 1,204 possible respondents, 462 usable surveys were obtained. The 53 questions of the survey were divided into four categories identified by Tinto's model as reported by the researchers. These four categories were pre-entry attributes, goals and intentions, social integration, and academic integration.

The results of the correlation performed resulted in a finding that social and academic integration were not related to persistence or withdrawal. This finding highlights the fact that different groups may have different influences on their persistence. The question becomes: do commuter students exhibit similar differences in their determinants of persistence?

Of the studies presented, none attempted to differentiate commuter students from the remaining groups. This hides the impact of these variables on this important group of students. Additionally, many

variables that may be of greater importance to this group may have been omitted because of the focus on the traditional student.

Bean and Metzner (1985) provide a path model of nontraditional student attrition. In the model four set of variables, background and defining, poor academic performance, intent to leave, and environmental factors are said to predict the likelihood of leaving. It is argued that:

> …social integration variables should have only minimal effects on retention…because social variables from the outside environment are expected to be of greater importance than college social variables. (p.530)

Commuter Students

An interest in commuter students and the difficulties they face in the traditional residential institution has existed nearly as long as there have been commuter students. A significant increase in the

research began in the 1960s, as institutions began to adapt to funding problems by encouraging off campus living. The focus of this review is on the material that emerged in the intervening period. For clarity the research has been organized into four categories, retention, peers, achievement, and development.

Commuters and Retention

In a study by Alfert (1966), a sample of 153 students at the University of California at Berkley in 1965, selected using two measures of student development, with the intent of insuring that the sample consisted of students at all levels of academic performance was used. The students were tracked throughout their academic career, and where they were living at the time they dropped out was noted.

The results indicated that living in a boarding house or rented room resulted in the highest rate of attrition. The second highest group was the students

that lived at home. The group with the highest retention rate was those living on campus (Alfert, 1966).

In a study based on a sample of 605 male freshmen in dormitories, 322 in fraternities, and 444 in off-campus housing, a representative random sample of 50 was selected in each category. The clearest finding was that different types of housing attracted different types of students, a self-selection process. The key findings for the off campus group was that they were more likely to drop out because they had less academic aptitude and greater likelihood of financial difficulty (Dollar, 1966).

Astin (1973) in a far broader study included students who entered 213 institutions as freshmen in the fall of 1966 with a follow up in the summer and fall of 1970, resulting in 25,455 subjects. Outcome measures in 152 questions were divided into five categories: educational progress, plans and aspirations, behaviors, attitudes and values, and ratings of the college. Three living groups were identified and compared: dormitories, living with parents, and other private housing. Together

the three accounted for 95% of all students. Compared to living at home, dormitory students were less likely to drop out, more likely to attain the baccalaureate in four years, to apply to graduate school, and to earn a high grade point average. Dormitory students exhibited far more social behavior, but attended church and Sunday school less.

In addition, Astin (1973) reported dormitory living resulted in increased likelihood of satisfaction with the educational experience, greater opportunity for contact with faculty and staff, increased perceptions of students' own interpersonal competency, high self-ratings of popularity, and greater self-confidence and public speaking ability.

Astin(1975) in his long term study of dropping out reported that while living at home was the second most common living environment for freshmen, after living in dorms, and had a significant negative impact on persistence. A gender difference was also identified. Men persisted better when they chose to live away from

home, regardless of the choice. Women did not exhibit this result when they chose to live off campus.

In 1978, Pantages and Creedon reviewed the research on attrition over the twenty-five year period from 1950 to 1975. They found that the type of housing students live in affected attrition. Living off-campus resulted in higher rates of attrition and this difference was more pronounced at four-year colleges.

> The research to date generally supports the notion that housing is a significant factor in attrition, but it is unlikely that it is a primary factor in attrition. It may be hypothesized, however, that on-campus housing generally serves a valuable and positive socialization function that facilitates a student's adjustment and consequent satisfaction with the institution. (p. 78)

Levin and Clowes (1982) while investigating the impact of residence halls on attaining a baccalaureate degree used 686 students from the National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972. To generate a

uniform sample of students with high aspirations, they chose those that reported a plan to attend graduate school. Only students living at home or in a university residence hall were considered. They then were grouped by Educational Testing Service test into high, average and low aptitude groups. A socio-economic measure composed of father's education, mother's education, parent's income, father's occupation, and household items was utilized to group into low, medium, and high socioeconomic status.

The findings were consistent with other research that resident students came from higher socioeconomic status groups and had higher high school grades. There was no significant relationship between residence and aptitude which contradicted earlier studies. Graduation rates after four years yielded a significantly greater rate of completion for students in residence halls: 66% compared to 55% for commuters.

The focus of research conducted in 1983 by Pascarella, Duby, and Iverson was an attempt to verify the usefulness of Tinto's model of college withdrawal in

a commuter college setting. The model posits that family background, individual attributes and pre-college schooling influence institutional commitment and goal commitment. These two commitments influenced grade performance and intellectual development on the academic side and peer-group interaction and faculty interaction on the social side.

The two academic factors impacted the students' academic integration, while the two social factors impact the social integration. Combined these two integrations determined the students' level of goal commitment and institutional commitment after attending the institution. Based on these the student makes the decision to drop-out or not.

The sample consisted of 269 incoming first-time full-time freshmen at a single commuter institution that completed surveys, both before and at the end of their freshmen years. Measures were determined for each of the intervening variables and various multiple regressions were performed to test the model as proposed by Tinto.

The model as presented accounted for 19% of the variance in student withdrawal, which was consistent with residential studies. Background characteristics were determined to have the greatest influence, which suggests that commuter students had characteristics before entering that were more significant in their decision to leave than was their experience at college.

The characteristics that had the greatest value in explaining student departure were academic aptitude, being female and having lower secondary school achievement. Academic and social integration were both found to have strong direct effects on persistence. Conflicting with the position proposed by the model, academic integration, instead of social integration, was found to have a direct effect on commitment.

Utilizing discriminant analysis Herndon (1984) attempted to identify which of fourteen independent variables were significant in explaining the persistence of college students. The variables included: admissions eligibility index, degree objective, sex, age, ethnicity, Pell Grant eligibility (socioeconomic status), residence,

scholarship award, grant award, loan award, College Work-Study award, financial need, marital status, and number of children.

Only three of the variables were found to be significant predictors of persistence: admissions eligibility index, College Work-Study award, and place of residence. Living on campus was found to have a significant impact, but was the least significant of the effects.

In a 1997 study, Johnson, working with students at a predominantly commuter college in the northeastern United States, investigated factors that distinguish between drop outs and persisters. Drop outs were found to have lower GPAs and were more often female. In addition the retained students responded more strongly to the following statements: “I got to know the faculty”, “it was easy to get answers to questions about things related to my education”, “the institution has a well educated faculty”, and “I had adequate opportunity to interact with faculty”.

The research presented in this section makes clear that irregardless of time, sample, or methodology one conclusion can be drawn. In whatever means retention is measured, commuting to college is a factor that increases a student likelihood of attrition.

Commuters and Peers

Many of the models of student attrition or departure (Astin, 1985; Tinto, 1987) have as an element student involvement or integration. While there is an academic ingredient, the social integration of the student is generally viewed as equally important. The importance of social integration is highlighted by Tinto (1987):

> …students who stay at home expose themselves to a number of potential risks, not the least of which is external forces which may pull a person away from incorporation into the life of the college. If the orientation of the family or local peer group does not support, indeed opposes, participation in higher

> education, early separation and transition may be measurably more difficult. It may require the person to visibly reject the values of the family or local peers in order to adopt those appropriate to the college. (p. 96)

This statement supports this study's proposed concept of marginality by providing an explanation for forces and pressures that may result in the commuter remaining less involved.

Bauer (1967) identified the importance of peer groups while studying the relationship between student peer groups and academic achievement. Research indicated that students most often selected peers from housing units that were seen as similar in academic rating by the students.

The highest rated were the "Greeks", followed by the dorms, then those that lived off campus. Students tend to interact with those in their group, with some

friendships developing in class, but these were the exception.

Housing units and peer groups within them placed pressure on students to achieve academically. The social environment was dominated by the "Greeks", who held higher levels of organizational memberships and the leadership roles in them.

In a study of students' use of recreational facilities, Foster et al. (1977), using a sample of 407 undergraduate students at the University of Maryland, measured the extent to which commuters and resident students utilized facilities. Commuters were identified as either dependent (living with parents) or independent (living alone, or with spouse or friend).

Residents engaged in nearly twice as much recreational activity as either commuter group, were more familiar with recreational opportunities at enrollment, and felt that facilities met their needs. Both residents and independent commuters identified their place of residence as where they spent their leisure time.

In two separate studies presented by Lundgren and Schwab (1979), commuter peer relationships and resulting self-concept were investigated. The first study compared commuters and resident students on their relationship with their parents and friends. The second looked at the issue of student self-concept and emotional function.

In the first study the researchers concluded:

> The strongest differences occurred for parental relationships…congruent with the expectation of heightened conflicts concerning independence and constraint for students living at home. However, greater strains for home students were also evident in peer relationships, and the data support the expectation that students living at home have fewer opportunities to develop close, satisfying relationships with peers. (pp. 230-231)

Commuter students that lived at home were found to have lower self-esteem than their resident peers. They also perceived that they were viewed less favorably by

their parents and both male and female friends in the second study.

While studying the impact of freshman orientation on the adjustment of students to the college environment, it was found that while commuters students are less involved in binge drinking and suffer from fewer problems with alcohol, they are less involved in the social and co-curricular elements of higher education (Fenzel, 2001).

Skahill (2002) approached the issues of peer involvement by utilized social network analysis to investigate the difference in changes in social support system and the frequency of use that occurred for resident and commuter students during the first semester of college. A sample of 25 resident students and 15 commuter students completed two sessions of interviews. Matrixes were created for each student and changes were measured.

For both groups there was no change in the total number of people included in their network over the course of the study. Commuters reported gaining 2.133

new members and losing the same amount. Residents had a gain of 3.28 members and an equal loss. This difference was found to be statistically significant at the .05 level. The density of the network (reported connections within a social network compared to the number of possible connections) decreased for both groups. While the decrease was not significant for the commuter group, it was "abrupt and significant" for residents.

Dalton (1989) posits the importance of peers in the higher education setting, saying:

> One reason that peer influence is so strong is that college students are most likely to develop close relationships with those who share common interests in a common environment. New college students face problems of establishing independence, making new friends, and trying to master a complicated and threatening new environment…Today it exists largely outside the academic community. This is particularly so in large institutions. (p. 180)

It can be concluded from this research that commuter students differ significantly from resident students in their involvement on campus and peer interaction. Yet, nothing is presented to suggest that commuters feel marginalized or isolated in university setting.

Commuters and Achievement

Prusok and Walsh (1964) conducted a study to investigate the impact of fraternities on the academic performance of college freshmen. The sample included students living in four types of residence. They were dormitories, fraternities, living at home and off-campus. The sample consisted of 1070 male first-time freshmen in the Fall of 1961. Analysis of covariance was used to control for high school grade point average and composite ACT score. They found that there was no significant difference between the grade point average of the four groups.

In a firsthand review of 60 articles completed since 1950 and over 1,000 secondhand through four published reviews, Schroeder and Sledge (1966) investigated the

factors contributing to academic success. All of the articles looked at research related to factors that led to college academic success. Their review found that there was no conclusive evidence of a relationship between place of residence and any of the measures of academic success. The most common measures of academic success were first-semester or first-year GPA.

In 1970, Hountras and Brandt looked at academic performance, as measured by GPA, of students in five different colleges in a single North Dakota university to determine the impact of residence. Students were matched into pairs. Those students residing on campus attained higher GPA's than their counterparts off-campus or living at home.

In a single institution study at Auburn University, Burtner and Tincher (1979) found that grade point averages of resident (1.92/3) and non-residents (1.90/3) were nearly the same. The father's and mother's education level of residence students was higher than for non-residents. More non-residents worked (42 %), than

did resident students (15%), and more worked in excess of 20 hours a week (18% to 2.3%, respectively).

Twice as many non-residents reported an expectation of an interruption in their education of a quarter or more (13% to 6%). They were also less likely to form close friendships with fellow students they did not know before entering college, and they also date less often. This may have resulted in the reporting of less satisfaction with their social life.

The basis of the research was a study conducted through surveying 223 residents students and 624 non-resident (not living in university residence halls). Analysis was simple computation of averages and results were presented in descriptive measures.

Call (1979) completed research at York College with 200 resident students and 200 commuters. The groups were matched on various characteristics and grade point average was used as the measure of academic performance. Call finds: “There is no difference in scholastic achievement between groups of students relative to their living situation (on campus or at home)”(p.271).

In 1984, Pascarella provided a model that attempts to explain the influence of residing on campus on various academic outcomes. It argues that students entering characteristics and background characteristics influence the choice to live on campus or commute. It then suggests that background characteristics and resident living will influence college experiences. Finally, it assumes that background characteristics, living on campus, and the measures of college experience will influence the outcomes. It is hypothesized that the effects of living on campus will be largely indirect.

The sample and data for the study were attained through the 1975 Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) with over 9,448 Caucasian students from 100 colleges and universities. The final sample consisted of 2,220 women and 1,971 men attending 74 universities. They were chosen based on three criteria:

1. entering a four year college or university in 1975 as full-time students;
2. were attending the same institution at the time of the 1977 follow-up survey;

3. had lived either on-campus during the 1975-1977 academic years, or with their parents during the same time period.

Pascarella (1975) came to the conclusion that;

> Compared to commuters, students living on-campus as a group were more likely to: be women; have higher academic aptitude, secondary school achievement and 1975 degree aspirations; come from more educated families; have higher initial commitment to the college they were attending, and a higher level of secondary school extracurricular involvement…attend private institutions, have higher levels of social integration with peers and faculty, and have higher levels of both 1977 degree aspirations and general satisfaction with college. (p. 253)

When background characteristics and institutional control were held constant, living on campus had significant direct effect only on social integration with peers and social integration with faculty. There was no

direct effect on any of the outcome variables under consideration. The effect on the outcome variables was indirect through the social integration variables.

Two types of housing environments, on-campus versus off-campus, were compared in a 1985 study. Each was considered by gender on measures of GPA and academic difficulty (on probation) during the freshmen year. A sample of 1,302 residents (55% female and 45% male) and 740 non-residents (54% female and 46% males) were selected for the study. There was no control for confounding variables such as high school GPA, SAT score, etc. (Nowak & Hanson, 1985).

Within the residence hall group there was no significant difference in GPA for males and females. For those living outside the residence hall, females had significantly higher GPAs than males. When compared between the groups, for females residence halls added significantly to GPAs overall, but no such relationship existed for males. Residence hall students also had fewer cases of academic difficulty. Males living outside the

residence hall experienced significantly more academic difficulty.

Using the same sample and model from his 1984 research, Pascarella (1985a) changed the outcomes from academic to intellectual and interpersonal self-concept. The findings were the same on the first two phases of the model. When student pre-enrollment traits and institutional characteristics were held constant, living on campus had a significant, positive impact on social integration with peers and on social integration with faculty, but not with any measures of self-concept. At best there was an indirect influence of these measures through the intervening social integration variables.

In his 1992 book, What Matters in College? Four Critical Years Revisited, Astin presents the case for the importance of residence on student achievement by saying:

> Perhaps the most significant impacts of living on campus versus commuting are on achievement and career development. Living on campus substantially increases the student's chances of persisting in

> college and of aspiring to graduate or professional degrees. Residents are also more likely to achieve in extracurricular areas, in particular leadership and athletics. Among men, living on campus increases undergraduate grade point average. Residents are more likely than commuters to implement career plans in business, but those who commute to college earn more somewhat higher salaries in nursing and school teaching. Residents express much more satisfaction than commuters with their undergraduate experience, particularly in the areas of student friendships, faculty-student relations, institutional reputation, and social life. (pp. 220-221)

Concerned with the mixed results in the research on residence influence on student's academic achievement, Blimling (1993) performed a meta-analysis to combine findings and compare the results. Working with 21 studies completed between 1966 and 1987, that met the requirements for inclusion he concluded:

> To rely solely on the results of the 21 studies in which residence hall students were compared with students living at home might lead one to conclude that residence hall students perform better academically than do students living at home, and that living in residence hall influences this superior performance positively…When only studies that controlled for differences in past performance were used, the reviewed research does not show that living in a conventional residence hall significantly influences academic performance over living at home. (p. 306)

While the findings in the studies that investigate the differences in academic achievement are mixed, this a best explained by the methodologies that have been utilized. When the research has controlled for entering differences in academic performance, the findings suggest that commuters and resident students achieve at equal levels.

If it is concluded that this research is correct in estimating the academic integration of commuters compared to resident students, then academic integration must not be the issue of importance for commuters. Based on Tinto's model, that leaves social integration as the area of concern.

Commuters and Development

In a report on a sample of 2295 men and 2834 women attending 29 colleges in 1964-65 in which respondents self-reported on 31 traits and 35 life goals, Baird (1969) found that students who lived in fraternities and sororities appeared to be more involved in social and leadership activities. He further concluded that;

> Those who lived at home were also different in some expected ways. However, there was little difference among the groups on most variables, and most importantly, there were few large differences in most educationally relevant areas…Students living at home were as satisfied with college life and had

> approximately the same rate of achievement as other students in most areas except social activity. (p. 1020)

Graff and Cooley (1970) conducted a study based on research completed on the entire freshmen class, 185 residents and 116 commuters, at a small private liberal arts college. Surveys were administered at the end of the first semester and GPA was obtained, presented information in seven categories: study habits; personal relations with faculty and peers; mental health; personal efficiency; curricular adjustment; maturity of goals and level of aspiration; and performance.

SAT verbal scores were used to control for ability. High, average and low ability groups were identified. Commuters were found to have poorer mental health, lower curricular adjustment, and showed less maturity of goals and aspirations.

> These results can be interpreted as meaning that the commuter students tend to be less satisfied with their chosen curricula, saw less meaning in their

> course work, and took less responsibility in meeting academic requirement…tend to be more beset by lack of self-confidence, feelings of failure and insecurity, and excessive worry over petty disturbances than resident students. (p. 56)

Reporting on several small studies Chickering and Kuper (1971) identified changes in commuters in "intellectual disposition", interest in the arts, aesthetics, and humanities that were greater than in residents.

> In simplest terms, the differences between resident and commuting freshmen are the differences between the haves and the have-nots. In general, the parents of residents have higher incomes and more education. Resident students achieved better grades in high school and higher scores on aptitude tests. Their degree aspirations are higher and their average age is lower. They enter college with broader interests in national and world affairs and with more general purposes which they plan to pursue during college.

> They are more liberal and more receptive to diverse points of view and new experiences. (p. 257)

Beginning in the summer of 1967, Matteson (1974) completed three experiments to determine the impact on the move to campus on students' attitudes toward authority figures. The first and second dealt directly with resident students compared to those that stayed at home.

Since the subjects were late adolescents, it was hypothesized that moving to college would lead to less dislike and assertiveness toward authority figures. The findings were contrary to this hypothesis, with the students planning to move to campus exhibiting high levels of assertiveness and dislike. There was no lowering of these measures after moving to campus, just a leveling off. The students that stayed at home experienced an increase in both measures after starting school, until they were equal to the resident levels.

Scott (1975) designed a study to research the impact on the development of college students, of acting as a

student assistant or student leader in a residence hall. Four groups were compared on two separate data gatherings of self-actualization. The first was conducted at the beginning of the Fall semester and the second at the end of the Spring semester. The measure used was Shostrom's Personal Orientation Inventory. The four groups that were considered were student assistants, student leaders, hall residents, and commuters.

When residence hall students were compared to non-residents, residents more often had increases in self-actualization. According to Scott (1975) increases for residents were:

1. Freshman men increased in ability to express their feelings in spontaneous actions.

2. Freshman women increased in their ability to accept anger or aggression within themselves as natural.

3. Upperclass men tended to become more inner-directed and less other-directed and increased their ability to accept themselves in spite of their weaknesses or deficiencies.

4. Upperclass women became increasingly more inner-directed, more flexible, and less

dogmatic in applying their own values and principles to their lives, and better able to develop meaningful relationships.

Increases for commuting students were:

1. Freshman women became more oriented to living in the present and showed an increase in their sensitivity to their own needs and feelings.

2. Upper class women became more flexible in applying their own values and principles to their lives.

Utilizing a small sample of students Welty (1976) conducted a pre-test and a post-test on single freshman students. The purpose was to determine the impact of residence on intellectual and personal growth.

Upon entering, resident students were found to be more disposed to intellectual interests and behaviors, more interested in aesthetic matters, more interested in ideas, more flexible and experimental, more liberal and non-authoritarian, and possessing higher concern and sensitivity to others.

After two quarters at college, commuter students continued to lag behind their resident counterparts on

five of six scales of intellectual development. In addition they had significant differences in the number of extracurricular activities they attended, had fewer new friends at college, and had fewer college friends they had known before.

It was also argued that:

> in several instances, it is not only the living situation that produces the student growth, but the number of new student friendships formed during the freshman year, the amount and quality of student-faculty interactions, and the amount of interaction with administrators also help the student growth. (p. 468)

Marron and Kayson (1984) designed a 4 (year in college) X 2 (living status) X 2 (gender) factorial analysis to analyze data on subjects' self-esteem and life-change scores. The key finding for commuter students was that they exhibited no difference in self-esteem when compared to resident students. The authors postulated that this may be a result of major life-change

events for resident students associated with moving to an unfamiliar environment, causing a lessening of self-esteem.

In a study conducted using 115 students from a single course, varying in age and progress toward their degree, researchers found significant differences between commuters and resident students. Commuters were found to have greater levels of maladjustment, to feel more fused to their parents than any other group, had less trust, lower levels of initiative, and lower overall development of ego identity (Wilson, Anderson, & Fleming, W., 1987).

Smith (1989) reviewed the prior research that compares the non-classroom development of commuters and resident students and found:

> …research comparing the development of commuter and resident college students reveals a broad range of experiences and processes of which the student living at home may be deprived. That research also betrays some seemingly insurmountable obstacles that commuter institutions face in attempting to create comparable developmental experiences.

> Obviously, the commuter college cannot artificially recreate for its students the unique opportunity that initial separation from home and family affords the residential student for developing autonomy and creating self-concept. (p. 53)

In discussing the development of commuter students, Astin (1992) argued that:

> Leaving home to attend college affects student development in various ways. Since few freshmen live in private rooms, these effects compare dormitory living with living at home. Residents show slightly greater increases than commuters in artistic interests, liberalism, and interpersonal self-esteem and show slightly larger declines in musical interest. Effects are substantially larger on behavior: Residents show much greater declines in religiousness and much larger increases in hedonism. Residents are also more likely to interact with faculty, to become involved in

> student government, and to join social fraternities or sororities. (pp. 220-221)

Baxter Margolda (1992) utilized a qualitative approach to develop an understanding of how students with different "ways of knowing" experienced their college environment and the development that ensued. Each subject was interviewed individually on an annual basis for four years. The interviews were transcribed, coded by two separate researchers, and verified with the subject. It was posited that:

> Living arrangements both on and off campus, provide additional challenge…learning to get along with others and managing everyday responsibilities…The substantial challenges and supports students experience through their cocurricular environment confirm that cocurricular experiences can affect students' development. (p. 211)

In research that was designed to investigate the impact of living on campus versus commuting on the cognitive gain of first year freshmen, a sample of 210 incoming freshmen were paid to complete form 88B and form 88A of the Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP). The form 88B was completed in the fall and the form 88A was completed at the end of the spring. Three modules were considered which measured reading comprehension, mathematics, and critical thinking. A sample contained 170 residential students and 40 commuters which was consistent with the student body at large (Pascarella, E., Bohr, L., Nora, A., Zusman, B., Inman, P., & Desler, M., 1993).

An analysis of covariance was used to control for student age, total number of credit hours taken, average hours worked per week, and a measure of academic motivation. The results were that when students were statistically equated, there was a significant difference between residents and commuters in critical thinking gains. Reading and mathematics reported small and non-significant gains.

Inman and Pascarella (1998) used a sample selected from approximately 2,400 entering freshmen at 23 colleges or universities that were part of a longitudinal study. A total of 671 students (326 resident, 316 commuter) were selected for the study. They came from 6 institutions: 1 community college, 1 liberal arts college, 2 research universities, 1 Historically Black Institution, and 1 comprehensive state university.

The dependent variable (critical thinking) was measured using the ACT-CAAP test administered at the end of each of the first two years of college. The independent variable was student residence (commute to campus and reside in university residential halls). Seven preenrollment variables of incoming students at each institution were controlled including: student age, gender, academic motivation, work responsibility, enrollment status, precollege critical thinking ability, and average critical thinking level.

Two blocks of intervening variables were considered as factors differentiating the resident student experience from those of the commuter. The first was

measured using the CSEQ, a self-reported measure of student experience, and the second by the College Environment Scale which measures student impressions of the environment.

Using multiple regressions to measure the influence of each independent variable while controlling for the preenrollment characteristics, the following results were obtained. There was no difference in the development of critical thinking in the first year of college associated with the place of residence. Furthermore, the students' rating of the supportiveness of the institution had no influence. Modest, yet significant, increases in critical thinking were attributed to selected student involvements.

Pascarella, Terenzini, and Blimling (1994) identified six major differences that exist between live at-home commuters and resident students. Residential students:

1. Participate in a greater number of extracurricular, social, and cultural events on campus.

2. Interact more frequently with faculty and peers in informal settings.

3. Are significantly more satisfied with college and are more positive about the social and interpersonal environment of their campus.

4. Are more likely to persist and graduate from college.

5. Show significantly greater positive gains in such areas of psychosocial development as autonomy and inner-directedness, intellectual orientation, and self-concept.

6. Demonstrate significantly greater increases in aesthetic, cultural, and intellectual values; social and political liberalism; and secularism.

But there were no findings to suggest that place of residence impacts students' study habits or results in higher academic performance when entering differences are controlled.

Marginality in Higher Education

The study of marginality and mattering is not new to the higher education setting. Researchers have considered these phenomena to be important in respect to various minority populations. The following related

research will highlight the usefulness of marginality and mattering in expressing the difficulties of distinct groups within higher education. It will also point to the gap that exists in this area with respect to the commuter student.

Burbach and Thompson (1971) utilized the Dean Alienation Scale, which is composed of 24 items that measure the three dimensions of alienation, powerlessness, normlessness and social isolation. The purpose of the study was to examine the perceptions of Black, Puerto Rican, and White students in a large, urban university.

The sample was randomly selected from all the students accepted for admission in the Fall of 1969 in each target group. Surveys were mailed to 725 students (145 Black, 525 White, and 55 Puerto Rican). The return rate was 78.34 percent.

Means were calculated for each group on the three sub-measures and the overall survey. The groups were then compared by the use of t-ratios. The findings were that Blacks had the highest global score, followed by

Whites, with Puerto Ricans having the lowest reporting of total feelings of alienation.

Citing the higher attrition rates for Black students on predominantly White campuses, Suen (1983) used the University Alienation Scale and enrollment records to investigate the relationship at a medium size institution. Usable surveys were obtained from 67 Black students and 151 White students.

For each group of students a T-test of each scale was determined and a chi-square was used to measure the attrition for each group. Relationships between attrition and two factors, alienation and GPA, were calculated by point-biserial correlations. The groups were found to be significantly different on the social estrangement scale and the total scale. They also dropped out at a higher rate than White students, 48 percent to 20 percent respectively. It was determined that there was a higher correlation between alienation and subsequent attrition for the Black students in the sample.

In response to the cross-race methods used to study alienation, Steward, Jackson and Jackson (1990) hypothesized that successful Black students interact differently in a minority campus. Their research showed that these successful Black students:

> …tended to express and want to be included more so when in an all-White campus than when in an all-Black campus situation, and (b) tended to express and want affection more so when in an all-White campus situation than when in an all-Black campus situation. (p. 513)

In a multi-institution examination of students' perception of mattering and marginality, Gossett, Cuyjet and Cockriel (1996) used the Perception on Community/Environment of Undergraduate Students in Higher Education instrument. The sixty item survey is designed to measure total perception of mattering and five sub-scales: attention, importance, dependence, ego-extension, and appreciation.

A sample of 324 Blacks and 805 non-Blacks completed the instrument at four separate institutions. The findings were that there were considerable differences on all six scales and on 49 of the 60 questions. The implications were that Blacks felt like they mattered less and that institutions have failed to make them comfortable.

Identifying six possible reactions to being marginalized, Grant and Breese (1997) conducted a qualitative study to assess 23 Black students' responses. The six reactions posited were:

1. Affected-"exhibiting increased sensitiveness, self-consciousness, an indefinable malaise".

2. Emulative-the condition is so difficult that identifying with the majority is sought after, often at the cost of abandoning their own culture.

3. Defiant-dealing with the discomfort in the environment by open hostility, acting defiant and "finding comfort in explaining their discomfort".

4. Emissarial-acting as the go between for the groups.

5. Withdrawn-can lead to complete withdrawal from the culture and often total emersion into the sub-culture.

6. Balanced-when the two cultures have existed together for an extended period, some may develop the ability to act in both.

In the sample four students were identified as possessing behavior that could be categorized as defiant. One was determined to be withdrawn. There were nine that fell into the balanced category, with the remaining one being viewed as an emissary. Several respondents did not exhibit behavior or characteristics consistent with any of the categories.

James (1998) conducted four separate survey instruments on a group of 100 male and female Black students attending a predominately white institution. The instruments used were the University Alienation Scale, the PRIDE Scale which is an adaptation of the University Alienation Scale, the Attitude Towards Standardized Tests Questionnaire, and the Beck Depression Inventory Scale.

The purpose of the study was to measure the effects of feelings of social alienation among African-American

students. It was found that 25% of those surveyed had a worsening of self-esteem and self-concept. All reported strong feelings of social alienation, but those with the highest scores on alienation experiences greater levels of depression.

While examining the feelings of marginality of transfer students, Kodama (2002) used the Commuter Student Experience Survey. The original purpose of the instrument was to measure the use of support services, involvement in campus life, and the best ways to inform commuters about activities. The scale was changed to use the items that best measured the elements of marginality proposed by Schlossberg (1989).

This survey was administered to 142 native students and 167 transfer students. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) found that there was no significant difference in the feelings of marginality between native and transfer groups. With the use of multiple regression the researcher was able identify level of on-campus support and gender as two variables that were significant

predictors of marginality for transfer students. Women seemed to have greater feelings of marginality.

The body of research as reviewed by Baumeister and Leary in 1995, suggests that the need to belong is basic to humans. The need to belong acts as a motivating factor and humans require contact with others and a caring environment.

Three major themes of mattering presented by Rosenberg and McCullough in 1981 were attention, importance, and dependence. A fourth, appreciation, was added by Schlossberg (1989) as she described the relationship that exists between mattering and marginality as a continuum with marginality at one end with mattering at the other.

Dean and Middleton (1961) explained a closely related concept in their presentation of alienation. They posit that alienation is composed of three factors: powerlessness, normlessness, and social isolation.

Summary

The literature reviewed in this chapter examines the issue of retention in the higher education environment and more specifically the attrition challenge faced by the commuter student. Included is a synthesis of the research on commuters; their relationships with their peers and families; and their achievement and development in comparison to their residential counterparts.

The literature presented in this review highlights the value of studying the feelings and impact of marginality in the university setting. Various groups have been compared in differing settings, but there is one glaring void. While many of the studies cited the predominately white culture of higher education, they paid most attention to its dominant residential culture and little focus to the commuter student.

A second major flaw in the current literature on marginality is the lack of qualitative research. If a culture is lived and experienced, then a key aspect of understanding must be recognizing how it is experienced.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

As has been highlighted in the literature review, commuter student retention is a critical issue for institutions of higher education. Significant efforts to identify the differences that exist between commuter students and resident students have been undertaken. While researchers have been largely successful in producing the results that identify these differences, there is evidence that they have failed to discover a complete explanation of the higher attrition rates of commuters.

Most importantly, the findings suggest that although there are differences in these groups prior to entering college, when these differences are taken into account, their academic performance and development are comparable. If the results of this type of research are accepted and determined to be accurate measures of academic integration, then it is clear that the issue of

academic integration does not explain the attrition difference. The research conducted was designed to determine the nature of the experience of commuter students as they attempt to adjust to college.

Since the purpose of this study was understand the phenomenological experience of commuter students, the selection of methods was directed toward a qualitative study. Quantitative analysis would be more appropriate in evaluating the differences in some variable as measured in a numerical fashion. In this case, the key aspect was to understand how commuter students make sense of their adjustment (or lack of adjustment) in college. In essence, this study is designed to analyze their narratives of integration and/or marginality.

The difference between quantitative and qualitative research is described in the following way by Denzin and Lincoln (2000),"The word qualitative implies an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured (if measured at all) in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency"(p. 8).

Qualitative Research

At its heart qualitative research tries to find the answers to questions by scrutinizing the setting and the people that occupy those settings. Of key interest is the method by which individuals position themselves in their environment and the process of making sense of their surroundings (Berg, 2001).

Qualitative research is part of the naturalistic paradigm. The naturalist paradigm contrasts sharply with the positivist paradigm of the sciences. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 37) posit five crucial differences between the two paradigms. To the positivist reality is singular and tangible, knower and known are independent, it is possible to have context and time free generalizations, there are true causes, and inquiry is value free. To the naturalist reality is multiple and constructed, knower and known are inseparable, hypotheses are time and context bound, it is impossible to

distinguish cause from effect, and inquiry is value bound.

Merriam (1998) provides five basic assumptions that create the underpinning of the qualitative approach. It begins with the supposition that "researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed" (p. 7). This places it in contrast to quantitative approaches that wish to dissect the environment and understand the parts, while qualitative research endeavors to view how the parts fashion the whole. This challenges the researcher to find the "emic" or insider's viewpoint instead of the "etic" which is the outsider's view.

Understanding the experience of the subject is essential when studying humans because they act to interpret and give meaning to the events that shape their world. These interpretations influence subsequent behavior (Singleton, 1988). Morris (1977) described this stage of the research of a group as "setting the moorings". "An understanding of the phenomena from within, as they are lived through by others, is the first

step in a disciplined investigation of the human experience" (p. 12).

The second characteristic proposed by Merriam (1998) is that "the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis"(p.8). Unlike the inanimate methods of data collection, the research can respond and adapt to the participant and the setting. Immediate analysis of the data is possible and emerging issues can be explored.

Hatch (2002) describes this process as "emergent design", and describes its workings and the challenges it raises for the researcher.

> It is a characteristic of qualitative research that studies change as they are being implemented. Because the goal is to get inside a social phenomenon in a special social setting, it is impossible to construct a design *a priori* that takes into account what the researcher finds upon actually entering the social setting… This becomes a sore spot between doctoral candidates and their committees. Many committees expect a research

> proposal that represents a contract specifying exactly what students will do, when and for how long they will do it, and what questions will be answered in the doing. Some students prepare proposals that specify very little or nothing, claiming that the design will emerge. (pp. 9-10)

Thornton (1993) argues that the qualitative researcher is faced with the choice of design. He presents that some researchers highly structure their field work and data analysis. While he clearly states that the concept of “tabula rasa”, or clean slate, does not exist in research design, most qualitative researchers support this concept of an emergent quality as an essence of the design.

Qualitative research is also characterized by the involvement of field work. In order for the researcher to view behavior and the nature of the natural setting the researcher must often go to the setting. While the possibility of conducting qualitative research away from

the field exists, this is the exception, rather than the rule.

Since qualitative research areas often do not have existing theory it is said it “primarily employs inductive research strategies” (Merriam, 1998, p.7). This idea of induction is explained by Goetz and LeCompte (1984) as the use of “inferences and speculation”. These inferences and speculation develop as the researcher moves through data collection and analysis and then are tested during the project.

The last characteristic of qualitative research that is offered by Merriam (1998) is that “the product of a qualitative study is richly descriptive” (p. 8). Unlike quantitative research where the findings are often discussed using numbers or numerical values, in qualitative research the use of word or pictures act as the means of description.

Phenomenology

Various traditions lie within the framework of qualitative research, Creswell (1998) identifies five, while Merriam (1998) reports that Tesch has listed over forty. Each of these traditions was developed in response to researchers' needs to study particular types of problems.

In this case, the study investigated the experience (adjustment and marginality) as seen through the eyes of the participant (commuter student), which suggests a phenomenological approach. As defined by Gall, Borg, and Gall, "phenomenology is the study of the world as it appears to individuals when they pledge themselves in a state of consciousness that reflects an effort to be free of everyday biases and beliefs," (1996, p. 600). Creswell described a phenomenological study as finding "the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept of the phenomenon," (Creswell, p. 51).

Lauer (1965) explains that when we use the term "phenomenology" in current qualitative research, we are drawing on the thinking of Edmund Husserl or one of his followers. Husserl's position is described by Lauer as:

> …asserting that only phenomena are *given*, but he will claim that *in* them is given the very *essence* of that which is. Here there is no concern with reality as existing, since existence is at best contingent and as such can add to reality nothing which would be the object of scientific knowledge. (pgs. 3-4)

Schultz (1970) expands on the reason for Husserl developing the idea of phenomenology:

> …none of the so-called rigorous sciences, which use mathematical language with such efficiency, can lead toward an understanding of our experiences of the world-a world the existence of which they uncritically presuppose, and which they pretend to measure by yardstick and pointers on the scale of their instruments. All empirical sciences refer to the world as pre-given; but they and their

instruments are themselves elements of this world. (p. 54)

Each of the commuter students selected for this study lived the commuter experience. Through their senses they take it in, but through perception they give meaning to the experience. At the core of this study was understanding how they perceive the environment and whether they interpret certain segments as reflections of not mattering or marginality.

Data Collection

Three basic types of data were utilized: field notes, participant responses, and institutional documents. Each support and augment the other sources by providing the researcher with different perspectives of the participants as they describe their experiences as commuters.

The researcher, from design through analysis of this project, generated field notes. They provided insight

into the thought process of the researcher as the design was determined: his experiences, bias, and even feelings. During the interview phase the textual nature of the interviews were captured in the notes, such as setting, mood, or other environmental factors.

Data was collected following the guidelines suggested for phenomenological studies. In phenomenology, the participant is considered to be the expert and data are collected through an extensive interview process. In this case, three interviews of one hour were conducted with each of the participants. Audio-taping was utilized to increase the accuracy of the data collected and aid in the transcription of data. During the interviews, the researcher completed field notes that identify elements of the environment that may not have be captured through the audio-taping.

Goetz & Lecompton (1984) described the basic forms of interviews that researchers might use: scheduled standardized, nonscheduled standardized, and nonstandardized. The scheduled standardized is viewed as "virtually an orally administered questionnaire"(p. 119).

Each and every question is asked in the same order to all participants. The nonscheduled standardized allows for the order to be varied, but all of the same questions are asked. In the nonstandardized, which is more informal, the basic information that is sought and some general questions are outlined, but the interview is more undirected.

For the purposes of this study, the interview method followed those suggested by Merriam (1998):

> For the most part…interviewing in qualitative investigation is more open-ended and less structured. Less structured formats assume that individual respondents define the world in unique ways…In this type of interview either all of the questions are more flexibly worded, or the interview is a mix of more and less structured questions. Usually, specific information is desired from all the respondents, in which case there is a highly structured section to the interview. But the largest part of the interview is guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, and neither the

exact word nor the order of the questions is determined ahead of time. (p. 74)

The first interview was completed at the onset of the study and designed to introduce the participant to the study, to complete the consent forms, and gather base information for further questioning. At that point, the researcher provided the participants with basic background on his experience as a commuter and his interest in the research. Questions were created with the intent of gaining familiarity with the participant, gathering demographic information, and understanding their expectations of the study. Questions used for this interview are presented in Appendix A.

The second interview was completed approximately two weeks later. It was designed to investigate the experiences that the student had as they participated in the social and academic environment of the institution. The questions presented in this section of the interview process were designed to provide insight into the experiences of the participant, their level of

involvement, and the interaction with peers and faculty, as they were involved in the setting. Preliminary questions for this interview session are provided in Appendix B.

The third and final interview was conducted one month later. At this time, the member checking (described later in this section) was conducted. Also, any emerging themes identified through the earlier interviews were further investigated. Questions for the third interviews are provided in Appendix C.

The interviews were designed to generate the participant responses that are a key to a successful phenomenological study. The experience and insight of the participant, as the "expert" in the phenomena under study, is the crucial element in understanding it.

Documentation for the study consisted of the information provided by the registrar's office pertaining to each subject. This provided confirmation for the biographical data, academic information, and background information contributed by the participants.

To create triangulation and insure the validity of the information gathered, the two seniors and the two freshmen involved in the interviews were asked to complete journals. The journals involved registering their activities over the course of two weeks. The journals were compared to the stated levels of campus related activity for each student. In addition, they provided a glimpse into the type of activities the student participates in.

The value of triangulation is supported by Denzin and Lincoln (2000).

> Qualitative research is inherently multi-method…triangulation, reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question. Objective reality can never be captured. We can know a thing only through its representatives. Triangulation is not a tool or a strategy of validation, but an alternative to validation. (p. 5)

Two additional forms of data collection were utilized. The first was a set of discussions with focus groups, conducted between the first and second interview. These were designed to utilize a group setting to encourage students, similar to the participants, to share ideas and experiences. The focus groups served as a source of questions which expanded the data collected from the interviews. It also allowed the researcher to test themes that had begun to emerge.

The focus groups were selected to mirror the commuter students being interviewed. Two groups of five or six were selected following the same criteria as those interviewed. One group consisted of freshmen commuters, one of senior commuters.

Focus groups are often used as a secondary source of data in qualitative research. Hatch (2002) explains that through the focused nature of the group discussions can provide greater level of data than can often obtained in individual interviews. Hatch continues to discuss how this might work citing Hillebrandt, Byers & Wilcox:

> A record of how meaning is negotiated in groups is powerful data that is hard to come by using other strategies. In addition, being interviewed in groups gives informants a sense of security and comfort that may lead to more candid and reflective responses than in individual interviews (Hillebrandt, 1979). Being in a group may make participants more willing to express opinions that they perceive might not fit with researcher expectations. And finally, focus groups offer the advantage of giving participants a say in how the direction of the interview ought to go. While moderators are prepared with specific questions, they are sensitive to going where the group wants to go with particular topics, and this opens the opportunity for richer, more meaningful data (Byers & Wilcox,1991). (p. 132)

The second additional form of data came from the use of member checking which is described as “the process of having these individuals’ review statements made in the

researcher's report for accuracy and completeness," (Gall et al., p. 575). Analysis, themes, and categories were shared with the participant to insure the accuracy with the statements expressed.

As described by Lincoln and Guba (1985), member checking serves several purposes. The first is described above as a method of insuring accuracy and completeness, but they also argue that it serves to "provide evidence of creditability-the trustworthiness criterion analogous to internal validity in conventional studies" (p. 374).

Data Sources

Purposeful sampling was utilized to identify and select the commuter students, two seniors, two freshmen, and two commuters that have dropped-out. As described by Merriam (1998), the process of purposeful sampling begins with determining the selection criteria for the sample. To create a more consistent sample, the participants were limited in age, had never been a resident student, and lived more than five miles from the campus. The sample

for this study consists of students considered to be traditional age, eighteen to twenty four year old commuters.

All participants selected attended the same publicly funded liberal arts institution in the Southwest (hereafter called University A). The institution in which the research took place has an enrollment of approximately 1,100 full time students located on one campus. It has recently expanded its residence hall facilities to increase the number of students living on campus. Traditionally, it largely served a commuter population, with approximately 30% of full time students living on campus. These recent changes have moved the number of on campus residents to more than 40%. As a result, the student population has become younger in the past few years.

Each of the freshmen and senior participants in this study was randomly selected from lists provided by the registrar's office of the institution. The lists were limited by age, hours completed, and zip code.

The drop outs were identified using the same information as used for the seniors and freshmen. Two lists were generated with the additional factor that they were enrolled in the 2002-2003 school year but not for the 2003-2004 year.

Method of Analysis

Hessler (1992) describes the process of analysis as the toughest and most exciting part of the qualitative research study. The problem is that "trees get in the way of seeing the forest" (p. 226). Close involvement in the field by the researcher can lead to acceptance of the dominant view of the participants so there may be such great detail that the larger picture is missed.

The data in this case was analyzed following a modified form of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method as described in Creswell. First, the researcher provided a description of his or her own experience with the phenomenon. Providing the reader with an adequate understanding of the background of the researcher to aid

in the elimination and identification of biases that may be present (Creswell, p. 147-150).

With the emersion of the researcher in the gathering and analysis of the data, Wilson (1977) expresses the need for the creation of a “disciplined subjectivity”.

> …that is as thorough and intrinsically objective as are other kinds of research…Human actions have more meanings than just the concrete facts of who, what, where, and when that an outsider can observe…to understand these hidden or unexpressed meanings, the research must learn to systematically empathize with the participants. (p.258)

Merriam (1998) describes the task that faces the researcher at this point:

> Prior beliefs about a phenomenon of interest are temporarily put aside, or bracketed, so as not to interfere with seeing or intuiting the elements or structure of the phenomenon. When belief is temporarily suspended, consciousness itself becomes

> heightened and can be examined in the same way that an object of consciousness can be examined. (p. 16)

In order to identify any emerging themes in the data, each set of interviews were fully transcribed into written form before the subsequent interviews. Creswell (1998) describes this "process of taking information from data collection and comparing it to emerging categories" as the constant comparative method (p. 57). This method aids the researcher in identifying the meaning of categories and where the difference exists between categories, thus accentuating the categories that are of the greatest importance (Gall, et al., pp. 566-567).

Statements from the interviews were identified that describe how the individuals experience the topic under consideration, this process is defined as "reduction" or "bracketing" by Morris (1997, p. 11). The purpose of this step is to encourage the researcher to break down the total that comprises the social setting into the basic parts. This provided analysis that overcomes the social reality that is created in the everyday world,

leading to acceptance of the "natural attitude" (Morris, p. 11).

These statements were then grouped into "meaning units." Meaning units are the common themes that are derived from the data. This process is also referred to as "classification," with a general rule that the number of categories for classification is defined by the point at which all the data can be "accurately" and "exclusively" classified (Hessler, p. 262).

According to Glesne (1999), the process of coding is "a progression of sorting and defining and defining and sorting of those scraps of collected data." This requires the "clumping" of code into major groups, then into subgroups (p. 135).

Berg stresses the importance of creating a systematic method of filing data (2001, p. 103). At this stage, data will be filed into expandable folders based on the classifications identified previously.

They were then written up as textural descriptions of what happened in the experience, often including verbatim examples. In the next step of the analysis

process, the researcher reflected and used structural descriptions to define all of the meaning and different perspectives. Finally, the researcher created an overall description of the essence and meaning of the experience (Creswell, p. 147-150).

Summary

The purpose of this study was to understand the experience of the commuters as they exist in the social and academic environment of the university. The design was qualitative in nature and follows the phenomenological methodology. The key source of data was three interviews conducted with six commuter students: two freshmen, two seniors, and two who have dropped out. The data were augmented with field notes from the researcher and registrar documents as well as two small focus group interviews.

Data were analyzed manually using a constant comparative method with interviews transcribed manually

between subsequent interviews. The researcher broke the data down into categories and subcategories, and then looked for themes that exist between participants. These themes and the stories of the participants as they experience the phenomenon created the methods for presenting the findings.

The belief underlying this study is that in the process of experiencing higher education, commuters make meaning to whether they matter or not to the institution. In telling their stories, there was an explanation reflecting either the four elements of mattering that were expressed by Rosenberg, McCullough (1989) and Schlossberg (1989) or those of alienation provided by Dean and Middleton (1961).

If the themes are more closely aligned with the idea of alienation than mattering, then this would support the contention that commuters lack integration. This is a key indication of the likelihood of attrition as suggested by Tinto (1987). It would also support Kalsner's (1991) argument, that most students do not drop

out because of academic issues, by agreeing with the reoccurring theme of adjustment issues.

CHAPTER IV

Presentation and Discussion of Research Findings

Introduction

After more than three decades of research on retention, the attrition rates of students in higher education remain largely unchanged. Commuters as a subset of the larger student body leave college at a higher rate. They also make up the majority of students on university campuses and are the fastest-growing group in higher education. Little research has been done to identify the distinct issues that face this group as they make a decision to stay or leave.

This study aimed to identify issues of marginality that may be an intervening factor in a commuter student's decision to leave college. Connection to the university, through both the academic and social sides, has been found to be important in retaining students. How do commuters make sense of their adjustment to college?

Does commuting impact the academic and social participation of these students? Is marginality or elements of isolation evident in the way they described their college experience?

The previous chapter discussed the methodology for this study, including the sample, data collection methods, and the procedures for analyzing the data collected. This chapter will present the findings of the study, as it was conducted. The information will be provided first in a description of the participants based on their responses during the interview process. This will be followed by an analysis of the themes that developed during the course of these interviews. Six participants completed a series of interviews, two seniors, two freshmen, and two students who had dropped out of the institution in the past.

The Narratives of Two Seniors

Leslie

Leslie is a highly intelligent and articulate 22 year-old senior. A double major, she is in the second

semester of her senior year, carrying a 4.0 grade-point average. As a full-time student, Leslie regularly commutes 40 miles each way from the home she shares with her husband in a nearby town. In her words, she lives a "very suburban life", unlike what she views as the typical college student's existence.

> It's much better than living in a ghetto apartment eating ramen noodles…I know it's overrated, but sometimes you just want life to suck because all of your friends you know…you go home to your nice house, your dog, XBOX.

With a husband that works full-time and provides a sufficient income, Leslie is afforded the opportunity to complete her education while working part-time. Her job allows her the flexibility to work on weekends, during school breaks, and infrequently on Monday through Friday. Leslie has an average work week of approximately 8 hours. During her first interview, she described her approach to her education as:

> It's been fairly flawless academically, so I can't complain. That makes sense...I enjoy, I guess, the potential for academic escape, being that I'm a commuter, I can get out of class and I can go study you know until 5, 6 o'clock and go home and it separates that home life and that school life very much where it's like a job, you know you stay and you do your work and you don't do your work at home…

Describing herself as "anti-social," one of Leslie's goals as she entered the university setting was to attempt to make new friends. While she had been successful in becoming acquainted with some faculty members and classmates, until the summer of her senior year there were few that she considered friends. She describes the difficulties that she faced in this way:

> I would say the social element, I mean outside of being anti-social, I just didn't have a fighting chance to get involved. You know you come down for [campus event] and you had to come and stay and then go home because you don't have that option to go

> home and watch T.V. for a couple of hours and then come back and so that kind of a thing has always been a drag...just the inability to pursue that if I wanted to.

Through a strange coincidence, this changed over the summer, when Leslie met another university student while attending a summer camp. Through this new friend Leslie became a member of a club on campus that expanded her circle of friends. By her own account, this has had a dramatic impact on her social involvement and satisfaction. A review of her journal indicates that she now spends a significant amount of time with a group of friends that she has become associated with based on this friendship. During her interview, she explained the relationship and her satisfaction in this way:

> It really increased it, because now there is more of a motive to be here outside of pure academics, which really has been fine, you know no argument there, but it is nice to come and say hello and know that you have some sort of social thing to look forward

to; you're not just going to drive through class and then wander for an hour and then go to another class. It's definitely…it's good.

She continued on to clarify the nature of the interaction by separating the academic and social elements of the group's time together:

Oh, no we study a lot, they study biology and I'm studying economics, but you know and I said we all work out together and you know there is the whole eating thing, but we study together all the time, but that's definitely not the basis of it.

While Leslie continues on to explain the importance of these social interactions, and her overall satisfaction as a student, she highlights the difficulties that institutions face in trying to create an environment that initiates this type of interaction for commuter students. Even though she spends many hours a week socially with her group of friends, she rarely goes to campus events:

And that was something I was thinking when you were talking last meeting is I hardly ever go to them

> because I don’t want to drive back up here at night to…I don’t know the only time I came was for 1964 [campus event] and I had season tickets and never came back to anything else, because once you get home and settled and you know to pick up the husband and we’re going, do we want to drive 40 miles.

Despite the changes that have taken place during her senior year and the improvements that she has seen, Leslie recognizes that commuting does create some disadvantages. One of these disadvantages directly impacts her ability to complete her academic work. She discussed this problem in this way:

> Access to the library, I can't...I mean if I get a research project I probably need to do it during my school day...I'm kinda a night person so I would definitely be into those late night hours that they offer, things like that, if I need a resource I've got to wait until I'm coming to school.

Leslie's responses during this interview process are in harmony with those of other senior commuters in the focus group. One constant among all the members was the

subordination of their social goals to achieve their academic goals. Most described their approach as viewing the academic process as their job, with little interest focused on the social elements on campus. While this was often expressed by Leslie and the focus group, often the underlying message was that they truly missed an important part of higher education. One member of the focus group put it this way, "I'm at the point where I want to be more a part of... and not just go to class. I wanna be a part of different groups and stuff like that. So I can leave my mark, and be an alumni and still know people from…and still connect with them in the future and stuff like that."

The difference that had taken place in Leslie's academic career was not lost on her. She recognized that meeting with this group of friends had indeed made a significant impact on her overall experience. She related her understanding of the changes in this way:

> It just seems it's such a great impact study, the changes between this year and last year. I enjoy school so much more with the social element it's

like I'm motivated to....I don't know what it is, but I'm motivated to show up because I get to see somebody and we're all academically minded, so that's a great encouragement to me. But yeah, I don't know what it is, but the fact that if I could go to 1964 [campus event], this year and I could go with six friends would be great, that would be much better.

Justin

Justin is a warm and gregarious 22 year-old senior, in the last semester of his undergraduate program. Until recently, Justin has lived at home with his mother, and one brother, while commuting 18 miles each way. During his senior year, he and a friend moved into an apartment, just a few blocks from his parent's home in his hometown.

In many ways, he is different than the other senior commuters that were included in this study. While he is not majoring in music, Justin has been a

part of one of the University bands since he was a freshman. This has resulted in greater involvement in campus activities than any of the other seniors interviewed or in the focus group.

> Yeah, I've made a good amount of friends up here. In fact one of my friends graduated from here back in May and he got married back in July and of course I was at his wedding, and we've hung out before. I have friends now all over the country. Really because a lot of them have left and they'll stop in occassionally or we'll talk to each other on the phone and they're completely and utterly seperated from [institution], but we still interact. So yeah, I do keep communication with them. It's kind of like high school, you make your friends there, and then they go their seperate ways, but they are still your friends and so you find them and I've discovered that I've done that here. Made all new friends and we'll associate with each other outside of class. And hopefully friends that I'll have for a lifetime...teachers and students.

Justin's involvement in the University band has had the added benefit of allowing him to interact closely with some faculty. One example of this was detailed as he described such an activity during our interview:

> …and another cool part about it is you get to make some pretty cool relationships with some of the professors here. The only university parties I've ever been to have been over at Dr. D's house. I've been a member of the band for the past 4 years, just because I did it in high school and it's the only thing I know. So I was a member of that and every year at Christmas we get together at his house and we have wasol and finger foods and play with his dog and things like that.

While Justin is different than the other commuter seniors included in this study, he is also similar in many ways. One way that he is similar is his ability to rationalize the advantages of being a commuter. The senior sample as a whole tended to view living on campus in negative terms. The following description represents Justin and many other seniors view of resident students:

Another commuting thing that I've noticed, and it's funny, me and Dr. D were talking about this just the other day ... he was doing midterm grades and he had to turn in a lot of F's...and noticed that a lot of them were kids that live right over there in L Court. And I've noticed, and I've talked to some people that I've known that have lived over there and they would stay over there, they would not come across the street to come to class. And we had made kind of the funny comment that it's almost like they were just looking for some cheap housing and decided to come here. I had one of my first year or two here I had about six friends in the communications department. Most of them lived right across the street and they would not come to class. It was just impossible for them to get up and walk across the street, but me being 15 to 20 minutes away I would be there every time and that was always amazing to me. But they would get over there and there's parties going on quite a bit and they play volley ball until 5 in the morning and while we also

> noticed that the students in [dorm], they have a curfew, and rules and things of that nature and so they would be in class more than the L [university apartments] people.

While he rationalizes that commuting has its advantages, it is clear that he recognizes that much attention is paid to resident students. When questioned about to the activities on campus, and his involvement in them, he describes the focus on the resident to student. He discussed it this way:

> Oh, it seemed like we've got stuff going on here if you want to make a special trip back to campus. That's like Saturday, I had to make a special trip up here that I wasn't planning on, to come up here and do the ball game, which isn't that big of a deal and then this weekend we've got another ball game Saturday and then our senior communications project, we're going to get together Sunday that way we have a lot of time to go around town and shoot some footage and stuff for our big project that will be coming up here in a couple of weeks and getting

under the wire. But I don't know it kind of almost makes sense that there would be a focus on trying to please the students that are here on campus that way they can try and keep them here on campus, you have these huge apartments over here that we have to pay.

When asked to address the issue of disadvantages that he faced as a commuter, Justin struggled with the question. After some time, he was able to present only one basic concern:

…mainly just inconvenienced. Like Thursday we had our ball game, last Thursday, not today obviously, but I had class at 9:30 or something and then it got out at 10:30 and then I had to sit around basically until 6 o'clock. Yeah, I could have drove home and then drove back, but it would have been kind of a waste of gas.

As he considered his answers to this question, and dwelled upon the issue of the institutions response to the needs of resident students, he described many of the participant's views:

I think that they try to be concerned about the students that are on campus, because we have so many of them that are constantly, and I hear that it's all the time, complaining about there's nothing to do here and there's nothing to do on the weekends and they're bored and they want to go do something... I tend to think that they would look at the student here on campus and commuter students are a large portion I believe of the students that come here and since they're not here all the time, it's like well, they're not here so we should...if they're here, they're here and if they're not, they're not, but we've got to focus on these people that are on campus, try to get them to class, try to get them involved, try to not bore them out of their minds so they don't want to transfer to a different place, which has happened before.

As Justin was clear in pointing out his view of the institutions approach to satisfying the needs of the resident students, he was quick to separate the institutions' response from that of the faculty. In

fact, in his experience faculty have had a different approach, highlighted in this statement:

> Most of the professors and stuff that I've ever had never really made it an issue, to me anyway, to know who was commuting and who was on campus and if you were just in a lot of the classes that I've had and you were the professor and at the end of the semester, were asked ok, of these students, in your mind, which ones do you think are commuting and which ones do you think live on campus? and most of the classes I've had they would probably be surprised to find out that it's almost opposite. I mean like I said I don't know if I'm an exception to the rule or what, but.

Consistent with the other senior commuters in the study, Justin has learned to adapt to the challenges of commuting. As with the other students, he has found that learning to manage his time is a key factor for success. This is seen both in his approach to scheduling:

> I try to schedule everything to where....and that's the thing, your freshman year you can make a

schedule really easily and even your second semester...your last two or three years, it's like, ok I've had that, I've had that, I haven't had that, but it's the same time as this other class I need and it gets really, after that its like man, just put down whatever I can take. What the thing Tuesday, or Thursday...I wouldn't have been up here that long, but I had to wait for the basketball game, and I do try to do my classes where I won't be up here for just long periods of time just sitting around doing nothing where it's kind of an inconvenience. So...or things of that nature.

As well as the use of time, when commuting:

Yeah, something along that line and I do a lot of speeches being a communications major and so most of the times I'll practice my speeches on the drive up here and everything, so it gives good time and also think about clearing my head and hey what am I doing today. I've got this class and I've got this presentation, and I've got this class and there will be a test in it, or I'm going to be doing this,

that. Figuring out my whole day. And I've worked and I've had jobs in Anadarko before, I've had jobs here in Chickasha before, and I'm commuting on the weekends to those places also.

Narratives of Two Freshmen

Sheila

In the first semester of her freshman year, Sheila is an 18-year-old who lives with her mother and younger brother approximately 18 miles from campus. In one respect too, she is unique among all the students interviewed. In response to how much time she spent on campus, she replied “It's zero. I come to class and that's the only time I'm at campus. At all”. A review of her journal reveals this to be an accurate portrayal.

With the little time she spends on campus in class, she has still been able to make some friends. Sheila accounts for this by explaining that many of her acquaintances were individuals that she knew before coming to college.

> Yeah, there's a few, people that are from around small towns that I know, that I played basketball with or....they're in my classes, I talk to them, but I wouldn't just talk to any stranger....I haven't made any friends like that.

Two additional people are her major access to campus life. The first, is her fiancé, the second is an upper-level student she works with off campus. This friend J. J., is her major connection to the activities of the campus. She describes a relationship this way:

> Ummm....I don't know the only time I ever hear about things that are going on is through J.J., but J.J. is involved in everything and she tells me, but that's the only way I hear about it. I don't stop and read the signs, but.... Yeah, like I was....J.J. is in the sorority, and I didn't even know they had one and she was like we're having interviews. And I was like for what? and she said for the sorority....and I was like ya'll are having one? and she was like yeah. and I was like I didn't even know anything about it.

Sheila's lack of involvement in the college community began even before her first day on campus. In describing her actions during orientation week, she sets the stage for her involvement on campus currently as," I never went to any of the extracurricular things, like they had the luau, and the night games, or something like that but I never did any of that."

It appears that there are two explanations for her approach to the social environment on campus. The first, is that she may feel that these activities are directed toward resident students

> Yeah, like I was telling my cousin that I was doing this and she was like, well, you should bring up that there are more posters and bulletins in the apartments and [dorm] of whatever is going on, it's in those buildings and not so much in [campus building], and [campus building], and [campus building]. She said cause she went there and there was just stuff all over the wall, but you won't see that in the classrooms and stuff like that. I mean, I don't know personally, because I have never been,

in either of those. I mean, I went to J.J.'s room, but.... It's basically for them. Like maybe if they had bulletins for what was going on for the month or something, that would be nice. Or just like mailed us something, like this is the month and this is what is going on.

The second reason is more personal in nature. With little connection to the institution, it appears that her time is dedicated to her job and her fiancé. This became clear as she discussed her interest in the events she has heard about:

Oh, they sound like they would be fun, but I don't see T [fiancé] that much, maybe from like 8-10 [time] and that's all, but I don't choose to come up here. But it sounds like somethings....like I've been invited to go to a lot of things, but I choose not to.

With the limited time that Sheila spends on campus it is not surprising she describes a relationship with faculty by saying, “I've never had a talk with them one on one, person to person. I just leave class, like I

have...they know me I guess." Based her restricted interaction with the campus community, she has developed a unique view of her importance to the institution.

> I guess I'm making them money. I don't know though, I don't feel like they just can't go on without me, but....I don't know. I think I'm here because I want to be here, not because they want me to be here. Not that they don't want me here, but they're not like I'm really glad to have you in class. Like I don't feel like that.

And if she were to decide to leave;

> I don't know. Just sign my paper and you would be through with it I guess. I don't know that there is much, I don't know, I mean I've never dropped a class or anything. I mean I know in high school whenever we would want to change classes they would be like we don't want you out of our class...stay in our class you know or something like that. But I've never had a teacher come up and talk to me or anything, I mean Dr. M talks to everybody so I wouldn't necessarily say that was. But he's

probably the person I've had the most contact with. But none of my teachers are.

Even though Sheila appears to be happy with her time in school and her interaction with faculty and classmates, she realizes that it could be different. She explains, how more time on campus, and more contact could have an impact, "yeah, I mean I would be friends with everyone because I would be around them all the time and I would be around here all the time, but…".

Ned

In a way, Ned is representative of the problem that faces commuter students. He is the third freshman male to begin the interview process, but the first to complete it. The earlier participants both dropped out of the study and subsequently left school. Both of these students spent little time on campus, other than in class.

Ned is a 19 year old second semester freshman, who lives with his parents and younger sister, 20 to 25 miles from campus. In addition to being a full-time student,

Ned works 35 to 40 hours per week to help pay this college expenses.

Like the other males that were interviewed in this study, Ned has been able to become involved at least moderately in the social environment. This has been aided by the availability of acquaintances on campus.

> Really, I knew a few people before I came up here. But I… we never were friends or anything back in high school, but now that we are up here, you know just different goals. You find different people with the same goals and the same… Wants out of college and taking the same classes and you say, "hey I recognize you." And now you are buddies.

This group of friends on campus, has been expanded through one of the organizations in which he holds membership.

> I am in show band. We're also trying to start our own band. We are just kind of playing around right now. Well, I play a lot of guitar. Lift weights every now and then. And that's pretty much it. Study… All guys I've met here.

These relationships have resulted in Ned spending several hours, "Probably around 2. 2 or 3 hours. 3 at the most", on campus socializing.

> I've been to the dances, movies… I go bowling all of the time. Shoot pool. I do it with my friends. Oh, I forgot to mention, I am on the bowling team, actually it's a bowling class. I wouldn't call it a team right now.

While his social involvement on campus has been significant, this does not mean that he does not face challenges as a commuter. When asked to explain the challenges that he faced, two were prominent, sleep and scheduling.

> It's been hard to get up in the morning and get to school on time. That's probably the biggest problem… Missed a few classes. Because either I slept through my alarm, or as late as I get in some nights. It just takes another hour. That hour makes a big difference when you are going to school. I mean, my parents, if I am out real late, gripe. About that they can't sleep until I get home. Other

than that, it's not that bad for me. It does take less time I can work on stuff like that (studying) because I have got to drive and drive back in the morning...Having to drive the same drive every, you know, two or three or four times a day, it gets old after a while. Just gotta wake up, like I say on campus I could go to bed 30 minutes to an hour earlier and then I wouldn't be waking up the same time as if I had to drive to school. But with that extra hour, if I wake up later or anything, its not like big deal, I have to drive 100 miles an hour to class.

Ned's first challenge in scheduling is organizing his work schedule and school schedule to facilitate the commuting process.

Tuesday and Thursday I've got most of my classes. Monday, Wednesday, and Friday I have got one morning class. So I work those days and Weekends…. Its just that there are so many classes that have an hour or two hour gap between, I try to keep them as close as I can, that way, if it is all morning

classes, I can work in the evening. If it is all evening classes, I can start work and work a night shift. Sleep in late that morning.

Then, he spends a significant portion of time during the day to insure that he has everything that he needs for his classes. This was his response when asked to describe the time and the process that he used.

Probably about 30 to 45 minutes every day. Well, of course I usually try to take care of homework that needs to be done that night before I go to sleep. So probably 2 hours at the most…, I try to keep everything for school, and I've got this black bag style briefcase that I carry around, it weighs about 60 to 70 pounds… it's like a locker on a strap, I guess you'd call it. But yea, that's where I keep everything that involves school with.

Although Ned seems to be accomplishing the goals of balancing work, school, and commuting he recognize is that if he lived on campus, it might be different.

They (resident students) can be a lot less serious than I can, and do a lot better than me, because

they are getting a full night's sleep. And if they got a question, they are just hanging out, they just ask the question. Somebody will know it. But, me, you know, I have got to make phone calls… about 50 phone calls to find out who knows the answer to this or who knows the answer to that…I kept telling my friends since they get told before I do, you know when there's a dance or anything like that, to be sure to tell me. Sure enough the day of the dance about an hour before it, they are like "Hey there's a dance tonight." So, I almost missed out on that…Socially, it does impact you quite a bit because everybody is just getting started, you know hanging out or partying, or whatever. But about the time you got to go in. Then you know if they stay up late, its no big deal, they just go to sleep, wake up about 10 minutes before and head off to class. Not a big deal at all.

Narratives of Two Dropouts

Allison

Allison, a single mother, has been out of college for three years after completing two semesters. She was an 18-year-old freshman, who lived with her parents and brother, and commuted approximately 40 miles each way to school. With nearly two hours of commuting each day, Allison found little time for activities on campus:

> Let's see. Most of my classes were about an hour and a half, felt like. Probably about a little less than that. Let's see, about 4 classes a day and that took up a pretty good portion of the time. I mean if I wasn't in class or getting to class or lunch, I was going home or getting there…if I was on campus you know trying to hunt down a teacher, that took 30 minutes it seemed like, when you know they had a class or were doing something else. But, that was pretty much it, in class it felt like… Well, I made sure that it was between the 8:00 to 3:00 and that I was if able to get my hours in. You know, get all that taken care of, you know for what my

requirements were. The class hours and trying to make sure I was home before my mom had to leave. I'm a very visual person so even if I make contact with the professors at home or over the phone or anything… it wouldn't have been as helpful as it could have been. I probably should have at least tried. But I just got real discouraged with all of it.

During her time on campus to she was able to become acquainted with some other students, but most of this was in the academic context.

Oh, yeah. I mean there were a lot of people that were in my classes that you either had a group project to do, which most of the time I couldn't do because it was after classes. But also people that during class you looked over stuff with. You know, we just kind back over study thing, and, a bunch of people in music class that you just have to get to know or you'll go crazy… The only people that I did anything besides hang out in class with were like a

group project or some were my friends that I knew from high school.

Allison was much like the other students interviewed in this project, in that she was rarely involved in any of the planned events on campus. When she did make the effort to attend, it was largely because there was some academic component.

> Well, I did like some of the concerts and things like that. Especially since they were extra credit for our music courses, which really helped me out because, you know some of the times homework was just impossible. And I am trying to study all of these dates and names of composers. I mean I love it, I love to listen to it, but memorizing who did this and what year, was a little bit much for me… I did make it to a soccer game or two. But it was during school time. It was like scrimmages and things like that. It was something that we did in health class. So technically, it was class time. Despite the challenge a little time on campus.

Allison did appear to make some connection to faculty members. She described two teachers in this way:

> You know you try to get a hold of them outside of class and you know… be you know be friends with them. I really like Dr. B and Dr. J. They are fantastic teachers and they, what is the word, heartfelt and everything they love to do and do well. And I really appreciate them for that, Dr. J took a little of her personal time out with me and helped me though some stuff that we were going through at the house and things that I just felt horrible about and she just really helped me through that. She just has a lovely air about her too. So, she's just a great teacher.

Allison explained that there were many challenges that had to be overcome besides the time spent driving. Maybe the most difficult of these were those that impacted her ability to adequately prepare academically. She explained, one of these challenges.

> A lot of times, like I said with paper writing and everything. How difficult it was to put everything

together regardless of the situations and you know what kind of papers they were and sometimes if it's just creative writing I have no problem with that because I am a storyteller. But when it comes to like patterns and different ways you have to put it together, things like that, I know the material inside and out, but I can't do it. With my math there is no putting it nicely, I really suck at that. Even though I spend hours pouring over the book, even with my friends on the weekends, we were pretty much logic people, so I was hoping that we worked on it together that we would get somewhere, but we didn't get anywhere. I tried to go to labs when we were in between classes to get some help, something. And it seemed like nobody was ever there when I was able to be there. And then after classes when people were in lab, I wasn't able to be there because I had to go home. And it was a lot harder trying to get tutoring and things like that done…Well, as far as the papers that the teachers gave me in English about trying to research the

stuff that we needed for this certain essay. I did not know how to look through it because it was something to do with the school's computers and I had a set page or something like that. You could look at it with your home computer. But trying to do that and understand the paperwork and I don't know how it fit together. Without going to the library with the others, no way I'm looking into it. Anytime that I ever did actually go to the library that wasn't between classes was when we were supposed to be meeting with a group project. And I told them that I only had about 20 minutes and they said just go home. So that's one of the reasons that my intro to teaching class didn't work.

Bryan

Bryan entered the institution as an 18-year-old freshman in the fall of 2002. He had graduated from a high school in a small town 18 miles from the University campus. He lived there with his mother and younger brother and commuted to campus, three

days a week as a full-time student. At the end of the first semester, he withdrew from college and has yet to return.

During the time he attended, Bryan had an advantage that distinguished him from the majority of the students interviewed during this project. His family provided him with enough financial support that there was no need for him to work to pay for college. This allowed him far more free time than the other commuters in the sample, "3 to 6 hours a day that weren't in class". In addition to this, several friends from his high school were attending the institution.

> I had a few people, usually just people that I went to school with that I already knew that I studied with… Yeah, usually, my best friend... see the first part of school I started to live on campus, but I couldn't afford to, so I moved back to the house, because I didn't work when I went to school. At the time I was up there just about all the time. I participated in intramurals and other activities. I

was in the fraternity up there too. Yeah, Jacob was a cheerleader. I didn't go to a whole lot of them, but I did more of the on-campus activities and stuff like that than I went to the basketball games, but I went to several of them.

With this time on campus, Bryan was able to meet new people and to make new friends. This happened, both in class, and at social events.

Yeah, yeah, I had quite a few friends outside of people I already knew. But I had a few people in class that I studied with at the library, because I think that in 3 of my classes we had group projects to do, so…

For Bryan, the greatest challenges seemed to be balancing the social:

Usually I would get up and my first class was at 8:00 so I'd get up there at 7:30 to 7:45. Usually it was later in the evening when I left cause there was probably 6 or 7 people I went to high school with that went to school there at the same time so I'd go hang out with them out at their apartment…

quite a few times, you know you'd stay after for parties or something like thing. But I never went too far or anything like that, not anything that would affect my school. Really the crowd of people that I went and hung out with a lot, was usually most of the places I was, so I could probably say - not really the friends that I hung out but acquaintances that I knew in class, that I could see they really didn't have a lot of participation in certain things. But as far as the group as a whole, most of the people that I was either acquaintances with or friends with, were out after class in the evening playing volleyball or in the afternoon or in the weekends intramural sports, or going swimming or working out in the gym or something like that.

and academic life:

Yeah it wasn't a real big problem. There'd be sometimes that we wouldn't do it actually during the day and I'd have to come back at night or a day I didn't have school to finish that, but I really never had any problems doing that…My first two

classes were right on top of one another, and my last class wasn't until later in the afternoon, so I would have down time between to do things, and usually since I wasn't working and I wasn't in a hurry to go anywhere, I'd usually stay over quite a bit of the evening after class…, If I didn't make myself take time out to do my work, I probably wouldn't have done it.

while being a commuter:

There were a few mornings that I'd be running late, having an 8:00 class and having to drive, but I really didn't have any problems, between classes getting around or anything like that… several times, I had either forgotten stuff or forgotten to do something…, there was a few times where I had to be late for another class to come home between to get something that I forgot, and go back to school… I really didn't have computer access for school at home, so if I didn't stay at school and finish projects that I had to do on the computer or get information off the Internet that I needed at

school, it was kind of tough in that perspective, but socially I didn't really have any problems commuting back and forth.

With a 3.0 grade-point average and what appears to be a very satisfying social life, it seems that Bryan was able to find a balance between academic and social environments. But for him at least this did not come without some work.

Yeah, I had to figure out how to manage my time a little more effectively for school which didn't happen all the time cause of going out and doing stuff other than school. But I really had to...it was almost from one extreme to another, by staying on campus, having plenty of time to go do everything that I needed to do, rather than spending that extra 20 to 30 minutes morning and evening driving back and forth. Having access to school information, social activities, and actually sitting down and doing my school work.

Focus Groups

As part of the data collection for this study, two focus groups were conducted with commuter students similar to those in the individual interviews. The first group consisted of five seniors (three males and two females), under the age of twenty-six, commuting more than five mile to campus. Senior status was determined by the completion of more than ninety semester hours. The second group included four freshman (two males and two females), under the age of twenty-six, also commuting more than five miles to campus. The focus groups were conducted as one hour open-ended discussions of the academic and social environments of the campus before the second set of individual interviews. Their role was to provide insight into areas worthy of consideration that might not become apparent during the individual interviews.

The senior focus group was the more forthcoming of the two groups. During the discussion, while there was a vast difference in the on-campus activities of the

members, it first became clear that there was a disconnect between the staff and faculty and the commuters. Each of the members indicated that they were interested in being more involve on campus, but often were unaware of campus events because of poor communications. They were also consistent with the responses of the individual interviewees, who describing commuters in more positive terms than residential students.

In the course of the freshman focus group information was gained that was invaluable to the later interview sessions. With little experience in the higher education setting, the members had difficulty identifying and articulating the challenges that they faced. It appeared that they had not recognized the differences in their experience of college and those of the resident students. Far more time was needed to explain the environment.

This became important in the development of an approach to illicit responses from the individual interviewees. Questions had to be elaborated on, so more

time was spent talking by the interviewer. Frequently the answers would be short and more delving was necessary to arrive at a clear understanding of the participants' full response. This was a definite departure from the interviews conducted with the seniors.

Summary

Three sources of data were considered in the analysis process for this study; individual interviews with two freshmen, two seniors, and two drop outs; journals developed by the two freshmen and two seniors; and two focus groups, one comprised of five seniors and the other comprised of four freshmen.

The results from the focus groups were remarkably similar to those provided by the students that were interviewed. One concept that was first identified in the senior focus group and later supported by the individual interviews was the importance of organization for commuter students.

The commuters that were interviewed in this study expressed that one of the greatest challenges that they had to overcome was constantly being organized. Arriving at school without assignment or books that they needed for the day would result in late assignments or the need to return home. The outcome of such an oversight was described by Bryan, “several times, I had either forgotten stuff or forgotten to do something…, there was a few times where I had to be late for another class to come home between to get something that I forgot, and go back to school”.

This need for organization filtered into the selection of courses. The desire to compress courses to limit trips to campus or reduce dead time on campus lead Justin to say, “I try to schedule everything to where....and that's the thing, your freshman year you can make a schedule really easily and even your second semester”.

As a whole, the group exhibited characteristics that could be identified as reflecting a level of marginality. For the most part, their responses indicate that they

perceive little consideration of commuters on the part of the University. They present, separately and together, three of the four themes identified by Rosenberg and McCullough (1981).

With the exception of the two seniors, there was little evidence of significant interaction with the faculty, staff, and administration. Most of the students had not met with their professors and did not believe that the University considered them, when making decisions. Their responses suggested that there was a little attention paid to them, that they were not of great importance, and to some degree, they were unappreciated. The only theme reflected by the group as characterizing the relationship between them in the University was dependence.

Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) provided three themes of mattering; attention, importance, and dependence. Schlossberg (1989) added a fourth theme, appreciation. These themes were used as the basis for determining whether marginality existed in the sample group.

Attention

With the exception of the two seniors in the sample, there was very little interaction and involvement between faculty and staff, and the students. This was supported by the focus groups for seniors and freshman. Seniors as a group reported having more contact with faculty on campus and off. This may simply be the result of the extended period of time spent on campus in which to develop the relationships and become known by faculty. But for Justin, a senior, he placed attention in perspective, “if they're here, they're here and if they're not, they're not, but we've got to focus on these people that are on campus, try to get them to class”.

The significance of this dichotomy, is that students, both commuter and resident, are more likely to leave an institution during the first year. This disconnect between freshman and the faculty supports a conclusion that little attention is directed towards the students, early in there academic career.

Further exacerbating the problem is a major disengagement of the administration and staff. Few of

the students in the study could recall meeting anyone from the administration or remember names. Even when presented with information pertaining to freshman orientation, when the administrators speak to the new incoming freshmen, most could not recall who they were.

For those students in the sample that had made significant social relationships within the peer group, there tended to be some element of attention. But, as in the case with Bryan, who left school to move to another town with two classmates, this attention did not lead to connection or commitment to the institution.

Importance

The second theme of mattering that was considered was the feeling of importance. Again, as in the case with attention, the infrequency of contact with anyone in the formal structure of the institution led to feelings of not being important. Unlike attention which may be a general theme among all underclassmen, regardless of place of residence, importance appears to have at least

to some degree some differentiation between commuters and resident students.

Whether it was Justin saying “it kind of almost makes sense that there would be a focus on trying to please the students that are here on campus that way they can try and keep them here on campus”, or Leslie commenting “I hardly ever go to them because I don’t want to drive back up here at night’. One message that resonated with these commuters was that resident students were the focus. This included more than in the time and type of events.

Even for those students that had a strong social connection in the residence hall, and they were often unaware of what events were planned and when they would take place. In a senior focus group, one of the major complaints was that considerable effort was made to inform students in the residence halls, but little was done to notify them. The result was that they often were unaware of what events of interest that they may have made special efforts to attend.

Dependence

Of the four themes of mattering that were considered in this study, only dependence was found to be evident as a measure of mattering. The feelings of mattering would be a direct contradiction of the individual being marginalized. While this would seem to being positive from an institutional point of view, it reflects a jaded and pragmatic view of the institutional setting by the student.

Instead of measuring some co-relationship that exists between the institution and the student, it is more reminiscent of a buyer and seller relationship. The students view themselves as the purchaser of the educational experience and the institution as a producer and marketer. Based on this perception, the students in this sample represent the institution as being dependent upon them for their existence.

Sheila was this very thought into words in response to a question about the impact of her withdrawal on the college. “I guess I'm making them money. I don't know though, I don't feel like they just can't go on without

me, but....I don't know. I think I'm here because I want to be here, not because they want me to be here".

Appreciation

The final of the four dimensions considered as a measure of mattering is appreciation. Once again, as with attention and importance, it can be concluded that the commuter students in the survey did not feel appreciated. While there were some examples of positive experiences with the faculty, for the most part, this theme presents as a neutral. None of the students in the study presented any feelings of underappreciation, but they also did not make statements that would suggest they felt appreciated. Sheila best described this in her statement, "I've never had a teacher come up and talk to me or anything".

For those students that did have a relationship with a faculty member, the tenancy was to have a more positive outlook on the institution as a whole. Unfortunately, once again, this was only reported as happening with one of the freshman in this study. Allison the female drop

out in this study developed relationships with two faculty members.

Emergent Themes

In the course of the interviews, three themes arose that are relevant in explaining the retention of commuter students. These themes are the interaction between the social and academic environments, strategies for dealing with the lack of social integration, and failure of the institution to communicate effectively with commuter students.

Social and Academic Environment

Throughout the interviews and in the focus groups, one constant was a relationship that existed between the social environment and academic environment. Participant responses support the assertion of Bean and Metzner (1985) and their model of nontraditional student attrition that the social environment and academic environment impact each other. The findings were that social interaction served both as a method for

reinforcing goal direction through support of the peer group and by providing opportunities for corporate learning. In Leslie's words, "Oh, no we study a lot, they study biology and I'm studying economics". Each of the participants highlighted the role of group projects as a learning experience, while discussing the challenge of commuting and being involved in groups.

Strategies for Coping

An unexpected finding was that the senior commuters tended to have a process of rationalizing the difference in socialization between themselves and resident students. In both the individual interviews and a focus group, there was some denigration of the resident student. By creating a us-versus-them attitude, then prescribing negative attributes to the resident student, such as, not as focused and not as serious, they separated themselves from the social environment. An underlying premise for the commuter students was that education was their "job", and that social involvement may interfere with their success.

This rationalizing of the importance of the social environment is in stark contrast to the role that peer interaction plays in creating satisfaction for the same students. Most of the commuters expressed some desire to have greater involvement on campus and longed to create relationships that would enliven their experience and carry into future lives outside of college. Contrary to Bean and Metzner (1985), who contend that for nontraditional students the social environment should be of little importance.

Lack of Communication

Possibly the most disheartening theme that arose in the discussion with commuter students was at the core of their feelings of marginality. This evolved from a lack of communication between the institution and the commuter population. Echoing through the interviews, and focus groups, was the constant complaint that they were not informed of events occurring on campus. The assumption may have been that commuters were not interested in

campus events, but to the contrary, most reported that they had missed events of interest.

Adding to this difficulty was the knowledge that significant effort was made to inform and notify students living on campus. Across the three groups, there was knowledge that posters, fliers, and mailings were directed at students living in the residence halls, while commuters received few announcements. The notification that they did receive was often placed on bulletin boards in public areas, which are often frequently overcrowded. In many cases, the information was provided at the last minute, allowing little time for commuters to arrange to attend.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER EXAMINATION

Introduction

After nearly two decades as a commuter student in every level of the higher education system, and at both large and small institutions, as well as nearly a decade teaching and advising students, I entered this research recognizing that some factors were at play in commuter retention. Based largely on the work of Tinto, who identified academic and social integration as the keys to student retention, this study proposed to investigate the underlying problem of commuter retention.

The theory of marginality was posited as an intervening concept in the decision of a student to withdraw from college. Data was gathered through a series of interviews with six commuter students at three stages in the undergraduate process. Two were of freshman, two were seniors and two had dropped out several years ago.

To provide triangulation, those still on campus were asked to complete a journal describing two weeks of their on campus activity. An additional source of data was through focus groups composed of freshman and senior commuters.

The data were analyzed following the procedures outlined in Chapter III, and the findings were presented in Chapter IV. The findings were presented through narratives developed in the words of each participant. This was supported by analysis across the four themes of mattering to determine if marginality was present. Three additional emergent themes were identified and explained in the previous chapter.

In this chapter, conclusions from the analysis will be presented and implications for practice will be discussed. Recommendations for further studies and research will be offered.

Conclusions

This study contributes to the understanding of the process of attrition of commuter students by providing a new avenue of research and study. The concept of marginality appears to be an intervening variable that is worth further review.

It can be concluded from this study that the problem of retention with commuter students is a complex and diverse issue. The reasons for a student leaving cannot be explained and understood in simple terms. There are as many reasons for leaving, as there are students who leave. Models of academic and social integration fail to answer all the questions of student attrition.

As an example, Bryan our male dropout was one of the most socially integrated students in the study and maintained a grade-point average that would indicate academic integration. Yet, he did not return to school after one semester. When two of his friends from the institution left to attend school in another town, he followed.

While it is not clear whether the problem of marginality that was identified in this study is symptomatic of the commuter experience or global to all students, a sense of marginality does appear to exist. Some of the themes were definitively existed in commuters expression of their experience. Of the four themes, only dependence was found to be identified as present in a commuter-institution relationship.

As the principal researcher and author of this dissertation, it is impossible for me to ignore the implications of my time as a commuter. As I listen to the students and reflect on my experience, it comes to mind that they are very similar in many ways. As an undergraduate, I spent 10 years as a part-time commuter traveling 15 miles to campus, while working full-time.

The student's stories of wanting to be involved, but feeling disconnected from the social and much of the academic environment of the campus, resounds with familiarity. It was often a challenge to develop relationships with other students with the little time I

spent on campus. Often, the beginning of a new semester meant starting with a whole new set of classmates.

At the graduate level, the relationships were easier to maintain with a smaller number of students in the Masters and Ph.D. programs. In both, while not by design, cohorts developed of students that began and were progressing at the same rate. Throughout the coursework for both programs, I frequently socialized on campus and in the homes of fellow students.

While this eliminated much of the social confusion and difficulty, much of the academic challenge still remained. Both programs required numerous group projects and research. Commuting added to the difficulty in scheduling and completing this work.

As a faculty member, over the course of my teaching tenure, I have begun to recognize the difficulty in assigning group projects for commuter students. The constant complaint is the difficulty in scheduling time for meetings, especially for groups that include both commuters and resident students. Commuter students often complain that resident students refused to meet around

class times to accommodate their needs. The complaint from resident students is that commuter students refused to do evening meeting times.

Since beginning the interviews in this study, I have begun to notice that some of the statements of these commuters rang true. Upon closer examination, I realized that those students in my classes that I know are commuters tend to miss less class than those who live on campus. The level of organization that they bring to class and assignments is also often higher.

Implications

As presented in Chapter II, research in various settings has identified negative behavior associated with feelings of marginality. The behavior that most concerns institutions of higher education is the decision to stay or leave. At this time, with continuing high attrition rates, colleges and universities across the nation are vigorously attempting to find the answers and stop the loss of students.

With the spiraling cost of higher education, and the continued move away from the residential university, commuters will continue to constitute a larger portion of the student population. As the majority population on college campuses currently it is of paramount importance that we began to address the higher rate of attrition with this group.

The findings of this study suggest that it may be necessary to reevaluate higher education's assumptions concerning commuter student. The antiquated idea that this group of students is less interested in the social environment of the institution (Bean & Metzner,1985; Ortman,1995)) and only care about class time, may be wrong. As suggested by the responses of the students in this study, "I'm at the point where I want to be more a part of... and not just go to class", a greater degree of involvement is desired.

It also becomes apparent that the line between academic and social environments is not as clearly defined as some would lead you to believe. Tinto (1987) expressed academic and social engagement as two separate

paths to institutional commitment. In their model of nontraditional student attrition, Bean and Metzner (1985), argue that the social environment is of little importance because of external factors. In Commuter Versus Resident Students, Chickering (1975) explains that factors in the external environment impact commuter decisions and success far more than institutional factors.

Leslie discussed the role of studying together and Ned highlighted the opportunity to meet and go to the library. Commuter students that become isolated from the social environment of the institution may find themselves at a disadvantage in the academic realm, as Ned puts it, "if they (resident students) got a question, they are just hanging out, they just ask the question. Somebody will know it". While the classroom is the center of the educational experience, this research suggests that the educational experience reaches far beyond the walls of the classroom.

The demands of facing this challenge reached to every corner of the university community, requiring a

concerted effort of the faculty, staff, and administration. Changing the experience of the commuter student will not by itself solve the problem of attrition. Forty years of retention research presented in Chapter II underscores that there is no single answer to retaining students, but rather many individual pieces to the puzzle. For the commuter group this study and the presence of marginality are added pieces to the total picture.

Changes will require support from the highest levels of the university administration to commit the time and resources necessary. Faculty will continue to carry the burden of being the most clearly recognized members of the institution in the eyes of the student. For many staff areas, changing the current programs will be necessary, moving toward a more varied schedule and services, augmented by more vigorous communications processes to meet the needs of this group.

A final implication of this study is that institutions may need to take action to institute a method for auditing the level of student marginality. The

development of an instrument based on the four themes identified by Schlossberg, Rosenberg and McCullough, as described later, could be used to identify students with feelings of marginality. Since it is unknown whether or not these feelings of marginality are common to all students, it may be necessary to measure marginality levels for both residential and commuter students within an institution.

Recommendation for Further Examination

The construct of marginality appears to be of importance in the explanation of attrition in higher education and is worthy of further study. The methodology used in this study could be adapted to other populations, such as older students and minorities that traditionally have higher rates of attrition.

The development of an instrument, based on the four themes of attention, importance, dependence and appreciation that could assess quickly and accurately the level of marginality within the student body would be

beneficial to researchers and institutions alike. The ability to evaluate large populations in a meaningful way would speed the process towards identifying and alleviating marginality on college campuses. An expansion of the current models of student attrition to include marginality as an intervening variable may aid in their predictive results.

Since this study was conducted in a single institution the findings may not reflect the attitudes or opinions of commuter students in other settings. Replication of this study in institutions of different sizes and student selectivity may result in different findings. Additionally, other institutions may have programming or policies that mitigate the impact of marginality.

Student services in some institutions may systematically include consideration of commuters needs into the planning of events and programs. Funding for easily accessible commuter student lounges with vending, computer access, and space for studying, may be readily available on some campuses. Studies of best practices on

campuses where such services are available and commuter report improved connection to the campus are warranted.

A coordinated program of evaluation and reporting of levels of marginality as identified by the measurement described earlier could provide identification of institutions with lower levels of marginality. These institutions would then be candidates for examination to determine the best practices in identifying and eliminating feelings of marginality.

The expansion of this research into a longitudinal design may help to explain some of the differences seen between freshman participants and their senior counterparts. This would also aid in the understanding of the relationship between marginality and the decision to leave college. In the course of the study, two freshmen left the study and subsequently dropped out of school. In addition, the two dropouts that were interviewed relied on recollections of events nearly three years in the past.

The opportunity to begin with a group of freshmen and monitor their progress over the course of their

education, would greatly improve the explanatory value of such a study. More frequent interviews and the opportunity to supplement the data with surveys and journals would provide a clearer picture of the commuter experience.

Two sub-themes developed in the latter part of the interviews and in the analysis that given the time deserve more research. The first of these, commuting and its impact on the sleep patterns of commuting students is worthy of noting. Two of the students interviewed, during this study mentioned lack of sleep in their responses.

There is significant research on the impact of sleep deprivation on the performance of individuals, especially as they drive. While many of the students may commute short distances that take little time, clearly there are some that drive greater distances.

As a commuter at the graduate level, I commuted forty-five minutes each way to classes several times a week. With school and work, the time spent driving reduced the time that I slept. There were times that,

because of fatigue, it was difficult to study and stay awake in class. During this time there were also occasions when I would arrive home after a night class and not remember the route that I drove or any of the cities and towns on the route.

The second sub-theme involves the difference that gender appeared to make in social interaction. For the commuters that were interviewed, the three male participants reported having far greater peer interaction. With peers being the most likely connection to the university community for the commuters in this study, the result may be increased feelings of marginality. This may have been simply an element of the small sample size, but is definitely worthy of further investigation.

Two of the major difficulties identified during this study were the lack of a common definition of commuter and a concerted effort to systematically gather and organize data. This requires the attention either the National Center for Educational Statistics or one large research centers in higher education.

Finally, some of the major works in the field need to be revisited. Commuting Versus Resident Students, the seminal work written by Chickering in 1974, is more than thirty years old. It is safe to say that the descriptions of commuter students and the college environment have shifted significantly during that period. In his 1987 book, Leaving College, Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition, Tinto presents a model that needs rethinking in light of the subsequent research with non-traditional students.

Vignette Continued…

The time spent with the commuter students had been an eye opening experience. Despite the months of programming and the best efforts of her staff, they had failed to consider the feelings and needs of the students. The Vice-President had moved to improve the environment for the commuter student, but had failed miserably.

The comments from the students that she was meeting with made it clear that the changes had not been effectively communicated to the very students they were trying to reach. In the words of Derek, "How can we take advantage of events and opportunities on campus if we don't know they are happening?"

More perplexing than the lack of communication with the students was the feeling that the commuters expressed toward the institution. Having been on the faculty and serving closely with them as an administrator, she believed she knew and understood the faculty very well. If she had to describe them, at the top of her list would be student oriented. She was baffled when commuter students expressed feelings of alienation.

In fifteen minutes, she would convene a meeting of her staff to brainstorm new ideas for solving this problem that they had been working on for the three years that she had been in her position. How could she tell them that after all the time spent and the money invested that they were back where they started?

References

Alfert, E. (1966). Housing selection, need satisfaction and dropping out from college. *Psychological Reports*, *19*, 183-186.

Altbach, P. & Berdahl, R. (1981). *Higher education in American society.* Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Press.

Anderman, L. (1999). Classroom goal orientation, school belonging and social goals as predictors of students' positive and negative affect following the transition to middle school. *Journal of Research and Development in Education, 32,* 89-103.

Astin, A. (1973). The impact of dormitory living on students. *Educational Record*, *54*, 204-210.

Astin, A. (1975). *Preventing students from dropping out: A longitudinal, multi institutional study of college dropouts.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Astin, A. (1992). *What matters in college? Four critical years revisited.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Baird, L. (1969). The effects of college residence groups on students' self-concepts, goals, and achievements. *Personnel and Guidance Journal, 47*, 1015-1021.

Bauer, E. J. (1967). Student peer groups and academic development. *College Student Survey*, *1*, 22-31.

Baumeister, R. & Leary, M. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin, 117*, 497-529.

Baxter, M. M. (1992). Cocurricular influences on college students' intellectual development. *Journal of College Student Development*, *33*, 203-214.

Bean, J. & Metzner, B. (1985). A conceptual model of nontraditional undergraduate student attrition. *Review of Educational Research*,55 (4), 485-540.

Berg, B. (2001). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences.* Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Blimling, G. (1993). A meta-analysis of the influence of college residents. In J. Smart (ED.), *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research.* New York: Agathon Press.

Bowen, H., Clecak, P., Doud, J., & Douglas, G.(1997). *Investment in learning: The individual and social value of American higher education.* Boston, MA: The John Hopkins University Press.

Burbach, H. & Thompson, M. (1971). Alienation among college freshmen: A comparison of Puerto Rican, Black, and White students. *The Journal of College Student Personnel, 12 (4),* 248-252.

Burtner, R., & Tincher, W. (1979). A study of resident and non-resident students at Auburn University. (ED 172 664)

Call, R. (1979). A comparison of the developmental impact of homogeneous and heterogeneous housing conditions of freshmen. *Journal of College and University Student Housing, 9,* 266-272.

Cambiano, R., Denny, G., & Devore, J. (2000). College student retention at a Midwestern university: A six-year study. *Journal of College Admissions, 166*, 22-29.

Chickering, A. (1974). *Commuting versus resident students.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Chickering, A., & Kuper, E. (1971). Educational outcomes for commuters and residents. *Educational Record, 52,* 255-261.

Creswell, J. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing.

Dean, D., & Middleton, R. (1961). Alienation: Its meaning and measurement. *American Sociological Review,* 753-758.

Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (2000). *Handbook of qualitative research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Dollar, R. (1966). Student characteristics and choice of housing. *Journal of College Student Personnel, 7,* 147-150.

Fenzel, L.M. (2001). Predictors of the adjustment of first-year students to college: The role of early involvement and type of residence. (ED 451 798)

Foster, M., & Sedlacek, M., & Hardwick, M. (1977). Student recreation: A comparison of commuter and resident students. Unpublished manuscript, University of Maryland. (ED 165 531)

Gall, M., Borg, W. & Gall, J. (1996). *Education research: An introduction 6th edition.* White Plains, NY: Longman Publishers.

Glesne, C. (1999). Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction, Second Ed. Reading, MA: Longman Publishers.

Goetz, J. & LeCompte, M. (1984). *Ethnography and qualitative design in educational research.* Orlando, FL: Academic Press, Inc.

Goodenow, C. (1993). The psychological sense of school membership among adolescents: Scale development and educational correlates. *Psychology in the Schools, 88,* 79-90.

Goodenow, C. & Grady, K. (1993). The relationship of school belonging and friends values to academic motivation among urban adolescent students. *Journal of Experimental Education, 62,* 60-71.

Gossett, B., Cuyjet, M. & Cockriel, I. (1996). African American and non-African Americans' sense of mattering and marginality at public, predominately white institutions. *Equity and Excellence in Education, 29 (3),* 37-42.

Graff, R. & Cooley, G. (1970). Adjustment of commuter resident students. *Journal of College Student Personnel, 11*, 54-57.

Grant, G. & Breese Jr., J. (1997). Marginality theory and the African American student. *Sociology of Education, 70,* 192-205.

Hatch, J. (2002). *Doing qualitative research in educational settings.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Herndon, S. (1984). Recent findings concerning the relative importance of housing to student retention. *Journal of College and University Student Housing, 14,* 27-31.

Hessler, R. (1992). *Social research methods.* St. Paul, MN: West Publishing Co.,

Hountras, P., & Brandt, K. (1970). Relation of student residence to academic performance in college. *Journal of Educational Research, 63,* 351-354.

Inman, P., & Pascarella, E. (1998). The impact of college residence on the development of critical thinking skills in college freshmen. *Journal of College Student Development*, *39*, 557-568.

James, R. (1998). The perceived effect of social alienation on Black students enrolled at a caucasian southern university. *College Student Journal, 32 (2),* 228-239.

Johnson, J. L. (1997). Commuter college students: What factors determine who will persist and who will drop out? *College Student Journal, 31*, 323-334.

Kalsner, L. (1991). Issues in college student retention. *Higher Education Extension Review, 3 (1),* 1-6.

Karabell, Z. (1998). *What's college for?* New York, NY: Basic Books.

Kodama, C. (2002). Marginality of transfer commuter students. *NASPA Journal, 39 (3).*

Lauer, Q. (1965). Phenomenology: *Its genesis and prospect.* New York, NY: Harper Torchbooks.

Levin, B., & Clowes, D. (1982). The effect of residence hall living at college on attainment of the baccalaureate degree. *Journal of College Student Personnel, 23,* 99-104.

Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Lundgren, D., & Schwab, M. (1979). The impact of college on students: Residential context, relations with parents and peers, and self-esteem. *Youth and Society, 10,* 227-236.

Marron, J., & Kayson, W. (1984). Effects of living status, gender, and year in college on college students. *Psychological Reports, 55,* 811-814.

Matteson, D. (1974). Changes in attitudes toward authority figures with the move to college: Three experiments. *Developing Psychology, 10,* 340-347.

Merriam, S. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education.* San Fransico, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Morris, M. (1977). *An Excursion Into Creative Sociology.* Columbia Press, New York, NY.

Nowak, K., & Hanson, A. (1985). Academic achievement of freshmen as a function of residence hall housing. *NASPA Journal, 22,* 22-28.

Osterman, K. (2000). Students: Need for belonging in the school community. *Review of Educational Research, 70,* 323-367.

Pantages, T., & Creedon, C. (1978). Studies of college attrition: 1950-1975. *Review of Educational Research, 48(1),* 49-101.

Pascarella, E. (1984). Reassessing the effects of living on campus versus commuting to college: A causal modeling approach. *Review of Higher Education, 7,* 247-260.

Pascarella, E. (1985). The influence of on-campus living versus commuting to college on intellectual and interpersonal self-concept. *Journal of College Student Personnel, 26,* 292-299.

Pascarella, E., Duby, P., & Iverson, B. (1983). A test and reconceptualization of a theoretical model of college withdrawal in the commuter institution setting. *Sociology of Education, 56*, 88-100.

Pascarella, E., & Terenzini, P. (1991). *How college affects student: Findings and insights from twenty years of research.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Pascarella, E., Terenzini, P., & Blimling, G. (1994). The impact of resident life on students. In Schroeder, Mable & Associates (ED.), *Realizing the Educational Potential of Residence Halls.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 22-52.

Pascarella, E., Bohr, L., Nora, A., Zusman, B., Inman, P., & Desler, M.(1993). Cognitive impacts of living on campus versus commuting to college. *Journal of College Student Development, 34,* 216-220.

Prusok, R., & Walsh, W. B. (1964). College students residence and academic achievement. *The Journal of College Student Personnel, 5*, 180-184.

Reisberg, L. (1999). Colleges struggle to keep would-be dropouts enrolled. *Chronicle of Higher Education, 46 (7)*, A54-A57.

Roeser, R., Midgley, C. & Urdan, T. (1996). Perception of the school environment and early adolescents psychological and behavioral functioning in school: The mediating role of goals and belonging. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 88*, 408-422.

Rosenberg, M., and McCullough, B. (1981). Mattering: Inferred significance and mental health among adolescents. *Research in Community and Mental Health, 2,* 163-182.

Ryans, A. & Patrick, H. (2001). The classroom environment and change in adolescent motivation and engagement during middle school. *American Educational Research Journal, 38,* 437-460.

Schlossberg, N. (1989). Marginality and mattering: Key issues in building community. *New Direction for Student Services, 48,* 5-15.

Schmidt, P. (2002). Most states tie aid to performance, despite little proof that it works. *Chronicle of Higher Education, 48 (24)*, A20-23.

Schroeder, W., & Sledge, G. (1966). Factors related to collegiate academic success. *The Journal of College Student Personnel, 7*, 97-104.

Schutz, A. (1970). *Alfred Schultz on phenomenology and social relations*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL.

Scott, S. (1975). Impact of residence hall living on college student development. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, *16*, 214-219.

Singleton Jr., R. (1988). *Approaches to Social Research.* Oxford University Press, New York, NY.

Smith, B. M. (1989). The personal development of the commuter student: What is known from comparisons with resident students? *Community College Review*, *17*, 47-56.

Steward, R., Jackson Sr., M. & Jackson, J. (1990). Alienation and interactional styles in a predominately white environment: A study of successful Black students. *Journal of College Student Development, 31,* 509-515.

Suen, H. (1983). Alienation and attrition of Black college students on a predominately white campus. *Journal of College Student Personnel,* 117-121.

Thornton, S. (1993). *The quest for emergent meaning: A personal account.* In D. Flinders & G. Mills (Ed.), Theory and concepts in qualitative research: Perspectives from the field (pp. 68-82). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Tinto, V. (1987). *Leaving college, rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Trusty, J. & Dooley-Dickey, K. (1993). Alienation from school: An exploratory analysis of elementary and middle school students' perceptions. *Journal of Research and Development in Education, 26,* 232-243.

Welty, J. (1976). Resident and commuter students: Is it only the living situation? *Journal of College Student Personnel, 17*, 465-468.

Wentzel, K. (1997). Student motivation in middle school: The role of perceived pedagogical caring. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 89,* 411-419.

Wentzel, K. (1998). Social relationships and motivation in middle school: The role of parents, teachers, and peers. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 90,* 202-209.

Wilson, R., Anderson, S., & Fleming, W. (1987). Commuter and resident students' personal and family adjustment. *Journal of College Student Personnel, 28*, 229-233.

Wilson, S. (1977). The use of ethnographic techniques in educational research. *Review of Educational Research*, 47 (1), 245-265.

Appendix A

First Individual Interview Questions

1. How many course hours have you completed?

2. What is your major?

3. How far do you commute one way to campus?

4. Describe your living arrangement.

5. What is your current age?

6. Could you provide an estimate of your grade point average?

7. Do you work during the school term?

8. If so, how many hours do you average a week?

9. How do you finance your educational expenses?

10. Do you understand the study that we have discussed?

11. Are there any questions that you would like to ask me?

Appendix B

Second Individual Interview Questions

1. Describe your level of involvement in the social environment of the college.

2. Discuss a time that you interacted with other students outside the classroom.

3. Did you ever socialize with faculty or staff members in a non-academic setting?

4. Were there friends that you made at college where the friendship did not begin in class?

5. Illustrate a time that you attended a university organized social function.

6. Were the majority of social activities that you attended university sponsored or not?

7. Describe you relationship with the faculty and staff of the college.

8. How responsive do you feel that the university is to your needs as a commuter?

9. Do you feel that you success is important to the leaders of the institution?

10. To what degree do you feel that the university community is supportive of commuters.

11. Discuss a time that you felt unwelcome or unneeded by someone at the institution.

12. Did you at anytime feel or think you were disadvantaged because you were a commuter?

13. On average, how many hours per day did you spend on campus that were not in class?

14. If or when you left do you think anyone would care?

15. What type of university sponsored activities were you most likely to sponsor?

16. How would you describe the social environment of the university to a friend?

17. If you consider the activities that the college sponsors, do you believe that they are designed for everyone?

Appendix C

Third Individual Interview Questions

1. Is the data that was transcribed from your past interviews true and accurate? If not, how should it be corrected?

2. Are there any questions that were posed to you in previous interviews that you would like to revisit?

3. Is there anything that you would like to add to any of your answers?

4. If you were doing this research, what questions would you ask?

5. Has there been any change in any of the demographic information collected in the first interview?