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A Study of Nontraditional Undergraduate Students at the University of Memphis.

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A Study of Nontraditional Undergraduate Students at the University of Memphis

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A dissertation

Presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

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In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education

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by

Linda G. Wood-Wyatt

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ABSTRACT

A Study of Nontraditional Undergraduate Students at the University of Memphis

by

Linda G. Wood-Wyatt

This study examined nontraditional student engagement into the collegiate environment on the University of Memphis (U of M) campus, specifically services and programs in the University College. The sample surveyed included 4 nontraditional undergraduate students, 1 from each grade level, aged 25 years or older. The 4 nontraditional undergraduate study participants were admitted and enrolled at the U of M. Additionally, there was 1 alumnae member included in the study.

The study employed the use of multiple forms of data collection including interviews, personal and focus group, journaling, life stories, and an online campus climate survey. In order to analyze the multiple forms of data received, data analyses were broken down into 3 chapters. Each chapter revealed findings that provided answers to the initial research question. Each chapter was then further divided into themes or categories that emerged from questions and interviews.

Results of the research revealed that nontraditional students did not feel active engagement with the collegiate environment was a major component contributing to the success of their academic career. Research data indicated that nontraditional students because of their maturity level are at times disappointed with their traditional counterparts and faculty in classroom activities. Further, data analyzed support nontraditional student need for more communication from campus staff as well as development of separate tutoring services and offices for nontraditional students.

Additionally, findings indicated that the institution should hire faculty and staff who understand nontraditional students' learning styles and needs.

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Finally, my acknowledgement would not be complete without extending my sincere love and thank you to my husband, Jerry. His encouragement and confidence in my abilities and success was overwhelming. I could not have completed this journey without him.

CONTENTS

VIGNETTE

Once you label me you negate me.
Søren Kierkegaard, Danish philosopher

A Nontraditional Student's College Adventure

Life is a journey - a journey in which you face many challenges as well as opportunities that require you to make choices and decisions. My decision to pursue a college degree came at the age of 34. I had a wonderful job, husband, and three children; however, I still wanted to fulfill my lifelong dream of earning a college degree. The pursuit of lifelong learning and a college degree had always been one of my goals and now was the time to make it happen.

Imagine walking into your first college classroom of 30 or so traditional college-aged students, scanning the room you suddenly realize these students make you feel old. As that nontraditional student, my first response was to hide. And, in a sense, I was - hidden in plain sight!

This initial experience as an adult learner resulted in raising a series of concerns and questions, specifically about my ability to succeed. If I were to succeed, somehow I had "to fit" into the new environment and "fit" meant I would have to be engaged. However, that was going to prove more difficult than I had first thought. Although the professor in my first college class was the only reason I continued, there was no one else in that class who was remotely interested in doing more than getting in and out of class as fast as possible. It was apparent that the traditional college students had no desire to be engaged or listen to the instructor or what I had to offer in classroom discussions. The professor was my saving grace. He seemed to appreciate the knowledge, life experiences, and maturity I brought to the class. However, I was quickly outnumbered by traditional college students who were not as comforting or appreciative of what he or I brought to the class.

In retrospect, the entire campus and college environment contributed equally to my less-than-perfect college beginning. Both share the blame for being unreceptive and uncaring in offering support. The entire institution failed at fueling my desire to be engaged in the college experience.

Historically, institutions have always placed greater importance on meeting the needs of traditional-aged college students. This includes the commitment from campus leaders to develop a supportive, engaging college environment to satisfy this particular group of students. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this practice is most likely due to higher enrollment in this population of students and greater funding from both state and federal sources. Fortunately, this practice is slowly beginning to change as institutions face increased enrollment of nontraditional students. However, it is reasonable to expect that it should not make any difference which college or university you attended; i.e., a 2-year community college or a 4-year public or private college; nontraditional college students will face challenges and barriers that are not part of the typical traditional-aged college student's concern or interest.

Institutional practices and policies are becoming increasingly more important as institutions move toward increased support and engagement of current and future nontraditional students.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

American colleges and universities face additional challenges in providing a quality

education to first-generation, nontraditional students. These students are inadequately prepared

academically and psychologically for college-level work and learning (Howell, 2001).

Challenges such as these continue to be exaggerated when students are unable to garner a sense

of belonging or connection. Students must become involved in the academic experience and

level necessary to achieve academic and personal success (Chaves, 2003).

According to Tinto (1997), one of the most reliable predictors of gains in learning is

active student involvement or engagement. He further posited that increased levels of

involvement assisted in achieving student success and retention. Such involvement can only be

accomplished if institutions develop "learning communities" on campuses. Such learning

communities should be developed at all levels including the college, program, and classroom

levels. Successful learning communities may integrate students into the social and intellectual

environment of the college campus (Tinto, 1997).

Student engagement is traditionally seen by colleges as a student affairs responsibility.

Additionally, it is used by colleges and universities as a measure of how active or involved

students are in academics and the overall college environment (Wasley, 2006). Institutional

leaders on college campuses have agreed that those students who are active participants in their

learning and educational goals both inside and outside the college classroom were more

successful and satisfied with the overall college experience. Unfortunately, increased student

engagement, particularly for nontraditional students, continues to be a challenge for college

leaders. Consequently, increased engagement of nontraditional students remains at the top of the

list of priorities and concerns for student affairs personnel and college leaders. Institutions are beginning to increase their focus on nontraditional students in order to effectively serve this increasing segment of college students.

According to Macari, Maples, and D'Andrea (2006), student development professionals must be able to effectively work with today's college students. Additionally, Macari et al. stated, "Unfortunately, the developmental needs of nontraditional students, particularly those students considered nontraditional for reasons other than age, have rarely been examined" (p. 285). Further, unless college and university student development personnel can effectively address and understand developmental issues of all college students, they will continue to base the needs, issues, and characteristics of nontraditional students on those of traditional college students (Macari et al.).

Enrollment management is another critical function of colleges and universities that continues to overlook nontraditional students when developing institutional recruitment goals. According to Bodfish (2002),

> Only about 20 percent of all institutions (four-year and two-year)
> had a goal for the number of adult or nontraditional students enrolled.
> However, two-year public institutions were much more likely to be
> successful, with 70 percent meeting this goal, compared to only half
> of the four-year institutions. (p. 6)

A 2006 report on the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) provided to institutions of higher education indicated that rankings and measurement of student engagement is an important indicator of institutional performance and quality in the areas of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriching educational experiences, and a supportive campus environment. Results obtained from NSSE further indicated how well institutions performed as compared to their peer institutions. Information

obtained from the NSSE, as well as other assessment instruments including surveys and college

rankings, provide a more comprehensive assessment of institutional quality and performance.

When assessments such as these are used in addition to traditional institutional assessment

models, methods, and practices, they can provide a great deal of information relative to

increasing student engagement at all levels. Kuh et al. (August, 2006) stated,

> When institutions use effective educational practices, they provide a
> small boost to students who are lower achieving when they start college.
> For those students, the more engaged they become, the better their grades
> are, and they start catching up to students who started with a higher level
> of achievement. (p. 2)

Kuh et al. (2005) further suggested that student engagement directly impacts student

grades and increases retention rates, particularly freshmen to sophomore retention. Additionally,

increased involvement in academic affairs and campus activities serves to assist students in

overcoming any previous misconceptions, disadvantages, or problems associated with the return

to the classroom (Kuh et al.).

Engagement in the collegiate environment and its effect on students of color is another

area that is receiving a great deal of attention on college campuses. Research conducted by the

University of Michigan Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program (UROP) initiated in 1988

showed increased retention and improved academic performance of underrepresented students of

color at the University (UROP, 2007). Additionally, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) maintain

findings from the UROP study supported then current research and theory that reinforced the

claim that those students who were more integrated into the campus culture and environment

were more likely to be retained by the institution and persist through degree completion.

Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) further stated:

> Whatever form engagement might take…students should be helped early
> in their careers to find academic and social niches where they can feel

they are a part of the institution's life, where friendships can be developed, and where role models (whether student or faculty) can be observed and emulated. (p. 654)

Spanier (2001) affirmed that institutions of higher education have been successful in their missions of teaching, learning, and service. However, he cautioned that with the rapid changes in enrollment trends, demographics, and demands for accountability from the public and community institutions, higher education leaders need to be prepared. Consequently, institutional leaders can be assured that they will be required to aggressively confront the challenge of engaging nontraditional students on their college campuses. Institutions must look to the 21st century and begin to reinvent themselves. This may include developing a new vision that requires a shift in thinking about who and how well institutions are currently operating. Students who step onto college campuses expecting to graduate and leave the institution with a degree in one hand and assurances of a bright future just outside the door deserve as much.

Achieving effective involvement by students, especially those who are most vulnerable to dropping out of college when the pressures and demands become too much, requires institutions to become more proficient. Engagement is the key to success and the evolution of higher education (Spanier, 2001). This includes active engagement and involvement of nontraditional students enrolled in colleges today. This population of students should be immersed into the entire campus culture. Full immersion into the collegiate environment includes participation in orientation programs and continual receipt of ongoing academic assistance. Further, it requires a commitment from institutional leaders to deliver to each student a campus experience with a curriculum that connects the classroom learning objectives to real world requirements, relevance, and skills (Chaves, 2003). As such, nontraditional students are particularly susceptible to what the college environment offers.

Colleges and universities understand that engagement is a major concern for all college students. However, it has been and continues to be difficult to involve or engage nontraditional students. Institutions in the 21st century must learn how to develop strategies and initiatives that serve to engage students who are representative of this large population of college students. In so doing, college leaders will gain insight into what nontraditional students desire, need, and want from the collegiate experience. Additionally, institutional leaders will begin to understand the role of nontraditional students on college campuses. They will begin to realize nontraditional students need access, interest in lifelong learning, and desire to become a part of the campus culture. Integration and inclusion of nontraditional students will require putting students first and changing current institutional paradigms to reflect one that considers the needs of all college students.

This research involved a qualitative study of the University of Memphis (U of M), Memphis, Tennessee, and focused on the practices, policies, and perceptions of nontraditional students at the U of M. For the purposes of this study, research was conducted using participants from the undergraduate student population at U of M.

The U of M is the second largest Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) institution. Enrollment figures for 2007 reveals that in 2006, 38% of those students enrolled at the U of M were men and 62% were women (Tennessee Board of Regents, Data & Statistics, fall 2007, n.p.). Fall 2006 student enrollment totaled 20,379 students. There were 15,802 undergraduate college students included in the overall total (TBR, 2007). The nontraditional undergraduate student population for 2007 included 8,563 students 25 years of age and older.

The U of M was chosen for this study because it has in its academic makeup a unique college, the University College, which places its emphasis on nontraditional students.

Additionally, U of M was chosen for this study due its size and proximity as well as

nontraditional student enrollment. Specifically, the University College espouses the following

mission:

1. Encourages one-on-one interaction among students, faculty, and advisors.

2. Acknowledges its students' learning from past career and academic experience.

3. Respects students' need to balance academic, career, family, and social
   responsibilities.

4. Responds quickly and positively to community needs that can be addressed through
   interdisciplinary course programming (University of Memphis, University College,
   (n.p), May 21, 2007).

Potter (2003), referring to the University of Memphis' University College stated:

> Many nontraditional students often feel like they do not belong on a
> college campus; however, at the University of Memphis, the University
> College is a place where these nontraditional students are the rule, not the
> exception… (p. 1)

This research examined what the U of M University College is doing that results in

higher nontraditional student enrollment at the U of M. More importantly, this research revealed

information about how institutional leaders and the University College encourage this population

of students to become engaged in their academic and collegiate experiences.

Intent of the Study

The intent of this research was to study and understand the responsibility of colleges and

universities in successfully engaging nontraditional students in the preparation and completion of

an academic career. In so doing, colleges and universities gain a greater understanding of what

motivates and drives nontraditional students to attend college. To accomplish the intent, this

study focused on one 4-year institution that may be a model of nontraditional student engagement – The University of Memphis.

Research Questions

The following research question is the focus of this study: How does a university successfully engage nontraditional students?

Additional questions, all from the perspective of nontraditional undergraduate students, that guided this research include:

1. Is engagement an integral part of the nontraditional student college experience?

2. How does the U of M currently engage nontraditional students in campus governance and culture?

3. How do nontraditional students currently feel about the collegiate environment?

4. How do U of M college leaders include nontraditional students in campus activities, events, programs?

5. What do nontraditional students really need from campus leaders in order to become successful college students?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to analyze and investigate the programs, culture, support systems, and curriculum deemed important by nontraditional undergraduate students at the U of M. This study was instrumental in identifying areas and criteria necessary on college campuses to stimulate and encourage nontraditional students' participation and engagement in their overall educational experience. This included evaluation and assessment criteria currently used by

higher education administrators, academic and student affairs personnel, and others on campus. Assessment and evaluation is necessary in order to determine if a connection exists between nontraditional student engagement and satisfaction. Additionally, assessment assists campus leaders in determining strategies to increase enrollment of nontraditional students at these institutions.

Nontraditional students are gradually being seen, and appreciated, by college and institutional leaders as a rapidly growing segment of the student population that needs to be engaged in the collegiate environment. According to Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, and Hayek (July, 2006), student success must include all aspects of the collegiate environment leading to successful progress toward degree. The collegiate environment includes academic achievement, engagement, and participation in educationally beneficial functions. A successful collegiate environment will also lead to (a) student satisfaction, (b) development of the desired knowledge, skills, and competencies to succeed in college, (c) successful achievement of educational objectives, and (d) successful attainment of career goals and future success (Kuh et al.).

High levels of student participation and engagement leads to increased student satisfaction, persistence, educational attainment, and successful learning outcomes. Additionally, positive student behaviors and institutional conditions that foster effective educational practices and policies are a direct result of active student engagement (Kuh et al., July, 2006) Engagement by all student populations is critical in order for colleges and universities to be successful in their missions. Effective institutions are successful at engaging all students in the campus culture and require a commitment to serve all students.

Significance of the Study

The debate and discussion among college and university leaders regarding the importance of student engagement and its significance to student success continues to challenge the institutional hierarchy. The challenge for institutional leaders is not only student engagement but how to engage the different student populations on campus. Today, on every campus in America there are two primary groups of students that make up the majority of students enrolled in classes on college campuses; i.e., the traditional college student, aged 18-24, and the nontraditional college student, aged 25 and above.

Nontraditional students are the fastest growing segment of higher education enrollments in America and are very diverse. According to Spanier (2001), nontraditional students, age 25 and older, included approximately 43% of all college students in the nation. Nontraditional students are increasingly becoming a significant majority of undergraduate students on college campuses throughout the United States. The increase in the number of nontraditional students returning to college campuses has resulted in a need for colleges and universities to look at the various factors and attributes of this population of students and what institutions need to do in order to serve their unique needs.

The importance of participation and engagement of nontraditional students is seen in the current demographics of this student population on college and university campuses throughout the United States. According to the Bureau of the Census' Current Population Survey, as cited in Kuenzi (2005), undergraduate participation rates among nontraditional adult learners indicates that 4 out of 10 undergraduate students were over 24 and enrolled on a part-time basis. Because of this high proportion of students, institutional leaders and policy makers need to look at

socioeconomic and other characteristics of this group to develop strategies and policies that meet their unique needs.

Scope of the Study

This study included personal interviews, focus group interviews, and a review of the personal journals for 4 nontraditional students at the University of Memphis (U of M). One participant from each undergraduate student classification; i.e., a freshmen, sophomore, junior, and senior nontraditional students enrolled at the U of M in the fall 2007 semester was selected for participation in this research study. Additionally, there was one alumnae from the U of M University College who participated in the research study. The alumnae research participant was not involved in focus group sessions but did participate in a personal interview, writing of a personal story about the decision to enroll in college as a nontraditional student, and completion of the campus climate survey. Students were recruited through contacts and recommendations from the University College administration and its academic college advisors.

There were two focus group sessions conducted in the research study. The first focus group session was held at the beginning of the spring 2008 semester. First, I interviewed each of the four students individually to collect data about their personal experiences as nontraditional students. Second, I engaged the four nontraditional undergraduate students currently enrolled at U of M in a 2-hour focus group session to collect data within a group dynamic. The second focus group session was held at the end of the spring 2008 session. This focus group session was a 1-hour session designed to allow research participants the opportunity to ask questions of the researcher and discuss their experiences throughout the semester.

The focus group method of research included development of a focus group guide for students that was used to engage all four undergraduate participants in a robust, comfortable

discussion. I taped and transcribed all interview sessions. Additionally, the four undergraduate research participants kept a journal of their experiences throughout the research study describing their daily activities and classes at the institution. The personal interview with the alumnae member was conducted during an evening meal prior to the first focus group session with the four nontraditional undergraduate student research participants.

A small compensation was paid to each of the four research participants in the amount of $100. The 4 undergraduate research participants also received dinner during the focus group sessions. The alumnae member participating in the study received a gift card in the amount of $25 to a local restaurant as compensation for participation in the research study. The alumnae participant also received dinner at the end of the data collection process. Additionally, all participants were provided journals to keep a record of their daily activities and other materials necessary for participation in the research study.

Responses to interview questions resulted in the development of major themes that identified areas of strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement in the collegiate environment. Information obtained from the study led to ideas and suggestions for college leaders that could serve to increase participation and engagement of the nontraditional student population at all institutions. Journals, observations, and students' personal stories provided valuable information about nontraditional student life on a college campus. Information gathered provided authentic data about how nontraditional students are engaged by campus faculty, staff, and students in the college environment.

Limitations of the Study

There are three very different and distinct student populations on college and university campuses today that include: (a) traditional age college students, (b) nontraditional age college

students, and (c) international students. Although international students may have age factors that are traditional or nontraditional, their unique problems are beyond the scope of this study. For the purposes of this study, research focused on undergraduate nontraditional students who are age 25 and above and who are not international students.

The researcher chose a qualitative research strategy because it allowed the researcher to explore in-depth the phenomenon of nontraditional student enrollment on college and university campuses. This research explored undergraduate nontraditional students enrolled at the University of Memphis (U of M). Two of the four nontraditional undergraduate student participants were enrolled in one of the 20 degree concentrations offered through the University College. These degree programs are offered in the University College's Bachelor of Professional Studies and Bachelor of Liberal Studies degree offerings.   In addition, graduate degree program offerings and associated graduate students were not included in this research study primarily because in most cases graduate students have reached the nontraditional student age by the time they enter graduate education.

Additionally, international students, while a significantly important college student population on college and university campuses, are discussed briefly in the research study. While this population of students on college and university campuses was recognized as a rising demographic they were not the focus of this research study.

Information obtained from this research study yielded significant information and knowledge about nontraditional student engagement on college and university campuses. Additionally, information obtained from this research will contribute to the advancement and understanding of the nontraditional student phenomena on college and university campuses across the nation.

My passion for understanding and learning about nontraditional students stems from the fact that I began my college career at 34. The barriers and obstacles, both personal and academic, were more than I could comfortably manage. Consequently, I did stop and start my college career depending upon what was going on in my life at that moment. Having said this, my passion for learning and the goal of getting my doctorate never left my mind or heart. It took me 8 years to complete my bachelor's degree, 3 years for my master's, and I am currently at the culmination of degree requirements for my doctoral degree in my 50s. My master's thesis centered on nontraditional students' satisfaction with their overall experiences at a 4-year, southern, regional, public university in Tennessee. And, my dissertation is an extension of my passion for learning about and assisting nontraditional college students in the successful accomplishment of their academic goals.

Current research, literature, and enrollment trends continue to support statistical data that predicts a continual increase in nontraditional student enrollment. Charged with this information and based upon previous experiences as a nontraditional student, I felt compelled to continue advocating for nontraditional students. I am privileged to have the opportunity to work in the field of academia. My professional capacity as an employee at a TBR institution allows me the opportunity to contribute to educational research and data that will assist current and future nontraditional students in their educational careers. Additionally, this research contributed to increased understanding of the nontraditional student population on college campuses.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions are specific to this study:

College (Collegiate) environment includes all areas of the collegiate experience in higher education institutions such as administration, academics, and auxiliary services.

Effectiveness is defined as the ability to accomplish a goal or outcome leading to and capable of producing an intended result having a striking effect or action as determined by an individual or group of individuals (Webster's, 1991, p. 426).

Engagement includes the act of sharing in the activities of a group, participating in activities inside and outside the campus environment, and the action taken by individual leaders to include students in the collegiate environment (Graham & Donaldson, 1999).

Nontraditional students, older college students, or adult learners are defined as those undergraduate college students 25 years of age or older (Toynton, 2005). These three terms are used interchangeably in the research study. Nontraditional undergraduate students often possess some of the characteristics indicated below:

1. Older than typical age college student

2. Financially independent

3. Delaying college entry (not attending immediately after high school)

4. Part-time enrollment status

5. Full-time employment

6. May have dependents or be a single parent, and

7. May have completed high school with a GED or certificate (NCES, 2002b).

Traditional college students are defined as those undergraduate college students who are under 25 years of age (PRWeb, 2007).

Institutional Effectiveness is a measure of accountability that is determined by how well a university's programs and activities reflect its mission, vision, and values (Franklin, 1996).

Tennessee Board of Regents governs the State University and Community College System that consists of 4-year universities, 2-year community colleges, and technology centers that serve the people of Tennessee through teaching, research, and public service. It is the sixth-largest system of public higher education in operation in the United States (Tennessee Board of Regents Online, 2007).

Overview of the Study

Chapter 1 is an introduction to the study that includes the intent of the study, research question, purpose of the study, significance of the study, scope of the study, and researcher bias. The primary purpose of this study, as stated in Chapter 1, was to explore in-depth a southern, regional Tennessee Board of Regents institution, University of Memphis (U of M), using a qualitative research strategy to explore the phenomenon of nontraditional student engagement on the U of M campus.

In Chapter 2, a literature review with research on learning theories is discussed having as the primary focus understanding how nontraditional college students learn. This chapter looked at individual characteristics and attributes of the adult learner as well as how to create a supportive campus environment for adult learners. To understand what a supportive campus entails, this chapter looked at campus culture, faculty and academic culture, motivational factors that drive nontraditional student enrollment, and other criteria used to determine successful student engagement and satisfaction.

Chapter 3 includes the research design for this study. A qualitative research design was used in this study to determine how the U of M is successfully engaging the large number of nontraditional students enrolled at the university. Successful engagement of nontraditional students has been shown to increase student satisfaction, retention, and successful progress

toward completion of a college degree. This chapter incorporated a discussion about the development of the focus group guide and the data collection and data analysis procedures.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 include findings from the Campus Climate Survey, student focus groups, interviews, and participant personal stories and journals.

Chapter 7 presents findings, conclusions, and recommendations for best practices and opportunities for further research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Tennessee Board of Regents State University and Community College System

The General Assembly is the governing body for the State University and Community College System. In 1972, the General Assembly created the Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) in order to achieve coordination and consistency in programs offered by public higher education institutions in Tennessee. Member institutions included those institutions that were former members of the Tennessee Board of Education. In 1983, technical institutes and area vocational schools, also known as Tennessee Technology Centers, also came under the governance of the TBR (TBR, "New Direction", n.p.).

The TBR State University and Community College System includes 4-year universities, 2-year community colleges, and technology centers that serve Tennessee residents through academic program offering, service to the community, and research.

Function and Responsibilities

The TBR is charged with the task of providing direction in postsecondary education administration and operation. Additionally, TBR is charged with the primary purpose of managing the system. The board is authorized to hire a chancellor and define his or her duties; select and hire institution presidents; confer tenure and promotion decisions of institutions in the system; review curricula and graduation requirements; approve institutional operating budgets; set policy for fiscal affairs; establish policies and procedures surrounding institutional campus environments; and otherwise assume responsibility for the operation of each institution in the system. Further, TBR delegates to institutional presidents the daily responsibility and authority for operating their institution and programs (TBR, "New Directions", 2007, n.p.).

The mission of the TBR is to raise the education and skill levels of the people of Tennessee. Specifically, its web site states, "In order to accomplish that, we must serve all kinds of people with all kinds of needs, providing them the opportunities and assistance that fit their particular situation" ("Educating Tennessee", 2007, n.p.). TBR determines success as the number of Tennessee citizens who have obtained education beyond the high school level. Ultimately, the challenge for TBR is to persuade more citizens to take advantage of the opportunities available to improve their lives through higher learning.

TBR School Systems

The TBR governs the State University and Community College System of Tennessee and it is the sixth largest public education system in the nation. There are six 4-year institutions, comprised of Austin Peay State University, East Tennessee State University, Middle Tennessee State University, Tennessee State University, Tennessee Technical University, and the University of Memphis. In addition, the TBR oversees 13 community colleges and 26 technology centers throughout the State of Tennessee. Currently, the TBR enrollment figures for 2006 for the six universities are approximately 83,000 students. Total enrollment for TBR institutions, including the community colleges, is approximately 162,000 students (Tennessee Board of Regents, Data and Statistics, 2007).

The University of Memphis

The University of Memphis (U of M) is currently the second largest TBR institution with approximately 21,000 students. It is a public research university located in Memphis, Tennessee. The University was originally created under the General Education Bill enacted in 1909 by the Tennessee Legislature. The bill allowed the creation of three colleges within selected state localities with one to be built in West Tennessee. There was also a clause that specified there

would be one school for African-American students. There was one site selected for construction of the school in west Tennessee. Memphis was chosen as the site for the new school primarily because of its location close to the railroad. The General Education Act also established East Tennessee State University, Middle Tennessee State University, and Tennessee State University.

On September 10, 1912, West Tennessee Normal School opened in Memphis, Tennessee with Seymour A. Mynders as its first president. West Tennessee Normal School changed its name in 1925 to West Tennessee State Teachers College (WTSTC), with Richard C. Jones as president. In 1941, WTSTC awarded its first bachelor's degrees and the name was changed once again to Memphis State College (MSC) because of the addition of a liberal arts curriculum. MSC became Memphis State University (MSU) in 1957 (University of Memphis, History, 2007).

On July 1, 1994, after a great deal of research and information gathering, MSU once again changed its name to its current name, the U of M. Dr. V. Lane Rawlins became president in 1991. He was instrumental in leading the institution through the process of changing its name to U of M. Dr. Rawlins retired in 2002; and today, the U of M has as its leader its first female president, Dr. Shirley C. Raines.

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The University College

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Overview

"The U of M's University College uses innovation, creativity and a vast set of resources to make education for 'nontraditional students a perfect fit" (Potter, 2003, "Square Pegs", n.d.). The University College, established at the University of Memphis in 1975, has an enormous impact on campus and its nontraditional student population. The University College

accommodates students and majors that do not fit within traditional college programs. The University College not only attracts but encourages nontraditional students to pursue their academic careers. The University College is successful in this endeavor because it effectively targets services and programs directly to nontraditional college students.

The University College's goal, besides that of enhancing nontraditional student educational experiences and providing a quality education, is to increase opportunities for this population of students. This includes providing flexible degree programs, employment of outstanding, caring faculty, and individualized attention to nontraditional students' educational needs.

The University College Program Review (2007) indicates that all program offerings are to be interdisciplinary. Therefore, programs must include content and courses from other scientific or artistic disciplines currently offered on the U of M campus. Additionally, the "University College is the U of M leader in the use of technology in delivering courses and majors online" (University College Program Review, 2007).

The University College specifically identifies the following objectives and goals as part of its mission:

1. Encourages one-on-one interaction among students, faculty, and advisors.
2. Acknowledges its students' learning from past career or academic experience.
3. Respects students' need to balance academic, career, family, and social responsibilities, and
4. Responds quickly and positively to community needs that can be addressed through interdisciplinary course programming (University of Memphis, University College, 2007, p. 1).

Organization Structure

The University of Memphis (U of M) is governed by the TBR consisting of 18 Board Members. Additionally, the Board is responsible for setting policies and guidelines that govern all TBR institutions. The Board is comprised of both Standing Committees and Ad Hoc Committees that meet prior to each Board meeting. These committees include faculty and student representatives. The President of the U of M is the top administrator at the University.

The U of M has 10 colleges and schools including the following: College of Arts and Sciences, Fogelman College of Business and Economics, College of Communication and Fine Arts, College of Education, Herff College of Engineering, University College, Loewenberg School of Nursing, School of Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology, Cecil C. Humphreys School of Law, and the Graduate School (University of Memphis, "Academic Programs", 2007). Additionally, the U of M also has several centers that conduct advanced research. These centers include: FedEx Institute of Technology, Center for Earthquake Research and Information, Institute for Intelligent Systems, and Advanced Distributed Learning Workforce Co-Lab (University of Memphis, "Colleges & Departments," 2007).

The University College is among one of the 10 U of M colleges and is under the supervision of the Provost. The University College leadership includes the Dean, University College, Associate Dean of University College, Assistant Dean for Undergraduate Affairs, three College Advisors, a Distance Education Advisor, and a Graduation Analyst. Additionally, there are eight faculty members aligned with the University College. As a part of the governance structure of University College, there is a University Council comprised of 10 members

(University of Memphis, Undergraduate Bulletin, 2007). Because the University College has a limited number of faculty assigned directly to its college, University College courses are taught by faculty in other academic areas within the University of Memphis.

Program Offerings

The University College offers over 20 undergraduate concentrations within their two University College undergraduate program offerings. Three of these concentrations are offered entirely online as part of the Regents Online Degree Program (RODP). The unique opportunity for University College students to design their own individualized program is central to its success. Students may create their own degree by combining course work and content from two or more disciplinary areas.

The University College program offerings consist of:

1. Bachelor of Professional Studies (B.P.S.)

2. Bachelor of Liberal Studies (B.L.S.)

3. Master of Arts in Liberal Studies (M.A.L.S.)

4. Master of Professional Studies (M.P.S.) (online), and

5. Master of Science in Consumer Science & Education (M.S.)

(University of Memphis, "Earn Your Degree," 2007, n.p.)

Additionally, it is important to note that U of M was the leader in the State of Tennessee when the directive was established from the Governor and TBR to initiate more online degree program offerings (University College Program Review, 2007).

Traditionally, all interdisciplinary program offerings such as those offered by the U of M are done so because of demand from the public, community, administration, or others seeking to meet the needs of society. As such, creation of University College programs is "in direct

response to the community's educational needs" (University College Program Review, 2007, p. 1). Local community leaders in the Memphis and Jackson area recognized the lack of trained professionals in several critical areas and looked to U of M to provide assistance. The U of M University College became the leader in program development. Current programs established in cooperation with the community and the U of M and the University College include fire administration, preschool and childcare administration, paralegal services, fashion merchandising, home furnishings, and commercial aviation. Additionally, there is the opportunity for development of individual programs designed by students that meets their individual academic and professional goals (University College Program Review, 2007).

Students

The University College has a very diverse student population. According to information obtained from the University College, Program Review (2007), the diversity of its students includes that of educational background, age, and ethnicity. Specifically,

> In fall 2006, 51.8% of undergraduate majors and 54.2% of graduate students in
> The University College are non-white students; 51.9% of the students in the
> University College are non-white. Students taking RODP classes are 46%
> minority students. The college student population is primarily non traditional
> students. p. 1)

Graduation rates for the University College continue to increase. In 2005-06, there were more than 300 undergraduate students graduating from the U of M's University College. According to University College administration, this was three times greater than in prior years. Additionally, College leaders indicate that this increased growth is primarily attributed to the establishment of the RODP and its online course offerings.

The University College prides itself in benefits offered to its nontraditional student population. Benefits to enrollment in the University College include:

1. University College students are often able to apply more transfer credit to their degree programs than is possible in other colleges.

2. Students with approved programs of study can submit an Experiential Learning Portfolio that can be evaluated for possible academic credit.

3. University College offers the Organizational Leadership BPS and the Master of Arts in Liberal Studies degrees at the U of M, Jackson Center, in Jackson, TN. It also offers a variety of courses at locations in the Memphis metropolitan area.

4. University College offers a range of scheduling options including day, evening, and online classes that make it easier to obtain a degree (The U of M, University College, "Earn Your Degree," 2007, p. 3).

The University College plays a pivotal role in nontraditional student recruitment and retention. The phenomenal growth of the University College has resulted in an increased emphasis on nontraditional student programs. University College administration and institutional leaders as a whole recognize the importance of successful program development and the necessity of engagement by all students on the U of M campus.

The Changing Demographics of College Students on University Campuses

Many of the current universities operating in the United States today were originally developed in the late 19th century. Public lands were allocated to the states for the development of state agricultural and mechanical schools. These schools became known as land-grant colleges and universities and were made possible because of the Morrill Act of 1862 (Colleges and Universities, 2007, n.p.).

The Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 allocated a large parcel of federal land to every state that remained in the Union. Further, the Act specified that the land was to be used to establish and support at least one college that offered standard academic programs. Additionally, the college was to offer courses in agriculture, engineering, and home economics (Morrill Land Grant, 2007, n.p.). Subsequently, a second Morrill Act of 1890 allowed the federal government to allocate appropriations annually to assist in support of these colleges (Johnson, 1993). Additionally, these colleges were mandated to show proof that race was not an admissions criterion (Campbell, 1995). Many historically black colleges and universities evolved as a result of the Morrill Act of 1890.

Today, 20th century universities have even more increased responsibilities placed upon them by government, society, and the students they serve. Universities play a crucial role in both scientific and technical research as well as in the global economy. As such, local, state, and federal governmental agencies are responsible for providing monetary support to support the mission of such institutions. This includes providing financial aid and support to those students who are disadvantaged and veterans of the armed services.

Enrollment Trends

According to Kuenzi (2005), there are currently "15.3 million students enrolled in 2- or 4-year colleges and universities; 12.4 million enrolled as undergraduates" ("Summary," n.p.). The general make-up of the student population, the rate of participation by these student populations, and future changes in enrollment of these students is of particular concern to the U.S. Congress.

Currently, the enrolled student population consists of young, primarily white, non-Hispanic young adults. Of those undergraduate students enrolled in college, two thirds are

white, non-Hispanic. Seventy-five percent are between the ages of 15 to 25. Minority students

comprise a large number of the postsecondary student enrollment, "particularly older students –

3-in-10 undergraduates between 15 and 24 and nearly 4-in-10 undergraduates over 24 are black,

Hispanic or Asian" (Kuenzi, 2005, "Summary," n.p.). More importantly, Kuenzi stated that 4

out of 10 of those students above the age of 24 and enrolling on a part-time basis are

nontraditional adult learners.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2006) reports that enrollment in

higher education institutions "… increased by 17 percent between 1984 and 1994" (p. 1).

Further, enrollment increased 21% between 1994 and 2004 to 17.3 million students. Not

surprisingly, much of the growth was due to increased numbers of women enrolling in college

degree programs. There were also increases in undergraduate student enrollment reported

between 1993 and 1996, and "…undergraduate enrollment rose 20 percent between 1996 and

2004" (NCES, 2006, p. 1). In addition, the numbers of minority students enrolling in colleges

and universities has continued to increase.   Minority student enrollment has doubled from 15%

in 1976 to 30% in 2004 (NCES, 2006).

Kuenzi (2005) further stated that there had been significant changes in the characteristics

and traits of students enrolled in postsecondary institutions since the enactment of the Higher

Education Act (HEA) of 1965. The postsecondary college student today is "more likely to be

female, minority, and over 25 years of age than was true in the mid-1960s" (p. 13). Kuenzi

further argued that because nontraditional students were a viable presence on college campuses,

HEA programs, particularly student aid programs, are concerns that need to be addressed.

Additionally, he states, "Consideration should be given to assessing non-traditional students'

participation in HEA programs, the actual needs (financial or other) that such students have for

assistance from these programs, and what barriers, if any, might curtail their appropriate

participation" (p. 18).

Student Demographics

Traditional College Students.   Research findings indicate that traditional college students

are normally 18 to 24 years of age, attend college full time, and enroll in college immediately

after earning a high school diploma (National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), 2002a).

Additionally, the traditional college stereotype is unmarried, never lived outside of his or her

parent's home, and with few social skills other than those associated with high school

experiences. Consequently, after completing high school and moving to college campuses they

are still dependent on their parents for financial support (Macari et al., 2006).

Merritt (2002) wrote that the American Council on Education (2002) reports that only

40% percent of college students…

> come to college directly from high school with parental support. The remaining
> 60 percent, labeled 'non-traditional', may be students who work full-time, have
> dependents, received a GED or other educational certificate, attend part-time, or
> had delayed entry into college. (p. 1)

Additionally, in a PRWeb (2007) press release traditional college students were defined

as, "18 to 22 year's old, undergraduate, living on campus and supported by his or her parents'

income" ("Rethinking," n.p.). As a result, student development programs historically have been

centered on this population of students. Consequently, student development professionals on

college and university campuses are concerned with educating the whole student into the

collegiate environment. This holistic approach to education is considered a critical component of

"the higher education mission since the inception of the first American colleges" (Macari et al.,

p. 284).

According to Hansen (1998): "overall student demographics, preparedness, and attitudes toward college have shifted greatly over the last three decades, coupled with an increase in the number of college students" (p. 1). Further, Hansen emphasizes that learning in today's academic environment has been changed due to negative experiences gained in high school as well as society. Hansen points to the negative impact of mass media and the entertainment world that create an environment "…that has altered the rules for academic learning forever" (p. 1).

Nontraditional College Students. According to Toynton (2005), the terms "mature student and adult learner are used synonymously to define those whose prior knowledge includes a significant element derived from work or life experience in addition to, or instead of any prior formalized study" (p. 207).

While prior knowledge and work experience define this population of students, age is the defining criterion for classifying students as traditional or nontraditional. However, a hundred years earlier, nontraditional students would have been classified by race, gender, or socioeconomic status (Ogren, 2003). The definition of nontraditional students continues to be expanded to include: (a) the fact that nontraditional students most often delay enrollment at a postsecondary institution for one or more years after high school, (b) are usually enrolled part-time, (c) employed full-time, (d) are not financially dependent on their parents, (e) may have a spouse and dependents but may just as easily be a single parent, and (f) in some cases, nontraditional students may not possess a high school diploma and attend college after obtaining a GED (NCES, 2002a).

Nontraditional students come with many special attributes not yet realized by their traditional student counterparts. As such, these attributes serve to set the nontraditional student population apart from the traditional-age college student population. Anecdotal evidence

suggests that nontraditional students come to colleges and universities in a sense "pre-packaged."

This means that this population of students possesses a greater sense of maturity, experiences, and values as well as different learning goals and objectives. In addition, nontraditional adult learners bring with them their individual learning patterns, interests, and responsibilities (Rogers, 1996).

In order to successfully engage the mature nontraditional student, it is imperative that educators develop a complete understanding of the epistemology of nontraditional students and their ways of learning. This involves teaching and instructing nontraditional students in the acquisition of the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary for completion of a degree. This process most often includes providing continual encouragement of adult learners to continue the process of lifelong learning.   Prior knowledge and life experience is not only a crucial part of the contributions that nontraditional students bring to the classroom but paramount to the nontraditional student's successful engagement in the college environment.

As one of the largest and fastest growing populations of students, adult learners spend much more time on academics and subject matter and are highly focused, serious, and more motivated than the traditional college student. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2006), nontraditional student enrollment is projected to increase 19% during the years 2002 to 2014.

In a 2006 survey administered by the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research (CPR), findings revealed that "… among all adult learners, 12 percent of first-year students and 7 percent of seniors reported taking their classes online, compared with only 1 percent of traditional-aged students" (NSSE 2006, p. 3). These findings lend evidence to support the desire and need of nontraditional students to be in charge of their academic careers. This

requires that institutions schedule classes at convenient times and places to accommodate this

population of students. Astin (1984) defines involved as "the amount of physical and

psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (p. 134). As such,

the level of participation, involvement, and engagement in activities inside and outside college

campuses among traditional and nontraditional students reinforces claims that nontraditional

students are not choosing to stay on campus. The Indiana University Center survey revealed

some interesting statistics in the area of participation and volunteer work as follows:

1. Only 47% of nontraditional adult students participated in community service or

   volunteer work, whereas 69% of traditional-age students took part in volunteer work.

2. Only 12% of nontraditional adult students choose to become involved in research

   with a faculty member, whereas 23% of traditional-age students worked with faculty

   on research.

3. Only 27% of nontraditional adult students participated in extracurricular activities.

   On the other hand, 69% of those traditional-age students choose to become involved

   in extracurricular activities (NSSE, 2006, n.p.).

On the other hand, in the academic arena findings revealed a much higher level of

nontraditional adult student participation than traditional-age students.

1. 80% of nontraditional adult learners asked questions in class or contributed to

   discussions while only 72% of traditional-age students did so.

2. 61% of the nontraditional adult students prepared two or more drafts of papers and

   assignments while only 40% of traditional-age students complete one draft, and

3. Only 13% of nontraditional adult learners came to class unprepared with assignments uncompleted; however, 24% of traditional-age students were coming to class unprepared with incomplete assignments (NSSE, 2006, n.p.).

These statistics reinforce the need for institutional leaders to design effective educational practices and strategies designed to engage the nontraditional student, particularly in the area of volunteer service.

International College Students. Diversity in the student population is an important issue on all college and university campuses. Higher education institutional admission offices and student affairs personnel are charged with the task of integrating all student populations into the college culture and campus environment. Additionally, institutions realize the importance of remaining competitive and that means inclusion of international students in the collegiate environment. According to Bollinger (2007),

> The experience of arriving on campus to live and study with classmates
> from a diverse range of backgrounds is essential to students training for
> this new world nurturing in them an instinct to reach out instead of clinging
> to the comforts of what seems natural or familiar. (p. B20)

Today's college students create the global campus. The global campus includes a very diverse group of students including international students. Choy (2002) states that the global campus includes: "...30 percent minorities, 20 percent born outside the United States or have a foreign-born parent, and 11 percent spoke a language other than English growing up" (p. 9). These findings are not surprising to those involved in the recruitment and admission of international students. Access to higher education for international students has become even more critical in the wake of the events of September 11, 2001, in the United States. The fear of global terrorism threats has resulted in a barrage of additional paper work and data reporting

mechanisms that have and continue to require additional paperwork and place restrictions on the admission and enrollment of international students in U.S. institutions.

With the institution of new international security guidelines and rules, open access to United States colleges and universities has become very difficult for foreign students. As a direct result of the creation of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) there came a flurry of new laws, rules, and guidelines for the admission and reporting of international student enrollment at all higher education institutions. Student enrollment personnel at institutions of higher education were introduced and mandated to learn and use the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) to chart and track international student enrollment. These new regulations brought with them additional restraints and a host of challenges for college and university admission offices.

Enrollment of international students that had been on the rise suddenly began declining. Chin and Gallup-Black (2004) stated, "The enrollment of international students at U.S. institutions of higher education declined for the first time since the Institute of International Education began conducting a census of foreign students in the United States" (p. 64).

According to Smith (2007), the Department of Commerce identifies international education as the nation's fifth largest service export. Additionally, in 2005-06 international education was responsible for generating $13.4 billion in revenue. She further emphasizes that in 2005-2006, there were 564,766 international students studying in the United States. Further, there was a 15% increase in the number of exchange and visiting scholar visas issued by the government. McCormack (2007) reflects a higher figure as published by the Institute of International Education which states that the 582,984 foreign students currently in the United States contribute approximately $14.5 billion to the U.S. economy.

The importance of international education in today's global economy continues to require action by congress and lawmakers. Smith (2007) posits that it is imperative that the United States and lawmakers remove barriers to international student enrollment in United States colleges and universities if the United States is to remain competitive in the global economy. International students continue to be the focus of higher education policy makers, administrators, and institutional governing boards. As such, it is important to include this population of students as one of the primary players in the changing demographics on college and university campuses.

Characteristics of Nontraditional Students

Seventy-three percent of all undergraduate students are nontraditional students possessing at least one or more of the characteristics of nontraditional students (NCES, 2002b). This information confirms existing research that nontraditional students continue to have a higher presence on college and university campuses today, and nontraditional students are now viewed by many institutional leaders as the "majority rather than the exception on today's campuses" (Compton, Cox, and Laanan, 2006, p. 73).

According to Kuenzi (2005), the term nontraditional is a highly debated label with very little consensus on just what differentiates a traditional student from a nontraditional student. He specifically argued that the primary concern and underlying issue was to be able to understand that today's college students were much different from the majority of students who attended college in the mid-1960 through 1970. Prior to this time defining student characteristics was primarily due to the establishment and framing of the Higher Education Act.

Today's literature supports two characteristics for classifying students as either traditional or nontraditional; i.e., age and enrollment status. These two characteristics are the most widely used in defining student populations at higher educational institutions throughout the United

States. Additionally, Horn (1996) identifies nontraditional students by reviewing their enrollment patterns which is also supported in the findings of the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) study on Nontraditional Undergraduates (2002b). The NCES identifies seven different characteristics of nontraditional students that include the following:

1. Older than typical age college student

2. Financially independent

3. Delaying college entry (not attending immediately after high school)

4. Part-time enrollment status

5. Full-time employment

6. May have dependents or be a single parent, and

7. May have completed high school with a GED or certificate.

Nontraditional Students Needs, Wants, Desires

Compton et al. (2006) stated that, while there were adult students who can be classified as nontraditional students by age, all of them do not possess other characteristics of nontraditional students. Also, some students who meet the age criterion of traditional students have one or more of the characteristics of nontraditional students.   It is important to realize that nontraditional students in spite of the overlap with traditional students are a distinct group and require the attention of college leaders and personnel.

Historically, when planning strategies and programs for nontraditional students, student affairs personnel and others in higher education focus on barriers that nontraditional students face once they are enrolled in college. As a result, college and institutional leaders have been unsuccessful in fulfilling their mission for this distinct population of students.   College

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personnel are beginning to shift their paradigm to focus on the development of strategies for overcoming barriers to success for this population of students.

According to Lightner (2001) nontraditional student needs include services such as library, registration, book store, counseling, and advising to be offered at convenient times and locations. Additionally, this student population needs assistance in development of both personal and social skills to include tips and instruction on time management, peer mentoring, and study skills. The ability to provide tutors to assist in remedial coursework and other classes is also effective in meeting nontraditional student needs. Other nontraditional student support needs include continual service and support in communication skills, individualized instruction, and practical learning experiences. A flexible curriculum and registration process that is simple and efficient is crucial to effectively meeting the educational needs of nontraditional students.

Nontraditional students, because of their distinct characteristics, demand student service professionals view them as highly motivated individuals who bring a great deal of experience to their education career (Compton et al., 2006). It is imperative that college personnel, particularly student affairs professionals, understand that nontraditional students are always in transition. As a result, institutional personnel will have to become very creative in the development of educational strategies that lead to successful engagement of these students in the collegiate environment. Aslanian (2001) stated, "Adults in America today, and in the future, cannot stop learning. They will be back, over and over, throughout their lifetimes" (p. 78). Consequently, nontraditional students mandate that institutions develop effective educational strategies that include creativity, the ability to be flexible, and the willingness to adopt a new paradigm that will adapt to this diverse student population.

Existing research tends to support institutional claims that student engagement is positively correlated to student success. Definitions of student success are broadly interpreted by individual institutions. Kuh et al. (January, 2006) define student success as, "all-encompassing to include academic achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction, acquisition of desired knowledge skills and competencies, persistence, attainment of educational objectives, and post-college performance" (p. 7).

Students who are active in the collegiate environment in their collaboration with faculty and peers are more likely to be successful in their academic endeavors. Kuh et al. (July, 2006) speaking about student engagement stated that, "…historically, underserved students and those who are less well prepared tend to benefit even more." Kuh (2007) further posits that institutions need to know more about those students who do not engage in the campus environment in order to induce these students to become involved in the collegiate environment. The nontraditional student population is one such group of students.

Engagement in the collegiate environment for nontraditional students is considered by most as an institutional barrier. While college and university leaders and other professionals understand the importance of student engagement, institutions have had very little success at engaging nontraditional students with the campus community. Student affairs professionals realize the importance of fostering student involvement and do a very good job of this with the traditional college student population. Unfortunately, they have not developed an effective strategy to induce involvement by their nontraditional student counterparts. According to Graham and Donaldson (1999) the standard definition of student involvement states, "the amount of physical and psychological time and energy that students invest in both out-of-class

and in-class activities" (p. 148). While nontraditional students may not become actively engaged in campus activities, they will continue to be engaged and develop throughout their academic careers (Graham & Donaldson). Nontraditional students have the motivation to continue their education even though the institutions in which they enroll are not designed to assist them in meeting their needs (Sandler, 2000).

According to Miller, Bender, Schuh, and Associates (2005) and Upcraft, Gardner, and Barefoot (2004) it is imperative that institutions become successful at identifying gaps between what students expect and how actively they are engaged during the first year of college. Institutions that are successful at this task will be able to expend their time, energy, money, and efforts toward creating effective educational programs for both traditional and nontraditional student populations.

Nontraditional Student Learning Theories

Maehl (2004) traced the roots of adult degrees and learning for those individuals over the age of 25 from World War II through the 1990s identifying what he calls the adult degree revolution. Maehl's overview found that this revolution offered increased opportunities for adults to become engaged in higher education. Subsequently, innovations such as technology-based distance learning and globalization led to unprecedented increases in enrollment of nontraditional students in higher education institutions. This transformation in adult degrees and the new learning society changed the "single model of undergraduate degree study which prevailed throughout the United States" (p. 5).

Social scientists began to look at development and learning of adults as a "developmental period that may entail change and growth through new learning" (Maehl, 2004, p. 6). One of the most recognized developmental theorists, Malcolm Knowles, gained a great deal of support and

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recognition for his development of andragogy or adult learning that is a unique nature of the adult learning.

Adult Learning Theories. There are two primary categories of adult development theorists which include:

1. Adult developmental theorists who believe that concerns, problems, and tasks are common to all adults at some point and time in their lives, and

2. Stage developmental theorists who believe that age is not related to distinct or qualitative differences in the structure (mode) of thinking at various times (Andrews, Houston, & Bryant, 1981, pp. 19-20).

While developmental theorists have similar views and thinking about adult student development, stage theorists have said that everyone must go through "stages of intellectual development" (Andrews et al., p. 20). Field (2006) further stated that, "this was accompanied by the recognition of a capability or "plasticity" of adults to learn throughout life" p.6.)

Additionally, there is another learning theory that is being studied by psychological and social adult learning practitioners that leads to transformational learning. Mezirow (1997) stated,

> Transformational learning processes can help adult learners recognize and
> overcome distorted assumptions that make up their personal perspectives so that
> they are more developmentally functional in guiding observations,
> interpretations and actions. (p. 60)

The implications of this learning theory for adult educators and higher education administrators is the creation of a process that supports the highest mission of higher education which is to "…foster learning processes that result in perspective transformation…" (Mezirow & Associates, 2000, p. 30).

Adult learning theory continues to be highly discussed and debated by experts and practitioners alike in the field of adult education. There is an enormous amount of literature

written on adult learning theory; however, what appears to be simple theory quickly becomes frustrating for the researcher. Merriam (2001) "…describes adult learning as an 'ever-changing mosaic', where old pieces are rearranged and new pieces added" (p. 1). Although, theorists cannot agree on one best adult learning model, they do agree that no one theory has the ability to completely identify and understand the process of adult learning (Kiely, Sandmann, & Truluck, 2004).

Adult Learning Styles. Nontraditional students have various needs from an educational program as well as different ways of learning. Research suggests that in order for faculty and administrators to understand how adults learn they need to identify the adult learner's individual learning preferences. Once they identify the learning preferences, they can develop strategies for instruction that will build upon the adult learner's strengths. It will also provide opportunities for addressing any identified weaknesses (Kiely et al., 2004). The use of different learning style inventories is an effective strategy for identifying adult learning styles.

Successful adult learning programs are those programs that not only meet the needs of the adult learners but include a curriculum that is effective in fostering individual self-direction and autonomy (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Merriam, 2001). Therefore, according to Kiely et al. (2004), "adult educators need to be both cognizant of systemic forces, institutionalized oppression, and dominant norms and practices that affect adult learners differently and be vigilant in ensuring and advocating for greater inclusiveness, safety and voice, particularly for marginalized groups" (p. 20).

Organizational Culture

Organizational culture, as defined by Farmer (1990), consists of assumptions, beliefs, and values that organizational members share and is expressed through, "…what is done, how it is

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done, and who is doing it" (p. 8). Unfortunately, members of the organization may not appreciate or value the importance of decisions, behaviors, and communications that affect culture until they are faced with issues that test institutional organizational structure.

Culture is a critical component in college and universities and "… helps shape the patterns of norms, values, practices, beliefs, and assumptions that guide the behavior of individuals and groups in an institution of higher education…" (Kuh & Whitt, 1988, p. 12-13). Simply stated, culture is everything that happens on a campus. With the diversity of student populations on college campuses today, campus leaders need to take a look at their campus culture in order to determine how to meet the needs of this new generation of students.

Campus Culture

What is campus culture and why is it important on a college campus? More importantly, why do higher education institutions need to be aware of campus culture in order to affect the outcomes of student learning? Culture is engrained into everything that takes place on campus both inside and outside the collegiate environment. Therefore, an institution's culture is an integral part of the campus community, and a successful campus community is a direct reflection of the institution's culture. McDonald and Associates (as cited in Anderson, Gardner, & Kuh, 2006), identify six elements of Ernest Boyer's model for a campus community as:

1. An educationally purposeful place where learning is the focus;

2. An open place where civility is affirmed;

3. A just place where persons are honored and diversity pursued;

4. A disciplined place where group obligations guide behavior;

5. A caring place where individuals are supported/service is
   encouraged, and;

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6. A celebrative place where traditions are shared (p. 7)

Consequently, campus culture is not only concerned with the education obtained by a student during his or her college experience but is a primary factor in determining student overall educational experience. Therefore, it is critical that the college culture encompasses not only instruction in humane studies, applied sciences, history, and interdisciplinary studies but "provide models for a better society, for basic education, for scientific and technological research…" (Bronner, 1990, p. 21).

Students, traditional or nontraditional learners, want to be part of campus life thereby contributing to their social as well as cultural experiences. As such, in order to have a successful learning experience the entire campus must contribute to student success. This begins at orientation, extends through the registration process, and remains throughout the student's college career.

The increasing difference in student populations, particularly the increase in older students, on college campuses is becoming even more prominent. During the 21st century, part-time adult learners on urban campuses will outnumber traditional age students (Bronner, 1990). Traditionally, academic settings should allow students the opportunity to grow emotionally while at the same time adopting a social identity and value system that will guarantee them achievement, money, goods, and status in society. Educational institutions are responsible not only to the students they serve but to society as a whole for the product they generate. As such, colleges and universities are now in the position of having to account to the public, accrediting agencies, and others for what they do. This includes accountability for instruction, research, profit, and what higher education is all about (Bronner).

Academic Culture

Academic culture is influenced by a college and university's faculty membership. The faculty of an institution are critical and have primary responsibility for teaching and research.

Research indicates that student success is positively related to a positive institutional culture in which students feel connected and engaged in the campus environment. Anderson, Gardner, and Kuh (2006) defined student success as:

> All-encompassing to include academic achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction, acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competencies, persistence, attainment of educational objectives, and post-college performance (p. 7).

Institutional faculties are directly responsible for easing the successful transition of students into the campus environment. Hunter (2006) emphasized that "the days of the 'let them sink or swim' attitude of faculty and staff toward new students is obsolete" (p. 10). She further states that institutions should instigate deliberate strategies to absorb students into the institutional culture if they expect students to prosper and accomplish planned academic and career goals (Hunter).

Kuh et al. (August, 2006) enthusiastically supported the premise that those students who are connected within the collegiate environment "…are more likely to engage in educationally purposeful activities during college, persist, and achieve their educational objectives" (p. 3). Additionally, those students who derive a sense of belonging by becoming members of social groups or campus organizations, including interactions with faculty and staff become more committed and invested in accomplishing their educational goals.

College and University Personnel Roles and Responsibilities

An institution is comprised of three primary groups of employees; i.e., faculty, administrative and professional staff, and clerical staff. These three groups of employees play

pivotal roles in the success of the institution and the students it serves. Each has a purpose and defined responsibilities directly related to the institutional mission, purpose, and goals.

The faculties of the institution are the primary facilitators of learning and engagement for the students who come to campus. Administrators and student affairs professionals as well as other institutional staff are key players in initiating successful programs and activities for students. They are critical to a student's need for a myriad of services and functions that are specific to the Student Affairs Office. Staff, at all levels, play an important role on college campuses and are instrumental in providing support services to faculties and administration. Additionally, staff at all levels in the institution play a significant role in assisting all groups of students in their transition to college (McDade, 1988).

Faculties. Bash (2005) identified four distinct populations when speaking about the challenges in the field of adult education. These include: (a) the adult learner, (b) adult degree students, (c)) continuing education students, and (d)) faculty. Bash (2005) defined the population of faculty as, "faculty engaged in a variety of learning opportunities towards improvement of their teaching, or less frequently, their scholarship and service" (p. 2). Faculty is the one population that most institutional student affairs personnel and campus leaders do not include in their recruitment and marketing strategies. Bash emphasized that this is an untapped resource that exists on all college and university campuses that must be addressed. Faculty development and professional development programs to support instructional effectiveness, particularly for adjunct faculty, are necessary components of an ongoing curriculum that leads to student success.

Bok (2006) suggested that university faculties had more flexibility in their teaching methods, particularly lecturing. Further, Bok contended that an important function of college

and university faculties was to teach students how to think critically, communicate effectively, develop moral fortitude, and become good citizens.

Kuh et al. (July, 2006) emphasized the important role faculty play in college and university governance. They further recommended that in order to establish commitment, increase involvement in campus activities, and further student success institutional leaders and faculty should:

1. Make the classroom the locus of the community.

2. Structure ways for commuter students to spend time with classmates.

3. Involve every student in a meaningful way in some activity or with

    a positive role model in the college environment. (p. 3)

Exemplary faculty members were those faculty members who exhibit a strong commitment to the teaching-learning process. This included employing various teaching methodologies in the classroom in order to connect curriculum and learning outcomes for both traditional and nontraditional students. These teaching concepts included the use of experiential and problem-based methods. Ultimately, learning served to

> Empower students to adapt to current and future environments, and to
> find solutions to challenges that life, career, and good citizenship will
> present, and is the measure of the need that adults feel for connecting
> education with its application. (Flint, 2000, p. 10)

Administrative and Professional. Colleges and universities most often operate as hierarchical systems and branch out to include divisions or offices of Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, Business, Alumni and University Advancement, and the list is as varied as the institutions administrators are employed in.   Higher education administration begins at the top with the President, who sets the moral compass and tone for lower level administrators. It is important that those involved in campus leadership have a shared vision and that the institution's

mission and values are applied and practiced by all those involved in administration. McDade (1988) stresses the importance of campus leaders who possess visions that can effectively be turned into reality.

Higher education administrators are responsible for setting the educational standards and goals for their institution. This includes the development of policies and procedures to fulfill these goals and accomplish the institution's mission. Responsibilities for carrying out the functions of the institution are divided among the institution's administrators.

Effective and efficient operation of an institution requires experienced, highly trained, competent administrators in order to be successful in carrying out institutional vision and goals. Of utmost importance, those involved in administration at higher education institutions is that they must be able to live balanced lives. Consequently, effective administrators must be able to: (a) manage and lead those under their direction; (b) provide the support services, both physical and financial, that support student success; (c) maintain the institutional vision and purpose; (d) execute fairness in judgment; (e) maintain the ability to accept criticism; and above all (f) possess the highest of values and moral standards. Effective administrators assist in moving the institution toward successful accomplishment of the institutional goals and purpose (McDade, 1988).

Student Affairs. Student Affairs professionals and organizations are critical in the successful progress of students toward degree completion. Student Affairs personnel offer a myriad of services directed toward the successful engagement of students into campus life. These efforts include: (a) improving student quality of life, (b) integrating new student groups, (c) student recruitment and retention, (d) student placement, (e) development of alumni, and (f) increased academic involvement (Garland, 1986). These same student affairs professionals often

become leaders within the organization and continue to contribute to the successful leadership of the institution.

Garland (1986) stated that while the Divisions of Student Affairs in universities shares its population with faculty, students, and administrators – "its position on the borders of these groups may be its greatest strength" (p. 3). It is because of the uniqueness of student affairs personnel that they have the ability to use institutional resources, values, norms, and opportunities of the other groups on campus to support institutional goals.

Student affairs personnel must be aware of the unique needs of nontraditional students in order to serve this population of students. They must be able to acknowledge and support adult learners as they transition from "employee to parent to student and back again" (Compton, Cox, Laanan, et al., 2006, p. 78). Student affairs professionals and other educators who truly want to create a student-centered learning environment will have to consider the unique demands and needs of nontraditional students.

Accountability and Assessment

Accountability by both external and internal constituencies is directly related to institutional effectiveness. As such, assessment is critical to accountability as it provides some measure of validity. It is also used as (a) an instrument of change, (b) to reassess curriculum by faculty, (c) to institute dialogue between campus constituencies about quality and desired outcome, and (d) to restore the confidence of external and internal stakeholders in the process of higher education (Franklin, 1996).

Indicators of Success

Indicators of student success continued to be measured by (a) self-assessed student satisfaction surveys, (b) active engagement of students in the campus environment, (c) increased

retention rates, particularly freshmen to sophomore, and (d) successful progress to degree completion.

Nontraditional student satisfaction is different from traditional student satisfaction. Nontraditional student satisfaction hinges on flexibility-the flexibility of the institution to understand the demands placed upon them as employee, wife or husband, mother or father, care giver, and student. Programs that are flexible and encourage nontraditional students to become more engaged in the social life of the campus provide incentives to nontraditional students to stay in college. According to Compton et al. (2006), "A proactive approach to serving adult learners requires flexibility, adaptability, and creativity"

(p. 79).

The ability of institutions to guide nontraditional students toward successful completion of their careers should be one of the primary objectives of student affairs professionals and campus leaders. Aslanian (2001) correctly sums it up when she states, "Adults in America today – and even more so in the future - cannot stop learning. They will be back, over and over, throughout their lifetimes" (p. 58).

Kuh et al. (August, 2006) emphasizes that institutions should place increased efforts on what they value most. Assessment and accountability should serve to improve institutional effectiveness and student success. However, "institutional effectiveness and student success will not improve without valid, reliable information to guide change efforts and to monitor performance" (p. 4).

Measures of Student Success

There are two primary instruments used in higher education institutions today to measure student success. These two instruments are the (a) Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory

(SSI) and (b) National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). Both are used on individual campuses.

Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory (SSI). The Student Satisfaction Instrument is an instrument designed to identify areas on college and university campuses that need attention in order to improve the quality of student life and learning. It measures student satisfaction and priorities and indicates how satisfied students are with the various components of campus life. Additionally, the SSI identifies what issues are important to students on a particular college campus (Student Satisfaction Instrument, 2007, n.p.)

The SSI instrument is available in two formats, on-line or pen and paper. Institutions can choose either a 40 question or 70 question version of the SSI. It is also available in format for 2-year or 4-year institutions. The SSI measures both importance and satisfaction. Rankings are based on two items: (a) "Importance to me," using a Likert scale with ranges from one to seven with one being "not important at all" and seven indicating "very important", and (b) "My level of satisfaction" using Likert scale ranges from one to seven with one being "not satisfied at all" to seven indicating "very satisfied." The survey measures services on campus such as overall learning experiences, bookstore services, food service, academic programs and services, administrative programs, caring campus, and campus commitment to student learning.

National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). The NSSE collects data on an annual basis assessing entering freshmen and then reassessing these same freshmen once they are classified as seniors. NSSE looks at participation by students in programs and activities and how institutions assist students in learning and personal development. Results from the assessment provide institutions with data about student experiences both inside and outside the classroom and what areas need to be improved.

The NSSE uses five clusters or benchmarks of effective educational practices that are:

1. Level of Academic Challenge

2. Active and Collaborative Learning

3. Student-Faculty Interaction

4. Enriching Educational Experiences, and

5. Supportive Campus Environment

The NSSE uses a Likert-type scale allowing students to rank questions within each cluster on a scale of "very often" to "never." Survey items reflect behaviors by students and institutions that are associated with desired outcomes of college. Institutions are able to use data obtained from the NSSE to identify aspects of the undergraduate experience inside and outside the classroom that can be improved through changes in policies and practices to make them more consistent with good practices in undergraduate education (NSSE, 2006, n.p.).

Summary

The literature on nontraditional student engagement is beginning to receive a considerable amount of attention from many of those involved in the field of academe. There exists in current literature a vast and varied amount of information regarding adult learners, adult degree programs, and adult continuing education programs. However, literature specifically addressing issues of interest and concern to nontraditional students is limited. With increases in enrollment in this segment of the college student population, campus leaders and policy makers alike will need to place increased focus and attention on service to these students (Kuh et al., 2005).

Even though the current research on nontraditional student engagement is limited, there is much to be explored and gained through research specifically addressing the nontraditional

student. Although there is an expansive amount of literature on traditional college students

enrolled in college and universities throughout the world, there still exists a desire for more

information about the nontraditional student phenomena.

The importance of serving nontraditional students and subsequent engagement of these

students in the campus environment is further reinforced by statistics detailing the increasing

numbers of nontraditional students enrolling on college and university campuses.

One of the major reasons for seeking a college degree cited by nontraditional students in

research studies indicated the need for increased earning capacity. Increased earning capacity

and benefits of earning a college degree as reported by the Census Bureau indicate that over an

adult's working life, high school graduates earn an average of $1.2 million; associate's degree

holders earn about $1.6 million; and bachelor's degree holders earn about $2.1 million (Day &

Newburger, "Special Studies," 2002).   Further, the study indicated that:

> Adults ages 25 to 64 who worked at any time during the study period
> earned an average of $34,700 per year. Average earnings ranged
> from $18,900 for high school dropouts to $25,900 for high school
> graduates, $45,400 for college graduates, and $99,300 for workers with
> professional degrees (M.D., J.D.,D.D.S., or D.V.M. (p. 2)

Further, St. John and Tuttle (2004) emphasize the importance of identifying and serving

nontraditional students, particularly when the U.S. Census Bureau (2003) projects that

approximately "two-thirds of the adult population could be considered potential nontraditional

students and many will find their way to some form of higher education through alternative

pathways to college" (p. 4).   These statistics in themselves are sufficient to warrant increased

research on the phenomena of adult learning, particularly nontraditional student engagement.

More importantly, challenges in providing access to this population of students should be

considered not as a barrier but an educational opportunity for higher education institutions (St. John & Tuttle).

Nontraditional students as a group will continue to play a significant role in changing how higher education institutions operate in the future. Institutions of higher education need to become creative and innovative in planning effective approaches for encouraging this population of students to participate and benefit from postsecondary programs (Kuh et al., August, 2006).

Campus leaders, policy makers, and others involved in higher education must accept the challenges that are present in identifying and marketing to them. The diversity of nontraditional student needs is a major consideration in developing effective educational programs that appeal to this population of students. Additionally, institutions will need to focus on nontraditional students who are most at risk in order to develop strategies to actively engage them in campus life. This requires identifying nontraditional needs and accepting the challenge and obligation to assist them in their college endeavors just as institutions have done in the past for traditional college students. The ability of institutions to adapt to changes brought about by the increasing numbers of nontraditional students will define successful colleges and universities in the 21st century and beyond (Kuh et al., August, 2006).

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHOD

Qualitative research involves field work using inductive processes. Qualitative research

explores theory, and the product of this theory exploration is a description of the phenomenon

that is being researched. For the qualitative researcher, the units of analyses are words, not data,

and the words are measurable and have meaning.

This research used multiple methods of data collection; therefore, the data analysis used

multiple methods as well. According to Creswell (2003),

> The process of data analysis involves making sense out of text and image
> data. It involves preparing the data for analysis, conducting different
> analyses, moving deeper and deeper into understanding the data,
> representing the data, and making an interpretation of the larger meaning
> of the data. (p. 190)

This research study employed the use of interviews, both personal and focus group. The

use of journaling and personal life stories is necessary in order to understand how nontraditional

students decide to attend college. Multiple methods of data collection results in a vast amount of

data that must be analyzed. Additionally, data must be reviewed and analyzed using the

appropriate method of data analysis that matches the data collection methodology. This can be

exhaustive and time consuming for the qualitative researcher.

Selection of Research Participants

Research participants were selected using a Participant Selection Guide (Appendix A)

developed by the researcher. This guide solicited demographic information and admission status

for nontraditional students enrolled at the U of M University College. To be eligible for

participation in the study participants must meet four or more of the seven characteristics of

nontraditional students identified by the National Center of Educational Statistics (2006). If so,

they were selected for the research study by University College administration and its academic college advisors.

Development of the Focus Group Guide

Development of the focus group guide (Appendix B) included an introduction to the focus group session and information about the research study.   Focus group session one consisted of five discussion questions that served to stimulate the discussion. It was anticipated that those questions would lead to a lively, robust discussion about nontraditional student engagement on college and university campuses. Discussion questions selected for the focus group session were selected based upon the initial research question.

Logistics of the Focus Group

Focus group sessions were held at the University of Memphis (U of M) on-site Holiday Inn and included dinner for the research participants. The moderator provided instructions to nontraditional students participating in the focus group session regarding use of an alias or pseudonym to protect participant privacy and confidentiality. It was agreed that the participants would use their student classification as their pseudonym. All correspondence or reference to the research participants included the use of these pseudonyms in order to hide participant identity. Both focus group sessions were tape recorded to assist the moderator in accurately reporting the data.

The development of a theoretical framework provided data that served to assist the researcher in understanding the phenomenon of nontraditional student enrollment on college and university campuses. Additionally, these data were used to assist the researcher in developing a model for institutional leaders to use in assisting nontraditional students in the successful integration into the collegiate environment and campus life.

Development of the Interview Guide for Personal Stories

The interview guide (Appendix C) was developed to provide the moderator with a guide to direct interviews with participants about their life stories. The guide consisted of an introduction about the intent of the research study, the research questions, and information about informed consent. The interview guide questions were developed based upon the initial research question and the desire of the researcher to garner information as to how nontraditional students make the decision to attend college. Information obtained from the main interview questions provided information to support and or explain why nontraditional students do not attend college immediately upon graduating from high school. These questions served to stimulate discussion about nontraditional student experiences that lead to enrollment in an institution of higher education.

Logistics of the Interview Process for Personal Stories

The interviews wherein each of the four undergraduate research participants discussed her personal story about her educational experiences and the ultimate decision to attend college were held in the Holiday Inn, located on the University of Memphis campus. The alumnae personal story interview took place at the Holiday Inn over dinner the night before the second focus group session and took 1-hour.

The Interview Guide consisted of four research questions designed to elicit information from participants about their decision to attend college and was provided to participants at the first focus group session.

The personal stories interview took place at the end of the second focus group session. Research participants provided me a written copy of their personal stories based upon the four

research questions. Participants' personal stories were brief and reflected each participant's reason for going to college later in life. The interview sessions took a total of 1 hour. Interviews were conducted according to student classification. The interview session concluded with the researcher thanking participants for their willingness to participate in this study and sharing their personal life stories.

Nontraditional Student Journals

Each participant was asked to keep a journal about her college experiences, especially as it related to interactions among and between other students, faculty, and staff. Additionally, participants were required to write in their journals at least twice a week; however, they were encouraged to write on a daily basis in order to gather as much data as possible about the phenomenon being researched. The journals revealed thoughts, feelings, and behaviors associated with being a nontraditional student enrolled at the University of Memphis (U of M). Research participants were asked to reveal thoughts about their experiences as a nontraditional student on the U of M campus. The researcher did not want to limit what they wrote in their journals but to make sure the writing was directed toward events and activities that center on nontraditional student engagement and inclusion in the campus environment.

Journals were kept by research participants to record events, actions, or other things that took place during the academic semester that they considered important in their academic career. Information gained from participants' journals allowed the researcher to gain knowledge about the thoughts and feelings associated with the decision to attend college. Additionally, logs and writings in these journals revealed what people did that either supported or hindered their educational endeavors. More importantly, data collection through journals allowed the researcher to understand behavior as it occurred.

It is important to do document analysis of journals as it is relevant to the initial research question. Because of the relevance to the research questions, not analyzing or collecting such data might leave a gap in the research. Document analysis was done using Strauss and Corbin (1998) Constant Comparison Analysis looking for themes, patterns, and behaviors that reveal and support development of a theoretical framework explaining the research phenomenon.

Data Analysis Using Constant Comparison Analysis

Data collected from interviews, both focus group and personal life stories, as well as student journals were analyzed using Strauss and Corbin (1998) Constant Comparison Analysis (CCA). This data analysis involved six steps:

Step 1: Microscopic Examination of the Data

This step explains what the words mean or say. The microscopic examination of data collected involved initially reading the transcript without coding in order to get a sense of the stories being shared by study participants. The use of memo statements was incorporated into this process. Additionally, this would serve to assist in the development of the theoretical framework and explain the researcher's interpretation of themes.

Step 2: Open Coding

Open coding involved conducting a second reading of the transcripts and bracketing individual categories that help to explain a small component of the phenomenon. At this step, data were closely examined and compared for similarities and differences. This allowed the researcher the ability to discriminate and differentiate between coding categories. It is at this stage that the researcher looked for words, phrases, and sentences that related to the intent of study and guiding research question. It was important to include enough words to understand the context of codes and be aware of any "nested" codes. At this stage a master code list was

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developed to assist in guiding coding. Once the coding was complete, a code book and theme sheet was developed with each theme labeled and identified in concise language.

Step 3: Axial Coding

Axial coding or Theme-ing was the next step in the process. This included relating categories and subcategories along the lines of their properties and dimensions. It also included merging code categories that have common threads or themes.

Step 4: Selective Coding and Patterning

Selective coding or patterning is a process that involved moving from code categories to a grounded theory and merging themes around a central theoretical construct that explains an important component of the phenomenon.

Step 5: Coding for Process

Coding for Process involved identifying the relationships between themes and patterns around a central theoretical construct that explains an important component of the phenomenon.

Step 6: Creating the Matrix

At this point in analysis the researcher develops a visual model of the interrelated concepts or theoretical framework (Franklin, 2007).

Quality and Verification

Validating the accuracy of the findings is a critical role of the researcher. According to Creswell (2003), reliability and generalizability play a very small role in qualitative research. However, validity, "…is seen as strength of qualitative research" (p. 195). Further, Creswell and Miller (2000) state that validity also suggests the accuracy of findings as revealed to the researcher, participants, and those who read and review the research findings.

There are several research strategies that can be employed by the qualitative researcher that will add quality and validity to the research study (Creswell, 2003). This research study employed the use of six of eight research strategies identified by Creswell to verify the findings of a qualitative research study. Additionally, these strategies served to ensure internal and external validity of the research findings. These six research strategies are detailed in the text that follows.

First, this research study employed the use of triangulation as a means of seeking convergence across qualitative and quantitative methods. Merriam (1988) emphasizes the importance of multiple methods of data analysis in the support of reliability and internal validity. This research study used focus group interviews, personal interviews, journals, surveys, and life stories as part of the research data collection methodology.

Second, to further provide qualification and validity to the research findings the research study employed the use of an auditor as a committee member who provided an evaluation of the entire research project. This individual, Dr. Carla Warner, was very knowledgeable about nontraditional students and was able to ask questions and solicit information that ultimately led to increased research validity.

Third, research bias is another strategy to check the accuracy of the findings. Researcher bias was identified and reflected in Chapter 1 of this research study and was used as another strategy of qualification and verification.

Fourth, the researcher spent time in the field in order to understand the phenomenon under research. The researcher participated in actual field study through discussions and collaborations with research participants and others directly during site visits to the University of Memphis campus.

Fifth, this researcher, as with most qualitative researchers, described research findings in such a manner as to allow readers to feel as though they were actually sharing the experiences of the research participants. This required the use of authentic, rich, thick descriptive language in writing the narrative account of the research findings.

Finally, the researcher used member checking wherein research participants were allowed to review and verify data collected in order to determine if the findings identified by the researcher were in fact accurate.   Research participants were sent drafts of the proposed research analyses and asked to review their respective portion of the research study for accuracy of reporting. Additionally, participants would be sent a copy of the completed dissertation upon completion of the study.

Through the use of multiple strategies for qualification and verification, the researcher assured that the data collected were reflective of the phenomenon being researched. Additionally, internal validity was assured as multiple methods of data analysis was employed by the researcher.

Summary

Qualitative data using multiple methods of data collection and data analysis allowed the qualitative researcher greater flexibility in the conduct of the research study.   Additionally, this flexibility provided assurances of both internal and external validity that led to increased quality and verification of the research findings.

This research study employed the use of (a) interviewing, both focus group and personal interviews, (b) online campus climate survey, (c) journaling, and (d) personal stories. The use of four different data collection methodologies provided the researcher with a vast amount of data.

Because of the large amount of data and various data collection methods, the researcher employed Strauss and Corbin (1998) Constant Comparison Analysis (CCA) six-step process to analyze focus group sessions, journals, and personal stories. For the qualitative researcher, constant comparison analysis is an effective methodology in qualitative research. CCA looks at words and is designed to allow the researcher to interpret words and phrases. It is one of the most popular methods of qualitative data analysis. Constant comparison analysis allows the researcher to code and describe everything that is happening in the research setting at that moment in time. More importantly, it allows the researcher the ability to study a phenomenon in great detail, adding meaning to the words and phrases that people use.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

The process involved in analyses of qualitative material is not only time consuming but exhaustive for the researcher. I was highly ambitious in the data collection phase of my research study primarily due to my study's small sample size and the desire through the use of triangulation to render the research findings more accurate. Responses to research questions identified in Chapter 1 were compiled through analysis of data collected from focus groups sessions, interviews, personal stories, journals, and an online survey.

Data gathered from the Campus Climate Survey were analyzed using the "analyze results" feature in SurveyMonkey.com software. The findings revealed in this survey are contained in the remainder of Chapter 4. This feature identifies the most important concepts in a document according to word frequency. I then manually reviewed each data collection document using Strauss and Corbin (1998) Constant Comparison Analysis (CCA) in order to synthesize the data and look for themes. Once the themes were developed for each document (Appendix E), I began looking at the overall research findings in order to determine if the research findings could reflect those identified in the literature review.

In order to effectively and adequately analyze the vast amount of data collected, I elected to incorporate a chapter for each two sets of data with the exception of the data gathered through the use of the online Campus Climate Survey. Chapter 4 addresses findings from the online Campus Climate Survey. Chapter 5 discusses findings from both focus group sessions and interview. Chapter 6 discusses findings from participant personal stories and journals, and Chapter 7 includes the findings, conclusions, and recommendations and offers suggestions for future research.

Characteristics of the Study Sample

The study sample consisted of four undergraduate students, one in each of the four student classifications, freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior who were currently enrolled in a degree-seeking program at the University of Memphis. Additionally, there was one alumnae member who had recently graduated from the University of Memphis, University College. All study participants were nontraditional-age, Caucasian females.

Recruitment Protocol

Initially, participants were recruited to the study using a memo (Appendix H) that was sent through email by the University College administration in order to protect the privacy and confidentiality of its students. Emails were sent to approximately 41 nontraditional students enrolled and admitted to the University College. They met a minimum of four of the seven characteristics of nontraditional students as identified by the National Center for Educational Statistics (2006). Additionally, there was one alumnae member who participated in the study.

Two students joined and dropped out of the study before I actually began the research phase. The University College administration once again identified an additional five nontraditional students who were sent a second email requesting participation in the study. As a result, I completed the recruitment phase of the study with four female students and one female alumnae of the University College.

Generalizability of the Research Study

Due to the small size of the sample, findings from this research study may not be generalized to the phenomena of nontraditional student engagement on college and university campuses.

A Change of Participants

Because a crucial component of my research centered on nontraditional student engagement and involvement with the campus environment, I designed an online campus climate survey that would gather responses from participants regarding various aspects of the campus environment.

Additionally, two participants in the research study were not enrolled and admitted to the University College; however, they were enrolled at the U of M in other college programs and met the characteristics of nontraditional students for participation in the study. These two students contacted me regarding participation in the research study after being recommended by University College staff following the dropping out of two original participants. After meeting and speaking with these two students at the initial focus group session, they were included in the study. In order to accommodate this change in participation and gather information that would be relevant to the U of M and the University College, the Campus Climate Survey was constructed. The Campus Climate Survey was designed to gather data about both the University College and the U of M. It was felt that this data collection method would provide information relative to the campus environment and collegiate experience that would be useful to all nontraditional college students.

Development of the Campus Climate Survey

Through the use of SurveyMonkey.com online software package, I developed an online survey entitled *Campus Climate Survey* (Appendix F) to replace my original Observation Guide (Appendix D). This survey collected both quantitative information and qualitative information through the use of open-ended questions. Once I received notice of approval for modification of the original research protocol from both East Tennessee State University (ETSU) and the

University of Memphis (U of M) Institutional Review Boards (IRB), I sent the online survey to all study participants. There were five study participants. I received responses from all research participants, representing a 100% survey return rate.

The Campus Climate Survey was modeled after a similar survey created by the University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNC, Campus Climate, 1996, p. 1) to look at student retention. My survey was designed to capture feedback from research participants about their experiences on the U of M campus in six areas. The six areas surveyed at the U of M included: (a) Students, (b) Faculty, (c) Campus Environment, (d) Organizations and Clubs, (e) Campus Community, and (f) University College. The last section of the survey was a general questions section designed to solicit advice and recommendations for future nontraditional students in the pursuit of academic degrees.

Students

This category asked research participants to rate their contact and interaction with other U of M students on and off campus using a scale of frequently, occasionally, or never. Sixty percent of the research participants responded that they occasionally (a) made friends with students whose interest was different from theirs, (b) made friends with students from a different race, (c) had important discussions with students whose philosophy of life or personal values were different from theirs, or (d) were the opposite sex. Forty percent indicated that they had (a) frequently made friends with students whose interest was different from theirs, and (b) had important discussions with students of the opposite sex. It is apparent from the responses that nontraditional students either directly or indirectly have limited interaction with other students on campus.

Faculty

This section of the survey asked study participants to respond to questions regarding their interaction and contacts with faculty members at the U of M campus. Respondents were to rate their interactions and contacts with faculty in the area of academics on a scale of frequently, occasionally, or never. All study participants indicated that they had frequently spoken to faculty members about course-related information.

Additionally, all five nontraditional students in the study indicated that they had never worked with a faculty member on a project. This finding alone is not significant because undergraduate students typically are not involved in projects with faculty; however, this may not be the case with senior students. Seniors enrolled in certain colleges and programs may be required to do a thesis or project that would require involvement with a faculty member who would direct or chair the student's thesis or project.

Table 1 details responses to statements about faculty interaction and contact by nontraditional students participating in the study.

Table 1

Nontraditional Student Interaction and Contact with Faculty Members

Statement	% Frequently	% Occasionally	% Never
I have spoken to faculty members about course-related information.	100.0	0.0	0.0
I have discussed personal concerns or problems with a faculty member.	0.0	60.0	40.0
I have discussed career plans with a faculty member.	0.0	80.0	20.0
I have met informally with a faculty member.	0.0	60.0	40.0
I have worked with a faculty member on a project.	0.0	0.0	100.0
My professors are available to answer questions outside of class.	80.0	20.0	0.0
My advisor has assisted me in planning my academic schedule.	40.0	60.0	0.0
My professors encourage me to interact in classroom activities.	60.0	0.0	40.0

Campus Environment

The next two areas surveyed include two similar categories; i.e., Campus Environment and Campus Community. It is important to denote the difference between the two categories for purposes of this research study. Campus Environment asked questions specifically related to the campus or collegiate environment. Responses received in this category would yield information about the amount of involvement, if any, by nontraditional students in campus activities, events, or facilities.

Sixty percent of the students responding to question 2 in this section indicated that there were no places for nontraditional students to go on campus and meet friends. When asked

whether research participants took advantage of places on campus to exercise or work out, three (60%) responded "no." Question 3 asked whether nontraditional students had dedicated places on campus where they could go to study. Sixty percent responded "yes" while 40% responded "no." An important factor in student retention and progression to degree for nontraditional students is whether they feel a sense of belonging or welcome on campus. Eighty percent indicated that they did feel welcome at the U of M campus.

Organizations and Clubs

Section 4 of the survey asked study participants to identify and respond to questions related to their activity in student organizations or clubs on campus. Participation in clubs and organizations is one way that students form a social network and create longtime friendships. Additionally, it allows students to work together on campus and community service projects. Historically, traditional college students are more active in student clubs and organizations than nontraditional students; however, for the purposes of this research study it was important to gather information from nontraditional students to either support or refute this claim. All nontraditional students involved in this research study responded that they were not a member of an organization or club in their major nor were they a member of social organization on campus.

Campus Community

This section of the survey asked study participants specific questions about the U of M campus and how they felt about the campus community. The campus community includes faculty, staff, and students and the survey solicited information about how participants felt about their support and treatment of nontraditional college students. When asked whether participants were proud to be a student at the University of Memphis, three (60%) answered "yes." When asked whether they felt faculty and staff were proud to be members of the U of M campus

community, four (80%) said "yes." When asked whether participants felt the U of M campus

was supportive of nontraditional college students, 60% responded affirmatively. When asked

whether study participants felt that U of M had a welcoming community for nontraditional

college students, four (80%) stated "no." Students appear to take some of the blame for not

feeling welcomed by the U of M campus community:

> If you mean do they have special activities and orientations for the
> nontraditional student...not that I know of. When I first began my college
> career, I felt out of place, but I think that was more my own feelings than
> anything the U of M community did or did not do. It took me a couple of
> semesters to feel more confident with myself, but after that I settled in and
> enjoyed the experience.
>
> Alumnae

The next question asked whether they felt like they were valued members of the U of M

campus community, and one did not answer this question. Three of the responses received

indicated they did not feel valued by the campus community, and one indicated that she did feel

valued by the campus community. Student responses, for whatever reasons, once again appear

to indicate that they feel different or uncertain about their value to the institution and the campus

community.

> I am sure that they are happy to get money from anywhere they can. I think
> that the teachers are glad to have a mature individual in their classroom too.
>
> Freshman

> I am treated as an outsider.
>
> Senior

One indicator of a successful educational institution is its academic programs and the

level of satisfaction with the institution expressed by its student populations. This can also be

viewed as a determining factor in whether or not these students become active alumni members

upon graduation. One of the questions asked regarding campus community concerned whether

or not they would become active alums once they graduated. Eighty percent indicated that they would not be active alumni members upon graduation.

Interestingly, when asked to provide comments about what they valued most about their U of M experience, nontraditional students participating in this study provided the following comments:

1. Keeping in touch with the mindset of younger people.

2. That I am using my brain more often.

3. Studying in my field of interest.

4. I am working towards a personal accomplishment.

5. My education was a wonderful journey. Part of me wouldn't trade it for anything in the world, while another part regrets not having the chance to experience as a traditional student. I value the knowledge I gained, and treasure the friendships that I made, but the thing I value the most is the person I became.

When asked what they liked least about their educational experiences at U of M, research respondents provided the following comments:

1. Some students did not treat the teachers with respect.

2. I feel like I have become jaded with age.

3. Being treated like an 18-year-old.

4. I do not think there is any difference between traditional and nontraditional students other than age-related interest differences.

5. I really can't think of anything. There were a few bad instructors, but that is not unique to nontraditional studies.

University College

Because this research study was designed to gather information not only about the University of Memphis but the University College as well, this section asked questions specifically about the University College and research participants' experiences with the University College.

One of the primary reasons I chose the U of M University College to do a qualitative research study was an article I located during internet research. The article in the U of M Magazine *Square Pegs* by Potter (2003) spoke to the uniqueness of the University College and its mission, "…to provide interdisciplinary educational opportunities primarily to nontraditional, adult students" (p 1). The first question in this section in this section asked students think about the above statement, and if they were enrolled in U of M University College they were asked to tell me whether they thought that University College had been successful in accomplishing this marketing niche. If they were not enrolled in University College, they were to think about this statement as if they were a potential college student seeking information about various colleges to attend and whether an article or advertisement with this statement would entice them into exploring possible enrollment at the U of M University College.

The second question on this part of the survey asked research participants if they felt that the University College was successful in creating a welcoming environment and sense of belonging for nontraditional college students. Once again, responses from students in the research study were split between "yes" and "no" and one chose not to answer this question. Comments received from research participants indicating "no" included, "I found no effort made by the UC," and "The advisors in the University College are more geared toward getting nontraditional students through their workload directly and expediently." The last question in

this section of the online survey consisted of one open-ended question focusing on how nontraditional students felt the University College assisted nontraditional students in successfully accomplishing their educational goals; and, if so how? While responses were mixed, it is apparent from those responses received that advising is considered an important component of nontraditional student success. However, it is clear that the University College has been instrumental in assisting and guiding nontraditional students toward accomplishing both their academic and career goals. The following two responses were received from survey respondents:

> At the encouragement of a Sociology professor I am beginning Graduate
> School in the fall.
>
> <div align="right">Alumnae</div>

> I was far from any degree until I was introduced to the University College
> then I was put on a right track with an end in sight.
>
> <div align="right">Junior</div>

General Questions

The last section of the Campus Climate Survey solicited responses from research participants about the campus and their collegiate experience. Question 1 asked survey participants to tell me about their overall impression of the U of M. An important indicator of success is how students feel about the institution they attend. Information such as this allows institutional leaders and student affairs personnel to gain a greater understanding about the university experience for nontraditional students. The following comments from research participants indicate a variety of feelings and needs about the campus environment:

> I feel that I received an excellent education. I work with, and have many
> friends who have received their degrees from the U of M and have become
> very successful.
>
> <div align="right">Alumnae</div>

Although I have come across some learned professors, I feel the school is sub-par.

<div align="right">Sophomore</div>

I like the campus setting…The trees and interesting buildings. It does take some hoofing it to get to some classes though. So far it has been easy to schedule my classes, but I am sure it is going to get harder as I progress.

<div align="right">Freshman</div>

Offers an education that is too often diluted to meet the needs of unprepared students. An institution of higher education should not accept Ebonics as a language and make special accommodations for inferior work. Talks a lot about goals and services that are not supported by staff.

<div align="right">Senior</div>

It is a large university in the middle of a large city.

<div align="right">Junior</div>

Question 2 solicited information and advice from study participants that would be useful to future nontraditional students who may be thinking about going to U of M, University College. Even though all study participants were not enrolled in U of M University College, they were asked to respond to this question as if they were viewing it as a advertising medium and thinking about making a decision to attend U of M. Information was thoughtful and revealing, especially in light of self-reflection and personal thoughts expressed about participants' own college experience.

Plan your degree through University College, but keep asking and searching and pushing to have your needs met. Make your own way and expect U of M to live up to their promises even if it means calling Shirley Raines.

<div align="right">Senior</div>

Start at the University College and ask a lot of questions.

<div align="right">Junior</div>

Take your time and be more organized. It is easy for me to say that, but I myself do not follow it. I have been burning the candle at both

ends, I wish I could be more organized...

<div align="right">Freshman</div>

I think that with the state of the economy and the unemployment rate, the number of nontraditional students on campuses across the US will continue to increase. My advice is to enjoy the experience. It is an enriching experience and one never knows what doors may be opened to them because of it.

<div align="right">Alumnae</div>

Summary

It is important that institutional leaders be aware of the special needs of nontraditional students and acquire advisors who display a caring and welcoming environment. One measure of institutional success is graduation rates. Therefore, it is imperative that institutions do everything possible to insure nontraditional students remain committed to their academic careers and continue to degree completion. Survey findings indicate nontraditional students are actively engaged in their education. As such, nontraditional students are in most cases a more demanding consumer. They expect a quality education for the time and money invested in their education. If nontraditional students don't feel the institution is providing them a quality education as they expect, they will simply leave and go somewhere else (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

While responses from nontraditional students surveyed indicated both satisfaction and dissatisfaction with aspects of the U of M and University College, the advice received from respondents indicates a genuine caring and concern for other nontraditional students pursuing degrees at the U of M and all postsecondary institutions.

CHAPTER 5

FOCUS GROUP SESSIONS AND INTERVIEW

Introduction

In this chapter, the findings from the focus group sessions and interviews are presented. There were two focus group sessions conducted during this research. The first focus group session was held at the beginning of the research study and included a discussion among participants about nontraditional student engagement on the University of Memphis (U of M) campus and their subsequent college experience as nontraditional students. The initial focus group session was semistructured and contained five discussion questions that were introduced to the research study group. The first three questions were discussed during interviews.

Prior to the start of the focus group session, I gathered demographic information, admission status, student classification, and nontraditional student characteristics as identified in the National Center for Educational Statistics (2006).

The second focus group session was held at the end of the spring semester in order to follow up with research participants regarding information obtained from the first focus group session. Additionally, it was scheduled in order to gather additional information about their college experience thus far, collect participant journals and personal stories, and conclude the data collection stage of the research study. Interviews regarding the personal stories were conducted at the end of the second focus group session.

At the second focus group session, I discussed the addition of the online Campus Climate Survey to replace field observations at this session. Further, I explained that the survey would gather information about interactions with faculty, staff, and other students and other aspects of campus life.

The second focus group session was semistructured and offered research participants the opportunity to discuss their feelings and experiences about the research data collection process and the various data collection instruments used in the study. Additionally, the second focus group session was designed to follow up on information gathered from the first focus group session on engagement and the student college experience as well as elicit information about what participants felt nontraditional students expected and needed from campus leaders in order to be successful college students.

Lastly, the second focus group session involved discussion among participants about Potter's (2003) *Square Pegs* article in the U of M campus magazine about the University College. Participants were asked to tell me how they felt about this article. They were also asked to tell me whether as nontraditional students they felt welcomed on the U of M campus and in their respective colleges.

Focus Group Demographics

The focus group consisted of four U of M nontraditional students; i.e., a freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior who were enrolled at the U of M. Each of these nontraditional students met four to seven of the seven characteristics of nontraditional students as defined by information obtained in the National Center for Educational Statistics (2006). One nontraditional student met all seven nontraditional college student characteristics. Originally, U of M nontraditional students participating in the research study were to be admitted to the U of M and enrolled in the University College; however, that was not the case. At the initial focus group session in which participant information was collected it was discovered that two of the participants were admitted to the U of M and enrolled in the University College Bachelor of Professional Studies Program. One participant was admitted to U of M but had not decided on a

major and was enrolled and classified as an "Undeclared Major." The fourth participant was admitted to U of M, enrolled, and majoring in a degree from the College of Arts and Sciences. The alumnae member, who was not part of the focus group session, graduated in December 2007 from the U of M University College Bachelor of Professional Studies program.

Due to logistics, recruitment protocol, and time constraints and in discussion with my dissertation qualitative committee member and dissertation chair, I elected to allow all participants to remain in the study. This decision was primarily because I felt that information obtained from this research study would ultimately serve to expand the knowledge base relative to nontraditional college students. It would also provide opportunities for future research in the area of nontraditional student engagement in postsecondary education programs at all colleges and universities. Further, the fact that participants were split between University College programs and other U of M programs would ultimately provide information about the institution and the connection between University College and other colleges at the U of M.

Findings from Focus Group Session One

Question 1

How do you define the collegiate environment?

Research participants were asked to discuss and define collegiate environment. I prefaced the discussion by explaining to research participants that the collegiate environment would include participation in various programs offered on campus such as orientation and the continual receipt of ongoing academic assistance, engagement in various activities and functions, and interactions with faculty, staff, and other students on and off campus.

Each participant provided a definition of collegiate environment that appeared to be similar to others but was obviously predicated on individual experiences and expectations of each student.

> For me, even though I am a nontraditional, older, supposedly established person I still find the collegiate environment as somewhere I can find out what I like about myself, my talents, and do something with it. Since I am older I still feel like I am starting out.
>
> Freshman

> The college environment…is a means to an end, but it is also supposed to be a stimulating environment and I think there are times that it is terribly remedial and then there are other times that someone says something that I didn't know that makes the whole thing worthwhile.
>
> Sophomore

> It is just school. I am here for myself and not active in any groups. I am not making life-long friends here. I am trying to continue my education.
>
> Junior

> For me, school is just a means to an end. Honestly, I feel myself above the traditional student because of their immaturity, or my maturity based upon how you want to look at it and that makes a big difference.
>
> Senior

When asked to provide one word that sums up the collegiate environment for them personally as a nontraditional college student at U of M, the responses appeared to reflect or mirror underlying mixed feelings about the student's own college experience

> Experience
>
> Freshman
>
> Stimulation
>
> Sophomore
>
> School
>
> Junior

Pointless

It would appear that both freshman and sophomore participants chose words that indicated a more positive attitude toward the college environment while junior and senior participants indicated a less than positive attitude about the college environment and their academic experience.

As nontraditional student research participants discussed the collegiate environment there were five areas that continued to emerge. Recurring areas included: (a) Students, (b) Classroom, (c) Faculty, (d) Staff, and (e) Curriculum.

Students

Nontraditional students involved in this focus group discussed issues with traditional students in interactions with faculty and in the classroom. Traditional students, classified as those college students age 24 and under, appeared to be characterized as lazy, immature, rude, and self-centered, although, some state that age and the fact that they were nontraditional students had nothing to do with their interactions with traditional students in and outside of the classroom.

> …Honestly, I feel myself above the traditional student because of their immaturity, or my maturity based upon how you want to look at it. .. Sometimes it can be fun as there is a lot of energy but there is a lot of stuff going on in the classroom that can be frustrating.
>
> Senior

> ...older students are the ones that volunteer in class, raise their hands, and have an opinion. I am one of those…but I don't think age has anything to do with it (inclusion). I believe they (traditional students) form their own little groups; and if I am close by or if we have been chatting I tend to be included.
>
> Sophomore

> I am still taking my Gen Ed classes…so you (nontraditional students) are looked at like freshmen girls coming in…you know when you have freshmen

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coming in and they are all giddy and looking at you like what are you doing here. Once you get past that there are various ages in your class and they have been weaned out in Gen Ed and the ones that are still there take it seriously, I think you are on equal ground…

<div align="right">Junior</div>

In every single class even when I went to college as a traditional student there were always older students in my Gen Ed classes. Even now there are students that are senior citizens. I have never really experienced being the outsider or anything like that.

<div align="right">Freshman</div>

Classroom

Nontraditional opinions on faculty members in the classroom were more concerned with

the lack of respect or rudeness traditional students appeared to treat them in the classroom.

Additionally, the fact that faculty did not discipline or reprimand students who continually spoke

to them disrespectfully, slept in class, played on their computers during class, or otherwise

clearly displayed that they were not interested in the lecture or classroom activities was a source

of continual frustration for nontraditional students.

…I have class Monday, Wednesday, and Friday and it's like everybody has just rolled out of bed and, you know, girls are talking behind me. This is my Spanish class, where you have to listen to the teacher and it's frustrating because he's a younger instructor and he's trying hard, and I respect that, but nobody else seems to respect that he's trying to teach us.

<div align="right">Freshman</div>

I got to the point where I couldn't take it anymore and I just told the kids to shut up… It was my first semester back at school and I was trying very hard to fit in or at least not necessarily be the stereotype… Finally, I had enough. I turned around and said: "Do not speak to her that way…" I am appalled by the lack of respect. when I was in college the first time…there were people sleeping in class…people not paying attention and stuff but they didn't do it so blatantly. They didn't have a person standing there right in front of them to impart something to them and to be snoring right under the person's nose, which to me it's the height of rudeness and quite an eye-opener.

<div align="right">Sophomore</div>

…one thing that I noticed… is that the younger students are sitting with their laptops, IPods, talking to their friends, watching music videos and stuff. I

<div align="center">90</div>

just can't believe it…To me that's very rude. One, because it is
distracting to the ones (students) that are sitting beside you (seeing
flashes on the screen and stuff). I think that's wrong.

<div align="right">Junior</div>

…what I see more of is a disregard for professors and for an educational
system

<div align="right">Senior</div>

Faculty

Research participants expressed mixed feelings about faculty members, both in classroom

management and teaching methods. It was obvious during the focus group session discussion

that nontraditional students did not feel as if they were in competition with traditional students in

the classroom; however, they were disappointed and frustrated with traditional students'

activities in the classroom. Nontraditional students appear to be more genuinely interested in

receiving a college degree and getting the best value for their money than traditional students;

however, they do feel there are times they have not learned anything in the particular course

undertaken. Additionally, nontraditional students are more respectful and tolerant of faculty than

traditional college-age students.

…I have encountered some professors that have knocked my socks off and
have been very stimulating, and I've encountered some students at higher
levels that have knocked my socks off, but generally speaking it's a senior…

<div align="right">Sophomore</div>

…In my age group it had been eons since I had a math class and the teachers
required math, especially statistics; however, the teachers expected you to be
fresh as if you had just come out of high school. I failed statistics the first
time. Fortunately, the second time I had a teacher that wanted everyone to
pass. She went out of her way to make sure we knew the material and
adjusted her pace to accommodate our learning style. I have had some really
rotten teachers, but for the most part I have had some great teachers.

<div align="right">Alumnae</div>

<div align="center">91</div>

Staff

The importance of staff and their interactions and involvement with nontraditional students at the U of M, particularly University College, was discussed. Students expressed mixed feelings about the treatment they received from various U of M offices and staff members. Student satisfaction leads to retention and successful progression to degree. Therefore, the impact staff members have on student satisfaction and recruitment is critical. The focus group discussion was directed toward nontraditional student and staff interaction. Additionally, students discussed whether institutional staff members projected a desire to create a sense of belonging and a welcoming environment for nontraditional students.

> …Mary Brignole really is an exception to the rule here. If it wasn't for her I know I wouldn't be where I'm at now…My major changed because of her… She helped me get in (U of M) a few years ago and she really changed the direction in which I was going… If we could get more people to deal with the adults like Ms. Brignole it would make a huge difference.
>
> <div align="right">Junior</div>

> People are the same everywhere, but why are the people here consistently negative when people in other places are just people? There's a problem. What the university needs is training. It's training from the university on how to treat people. It is the employees, staff, and faculty here (U of M) recognizing; and, most of the faculty actually do recognize the fact that I pay their salary and I expect to be treated like it. Do I want special privileges? No. Everyone should be treated the same way but I'm also not willing to be treated badly without saying anything…
>
> <div align="right">Senior</div>

Curriculum

The General Education curriculum requirement, particularly for nontraditional students, has always been a source of concern and anguish. Issues and difficulty in the mathematics and science courses are a source of frustration for nontraditional students. Additionally, the general education requirement is a major concern financially and time wise for nontraditional students. These students have both financial considerations and time constraints to consider when

enrolling in college; however, they need a degree to pursue job advancement, train for a new career, or further increase their income potential.

The next section discusses findings from both focus group questions 2 and 3 as they related to student engagement and the collegiate environment.

Question 2

How do you define engagement as it relates to the collegiate environment?

Students were asked to think about engagement and interaction they have experienced as students in their various roles on the college campus. Focus group responses revealed that while nontraditional students may be aware of events and activities taking place on the college campus they were just not interested. Work, family, and academic coursework took priority when it came to managing their time and finances. Engagement to a nontraditional student was something that just "happened." If something was happening on campus that "caught their interest" or would appeal to the entire family, they were more likely to engage in that activity or event. On the other hand, some participants stated that the institution was making an attempt to provide more activities for nontraditional students.

> Engagement…All activities that were perhaps designed for those who might
> be over 25 years old…And, just something that caught my interest that
> would be convenient and, again, geared for somebody over the age of 25.
>
> Senior

> If there was something offered that was directed more toward children than
> adults then that might peak my interest because I'm always interested in
> things to take the kids to, but as far as myself, I would rather spend time
> with my husband and my children than engage in something extracurricular
> at the university.
>
> Junior

> …I think it's a matter of putting yourself out there, looking for the stuff that
> interests you. I'm not saying the University doesn't offer a whole bunch
> of things, but you just kind of have to look for them.
>
> Sophomore

I think it is pretty engaging at the university and I can tell it is getting more
so…

Freshman

Question 3

What does student engagement mean to you as a nontraditional student?

Question 3 asked students to think about what student engagement meant to them as

nontraditional students.   In responding to this question, students were asked to think about how

they were currently or previously engaged in college activities. Additionally, they were asked to

offer suggestions and ideas about what they felt the institution should be doing to engage

nontraditional students on college campuses.

As research participants begin to think about and discuss student engagement several

themes began to emerge and recur throughout the discussion. After lengthy discussion among

participants and subsequent review and transcription of the focus group session, there were three

themes that ultimately surfaced regarding nontraditional student engagement.   These three

themes included: (a) Time Management, (b) Campus Opportunities, and (c)Alumni

Development.

Time Management

Time management has always played a factor in nontraditional student success and the

pursuit of an academic degree. Nontraditional students usually have full-time jobs and families

that require a great deal of organizational skills, patience, and sacrifices on the part of both the

students and their families. These multiple obligations make it very difficult for institutions to

develop programs and activities that are available to nontraditional students.

My life is so full outside of the university that, unless it is something that I feel
will enrich my life, I'm just not interested.

Senior

I don't have time to look for things that I can be engaged in at the University
of Memphis…

<div align="right">Junior</div>

…I have two jobs. I'm just going to school to use my mind, to open my mind,
to possibly doing something different with me, so it's not necessarily that
school is my life…it's just part of my life. So being engaged in anything
besides the school aspect is difficult.

<div align="right">Freshman</div>

People with our priorities are not looking for the college experience… If we
want to come, we'll come and it's not because you're offering extra-
curricular activities, a hamburger on Thursday evening, or a sock hop on
Friday, or whatever else it is…

<div align="right">Sophomore</div>

Campus Opportunities

Students were asked if they belonged to specific organizations and clubs or knew of
specific organizations, offices, or services just for nontraditional students. It was apparent that
while there was some knowledge about adult student services, participants were not aware of
specific organizations or services just for nontraditional students. The consensus among
participants was that the U of M could do a much better job of allocating resources and services
specifically for nontraditional students.

The University of Memphis does have an adult commuter student
organization and I dropped down a couple of times to that area. It is
overrun by 18-19 year old commuter students. So their perception of an
appropriate adult student center may be a little off.

<div align="right">Senior</div>

When asked what type of activities or support the U of M should provide to encourage
nontraditional student participation and engagement, the most requested response was the
development of a tutoring lab specifically for nontraditional students staffed by nontraditional
student tutors.

<div align="center">95</div>

We're not saying that there's nothing they could do to get us engaged, I think what we're saying is that what they are doing now is not getting us engaged.

<div align="right">Senior</div>

The only thing I could think of would be some sort of tutoring area that's specifically for nontraditional students.

<div align="right">Junior</div>

Alumni Development

Students discussed allegiance to school, alumni participation, and their relationship to student engagement. I asked about the connection between giving back to the school and becoming active alumni members upon graduation. Research participants stated that they did not feel vested in the institution as a result of their experiences as nontraditional students. And, because they were not vested in the institution, they would not be active alumni upon graduation. This is an important finding for institutional leaders involved in fund raising and alumni advancement. Institutions are dependent on alumni for future development and continue to actively campaign alumni for contributions and support. If nontraditional students are not engaged and vested in the institution, they do not feel inclined to contribute or support the institution upon graduation.

In coming back to school and re-entering the university I really did hope there would be more for nontraditional students and I was receptive to that, but I really didn't find anything. When I graduate you're not going to be able to depend on us (nontraditional students) as alumni to support the school because we have no allegiance to it and are not invested in it.

<div align="right">Senior</div>

…It (institution other than U of M) was just a more welcoming environment, it was also a community school, it was somewhat smaller than the University of Memphis but now I feel much more invested in that school.

<div align="right">Senior</div>

Question 4

Do you consider engagement to be an integral part of the nontraditional student college experience?

Nontraditional students participating in the study reflected similar sentiments about engagement and the part it plays in the overall college experience. Once again, multiple obligations such as career, family, and time played pivotal roles in student responses.

> …It's really based on personalities and what's going on in a person's life.
> My introverted personality does not need external stimuli to function. I tend
> to like being elusive and doing my own thing. The idea behind being a
> nontraditional student is making time for you to go to school. Me,
> personally, my time is limited. I have two jobs and one of them is
> actually full-time. I would not be able to engage in extra-curricular activities
> even if I wanted to. I think that the basic functions of college are a big factor
> for an adult student. Being able to have classes offered at certain times is a
> huge factor. Being able to use computers and the library at certain hours
> is another one.

Freshman

> I had difficulty getting some classes…When I went to registration they
> (classes) I wanted were pretty much gone and I was working a full-time and
> another part-time job trying to make ends meet. I had no spare time for
> anything and many financial obligations. I felt like I missed the college
> experience because I came to school when I was older.

Alumnae

Question 5

What do nontraditional students really need from campus leaders to become successful college students?

Here again, time appeared to be the primary factor. Findings indicate that time, or the lack thereof, is a continual source of stress for the nontraditional student. Time is a precious commodity for nontraditional students; i.e., finding time for work, time for family, time for school, and time for self is always a juggling act. How the nontraditional student deals with the

allocation of time and, more particularly, how institutions can assist nontraditional students in

this part of their academic career is a critical component of student success.

> An understanding that our time is more demanding than the average-aged
> college student. I would like to see more and more classes offered at
> unorthodox times in order for more adults to make life changes and go back
> to school.
>
> <div align="right">Freshman</div>

Summary

Responses revealed that nontraditional students are concerned about time and the many

obligations and requirements on their busy life, both academically and personally. Further, some

students indicated that being engaged in campus activities was not a priority. On the other hand,

students did indicate that they might participate in campus activities if the institution provided

something they felt was beneficial to them or their families. It is apparent from the focus group

research findings that nontraditional students have a variety of experiences to share with other

nontraditional students that will hopefully enhance their collegiate experience. It may well be

that nontraditional students, because of their maturity or life experiences, don't need to feel

engaged and a part of the collegiate environment. However, it is important for institutional

leaders to take the lead in improving nontraditional student services and offerings if they expect

to receive alumni support and participation after graduation

Findings from Focus Group Session Two

The second focus group session was scheduled at the end of the research study primarily

to allow the entire semester for students to write in their personal stories and complete their

journals. Research participants were interviewed about their personal stories immediately

following the focus group session. Additionally, this last session afforded participants the

opportunity to think about questions asked from the first focus group session and supplement or

clarify responses to the first focus group session. They also were allowed the opportunity to ask

any additional questions about the research study.

> …I do feel a little bit more negative. …I got sick and it (semester) was little
> overwhelming, but I am recovering. The instructors have been very good
> about class work. Then there were a couple of classes (Gen Ed) in
> which they (instructors) wanted the same thing and one in which I had
> already read everything in high school so it was discouraging.
>
> <div align="right">Freshman</div>

> I was apprehensive about coming back and following the same
> curriculum in the world of college business; however, my first semester with
> University College has made a world of difference. There is a light at the end
> of the tunnel and they understand workload and the fact that you are here to
> get a degree as fast as you can…
>
> <div align="right">Junior</div>

Lastly, citing a quote from *Square Pegs* in which it states, "...A place at the University of

Memphis where nontraditional students are the rule, not the exception: University College"

(Potter, 2003, p. 1), I asked participants to discuss how they felt about this statement.

Additionally, I asked those participants who were not enrolled in U of M, University College, to

think about when they were looking at attending college. If they were to come across this quote

in the University Magazine, other print media, or web site would it factor into their decision to

pursue a degree at the U of M, University College.

> Yes.
>
> <div align="right">Junior</div>

> Definitely! I would take that (statement) into consideration.
>
> <div align="right">Freshman</div>

> Yes.
>
> <div align="right">Sophomore</div>

> Yes. I am a University College major.
>
> <div align="right">Senior</div>

Summary

Research participants once again appeared to be less than enthusiastic about their General Education coursework. Additionally, others gave credit to their renewed enthusiasm for college work to the University College and its concern for the nontraditional student.

It was apparent from discussions in the second focus group session that nontraditional students felt marketing directed at nontraditional students was very important. If they found information or advertisements promoting the U of M, University College, as a place where nontraditional students were treated as valued customers, they would definitely pursue more information about the institution. Additionally, media of this type would be a decisive factor in visiting and subsequently enrolling and attending the institution.

CHAPTER 6

PERSONAL STORIES AND JOURNALS

Introduction

This chapter presents findings from participants' personal stories and journals. The importance of participant personal stories was in understanding how nontraditional students make the decision to attend college and who or what may have influenced their decision to go to college.

Research participants were asked to keep personal journals and write in these journals at least two to three times a week during the 15-week semester. These journals were to be used to record interactions with faculty, staff, and other students on campus. Participants were also asked to record events and activities on campus that they considered important to their academic career. Lastly, participants were asked to reflect on their college experience and daily interactions and express these feelings in their journals.

Personal stories and journals as a form of narrative inquiry allowed me to explore and record life stories as told by research participants regarding their decision to attend college. As a nontraditional student and researcher, I was genuinely interested in understanding this population of students and their life experiences.

Findings from Personal Stories

There were additional questions that guided this research study and provided more detailed information to answer the overarching research questions including the following:

Question 1

Reflecting on your precollege enrollment, perhaps when you were in high school and beyond, was there a point in time or a teacher, friend, parent, or other individual who discussed the possibility of attending college?

Question 2

Please tell me your personal story about when you made the decision to pursue a college degree and subsequent enrollment in a college degree program.

Questions 1 and 2 asked similar questions and their findings are presented in this section. Participants were asked to reflect to their precollege enrollment days and tell me why they made the decisions to enroll in college as nontraditional students. While each story was different and recounted differing life experiences and events, two common themes emerged throughout their stories and were listed as the reason or reasons for going to college: (a) Career and (b) Other Reasons.

Career

The primary reason discussed in participant stories indicated that their decision to pursue a college degree at this point in their life was predicated because of career needs. These needs focused on the need to: (a) change careers, (b) train for a new career, or (c) career advancement.

> My decision to re-enter college after 24 years was predicated on my wanting
> a career change. I was about to be divorced, and I had been out of the work
> force for 10 years. I could have gotten a job doing the type of work I did
> previously, but I wanted to discern what career would really float my boat.
> > Sophomore

> I am what I have heard kindly called a "nontraditional" student. During
> most of my adult life I have been a sales/marketing professional working
> in various fields including communications, construction sales, security, and
> promotions. I exhibit less enthusiasm and motivation that was present
> early in my career… Realizing that I am in no way ready to end my period of
> gainful employment, my goal is to train for a career I enjoy…

The decision to attend college hit me during an interview for a biotech company that was looking for a research administrative assistant… He kept asking me why with such good grades I didn't finish college…I kept making excuses, especially after another interview went sour as well. Then it dawned on me that I really needed to stop playing around and do things my way by using my brain. So, enrolling in college was a decision that these two interviews helped me make for myself.

Freshman

Other Reasons

As participants spoke about other reasons they chose to go to college later in life as nontraditional students participants shared very personal stories that obviously were difficult for them to relive. After reviewing these personal stories, I discovered that in the end there were three other reasons nontraditional students pursued a degree. Other reasons given by participants that resulted in their pursuit of a college degree were: (a) change in marital status, (b) empty nest syndrome, and (c) personal satisfaction.

…So, here I am in 2008 and my first born is graduating high school. As I am lecturing to her about the importance of education, I am feeling a little hypocritical. After talking it over with my husband, we decided that since all the kids are in school now was a good time for me to obtain my degree.

Junior

It is my life. I live it the way I want to. Ultimately, my decision to go back to school was my own. Using your brain is important.

Freshman

My college career began as my 25-year marriage ended. It wasn't planned that way – it just worked out that way.

Alumnae

Question 3

What type of college experience do you want to have?

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This research question asked nontraditional students to tell me what they expected out of their experience at college. Again, participant responses were very different depending upon the individual.

> I would like to expand on my knowledge and continue to grow as a person. Maybe as time passes I will be able to contribute more of my time into campus life. I'm not sure if that will happened, but for the most part my learning is more important anyway. I want to go to class and reap the benefits from knowledgeable people.
>
> Freshman

> My ex-husband and I had resources for me to attend school without working, Plus he was generous to subsidize my living expenses for the length of my college experience… I guess, for me, school is an interruption in my routine, as opposed to being my routine.
>
> Sophomore

> I do not need my degree because I am pretty much set in life, but I do need the personal satisfaction of completing something that I started. I also want to set a good example for my children.
>
> Junior

Question 4

What do you hope to gain from attending college?

Participants were asked to tell me what they hoped to gain from attending college. Participants expressed differing opinions about what they expected to gain from attending college.

> I hope to get a degree that will allow me to either be my own boss or get a highly enjoyable job that will allow me to live comfortably.
>
> Freshman

> There is a certain amount of pride in knowing that you are doing something to better your life. I will probably do absolutely nothing with my college degree but I feel good about getting it.
>
> Junior

> I plan to attend Graduate School where I can study social work or counseling with an emphasis on non-directive play therapy.
>
> Senior

Summary

The importance of personal stories in qualitative research cannot be overstated. Information collected from participants as they thought about their precollege decisions that led to enrollment in college provided insight into the reasons and life experiences that result in students aged 25 and above making a major life decision to go to college. Information collected from personal stories allowed me to gain new perspectives and insights about the nontraditional student population. Information such as this will become increasingly important to institutional leaders and recruiters in their pursuit of the nontraditional college student.

The collection of personal stories or life stories as a qualitative research method is a very effective method for use in the social sciences field. It requires active participation by the narrator and the listener. Through the telling of their personal stories I was able to develop a great deal of trust and openness with the research participants. Research participants were very informative and thoughtful as they reflected on the reasons that eventually led to actual enrollment in college.

Through the telling of their personal stories, participants relived the past, and in some cases reliving the past evoked a great deal of emotion. However, as participants narrated their personal stories it became very clear that these nontraditional students were very proud of their accomplishments and how far they had come in the pursuit of college degrees. It was also apparent from a review of the personal stories that nontraditional students have many more life experiences to draw from than the traditional student. As such, the decision to enroll in college ultimately becomes specific to that individual.

The use of personal journals is another form of narrative inquiry that requires participants to share information, sometimes very personal, with the researcher.

Several themes appeared throughout the journals and were consistent with those discovered in the first focus group session. Two themes continually appeared throughout the journals and included: (a) Time Management and Organization Skills and (b) Faculty and Classroom Management.

Time Management and Organization Skills

Time management journal entries focused on finding the time and the organization skills to effectively balance career, family, college, and other obligations that are usually part of nontraditional student lives. Nontraditional students have many obligations in their very busy lives. Consequently, one of the most difficult aspects of nontraditional student participation in college is being able to successfully balance these obligations and still manage to be successful in college studies. This results in a great deal of stress and at times illness for the nontraditional college student. The lives, struggles, and self-doubt experienced by participants are reflected in nontraditional student journal entries.

> Monday and Friday nights are my only evenings off when it comes to juggling school and work. Work is crazy. People consistently ask me how I do it. Work, school, work, school, work.
>
> Freshman

> A big Spanish test today and English test tomorrow. Haven't prepared adequately for the Spanish, but I am working on it. The English test will be fairly easy for me. My daughter has had two days off for Easter…so I'm juggling the child, plus I'm in rehearsals for a new play. Never a dull moment!
>
> Sophomore

I am really busy with school even though I only have two classes right now. I am doing research for my public administration class which I am really rusty   on… I am preparing to write an 8-10 page paper for my public admin class and feeling a little apprehensive.

<div align="right">Junior</div>

I don't feel good today. Class has been tough this week, probably because I haven't put my all into it. Sometimes I wonder if all of this is going to be worth it.

<div align="right">Freshman</div>

I'm back from my trip and just finished my paper for English. It was a killer. My focus just isn't there. I'm grateful that my quiz in Spanish didn't happen. I'm supposed to know all my lines for the play this evening. I'd better be looking at my script.

<div align="right">Sophomore</div>

During my Public Administration class today we were discussing emergency operations plans. I found out that the university offers tiger text. I was the only student in class that had any idea what this was. Talk about outcast!

<div align="right">Junior</div>

Faculty and Classroom Management

Participant journal entries in this area indicated, once again, that nontraditional students tend to expect more from faculty members in the conduct of both students in the classroom and in their teaching methods, although, it was surprising to read in participant journals their views expressing both empathy with and compassion toward the instructors and what they have to deal with in the classroom. Additionally, several entries by participants indicated satisfaction with faculty members. Satisfaction with faculty and classroom most often was the result of enrollment in an independent study course and working with one faculty advisor.

I dropped one of my classes that I do not need because the teacher is awful.   This is very upsetting to me that such a large university would hire or keep employed a professor that cannot teach.

<div align="right">Junior</div>

…I have Spanish at 8 o'clock in the morning on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. I feel so jaded at being exhausted and annoyed at the idiots that are

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in this class. I feel sorry for the teachers sometimes that wonder how those people have gotten so far.

<div align="right">Freshman</div>

This morning I received an email from the faculty advisor for my Senior Project. She is very clear and concise in her expectations, leaving no doubt about what needs to be accomplished. When I have had questions she has responded promptly and provided very helpful answers. It is a joy to work with someone so organized.

<div align="right">Senior</div>

Summary

The personal journals were very revealing in that research participants were brutally honest about how they felt as a nontraditional college student during the spring 2008 semester. Journal entries indicated multiple obligations and constraints placed on the nontraditional student due to family, work, school, and life in general. Additionally, journal entries revealed the highs and lows that all students experience as part of their college degrees.

The primary areas of concern for nontraditional students as recorded in their journals appeared to be in finding a way to effectively manage their time in order to organize and manage multiple obligations more easily. Additionally, it appears that nontraditional students expect more from their education than just attending class and getting a grade. It is important that their time and money were invested wisely. They expect to take something from the class and be able to apply that to their future careers or life experiences.

CHAPTER 7

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The previous six chapters chronicle an intensive exploration of nontraditional college

students admitted in undergraduate college programs at the University of Memphis (U of M) and

one alumnae research participant. I wanted to take a journey that would allow me to understand

who they are, what they feel is important in the pursuit of a college degree, when they made the

decision to attend college, why they made the decision to attend college, where the U of M

figured in to their college plans, and how they differ from traditional college students.   As a

current employee in one of the Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) Universities, East Tennessee

State University, I was eager to learn more about what other institutions were doing in the area of

nontraditional student engagement. My research took me to the second largest TBR institution.

The University of Memphis is a southern, comprehensive, regional institution ranked second out

of six in size in the Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) system. The U of M research offered me

an in-depth look at one of the six TBR institutions and their colleges; specifically, the University

College.

This chapter contains a summary of findings, conclusions, and recommendations as well

as recommendations for further research in the field of nontraditional student engagement.

Summary of the Findings Related to the Overarching Research Question

The research study's overarching research question was How does a University

successfully engage nontraditional students? Findings from this study indicate that

nontraditional undergraduate students base their decisions about engagement and its importance

on their college experience on how it impacts them. Therefore, it can be concluded from this

study that engagement to the nontraditional college student can be left up to interpretation. It may mean engaging in interactions with faculty, staff, or other students or taking part in some event or activity on campus. Whatever the meaning engagement conjures up in the mind of the nontraditional college student, it appears from the data collected that nontraditional college students at the U of M are more interested in getting an education and the best education their money can buy. They are not interested in engaging in anything outside the institution unless it was an event or activity at which they could include their families.

Participants in the study repeatedly stated in focus group sessions, interviews, personal stories, and journals that they had multiple obligations in their busy lives and college was just one of them. Consequently, research findings suggest that there is nothing that the U of M could do to engage students in the collegiate environment and campus life due to their hectic lifestyle and personal preferences. However, when it comes to engagement in the classroom, nontraditional students will engage with faculty and students in the classroom if they *like* the instructor, course, or students. Otherwise, they will just go to class and participate only when necessary or required in class discussions.

Findings from Supplemental Questions that Guided Research

Question 1

Is engagement an integral part of the nontraditional student college experience?

In discussing their nontraditional college experience, participants once again stated that they did not feel the need to be engaged in specific activities or events on or off campus. Their participation in campus life was limited to interactions and engagement with faculty about classes, assignments, and other academic issues. Interaction and engagement with other students

was most often the result of classroom discussions or group activities, and interaction and engagement most associated with staff was the need for advisement or admission to college.

Nontraditional student participants readily admitted that they did not consider engagement an integral part of the nontraditional college experience. Once again, school was just another part of their very busy lives. However, some participants agreed that their college experience may have been better if they had been able to participate in activities and events that they found interesting. The primary reason stated for the lack of engagement or involvement in campus activities was communication, or the lack thereof. Several participants indicated that because they were not on campus as much as their traditional counterparts it would have been beneficial if there had been better avenues of communication for nontraditional students including print media that was available to them on a regular basis. Additionally, nontraditional students would consider participation in an adult student organization if it was dedicated to those students 25 and above and not traditional-aged college students.

Findings from this research study lend support to previous research on nontraditional college students solidifying the importance of interactions with faculty and staff at the institution. Participants in this study confirmed the need to be able to interact and engage with warm, friendly, supportive faculty and staff. However, findings of this study revealed that they felt detached and had difficulty dealing with staff members resulting in further disengagement with the institution and overall dissatisfaction with the college. However, participants in the study indicated faculty were much more likely to treat nontraditional students with respect and tend to appreciate both their maturity and life experiences.

Question 2

How does the U of M currently engage nontraditional students in campus governance and culture?

Question 3

How do the University College (U of M) leaders include nontraditional students in campus activities, events, programs?

Questions 2 and 3 are combined in this section as both inquiries deal with similar topics. Once again, engagement with campus governance and culture was not considered an important part of the college experience. Again, time played into the equation as nontraditional students indicated they did not have the time to participate in such activities. However, nontraditional students will participate in classes that require off-campus commitments and group work.

As for the culture of the institution, nontraditional students implied that, at times, they felt angry with traditional college students primarily because of their immaturity and lack of respect for the instructor. On the other hand, findings indicated that while nontraditional students normally are more prone to speak out in class and offer their opinions on discussion topics, they did so only when they felt they had something positive to contribute to the discussion. Research findings revealed a definite difference in traditional and nontraditional student life on the U of M campus.

Question 4

How do nontraditional students currently feel about the collegiate environment?

The collegiate environment and its role in student success include many things that are specific to individual campuses. Factors such as the university's mission, values, and views

about student learning as well as its commitment to student success are critical to both retention and engagement of college students. Nontraditional students are particularly vulnerable to the collegiate environment as it relates to their interaction with peers, classroom, and the campus environment. More importantly, successful interactions with staff and faculty most often result in a successful transition to college life for the nontraditional student. Findings from this research study indicate that nontraditional students thought faculty respected them as individuals and students, whereas staff members either because of their workload or apathy treated them disrespectfully. It was important to note that research findings indicated that while nontraditional students did not want special treatment they expected to be treated like adults.

Findings surrounding the physical environment indicated students appreciated the beauty of the physical surroundings which became one of the reasons they chose to attend the U of M. Participants spoke about liking the layout of campus and its many shade trees. Findings revealed that while most nontraditional students are only on campus for short periods of time they did take the time to appreciate the beauty of the surrounding campus.

Question 5

What do nontraditional students really need from campus leaders in order to be successful college students?

Findings from this question revealed what nontraditional students valued most from administration, faculty, staff, and other students was to be treated like adults. Findings revealed nontraditional students need the following to be successful in their college career: (a) a basic orientation to the campus; (b) information about university practices and policies; (c) classes taught by faculty members who meet the needs of nontraditional student learning styles; (d) communication; and E) an understanding of the time constraints of nontraditional students.

Findings revealed in this study support the importance of campus leaders and student affairs personnel developing activities and functions that meet the needs and wants of nontraditional students. However, it is also important to note that while institutional leaders continue to try to "figure out" just what nontraditional students really need to be successful there will always be a segment of the nontraditional student population that never participates or engages in activities outside of the classroom. In that respect, perhaps they are not too dissimilar from the traditional student.

Conclusions

The following conclusions can be drawn from these findings:

1. Nontraditional students both need and expect different interventions, services, and programs at different stages of their academic career.

2. Nontraditional students desire the connection and services of other nontraditional students when accessing tutoring services. Nontraditional students feel more comfortable and learn more quickly when tutored by their peers.

3. Nontraditional students adapt more quickly to the collegiate environment when faculty adapt teaching methods and employ course delivery systems that are specific to the nontraditional adult learner.

4. Counselors play a pivotal role in the retention, continuation to degree, and overall academic success of nontraditional college students.

5. General education courses pose an additional challenge for nontraditional students, primarily because they have been out of the classroom and academic setting for many years. The addition of remedial and general education courses may pose additional

financial hardships on this population of students as they pursue a college degree while working full time and raising a family.

Summary

Research indicates that a growing segment of the student population on college campuses today and for the foreseeable future will continue to be nontraditional students (NCES, 2006). Consequently, it is imperative institutional leaders become more effective in integrating and engaging the population of nontraditional students into the collegiate environment. This research was an examination of one institution, University of Memphis, that I felt had developed a sophisticated model of student engagement that would be useful in all higher education institutions.

After 15 weeks of research and many hours spent mulling over transcripts from focus group sessions, interviews, life stories, journals, and survey results, I was optimistic that I would find some interesting and new findings that would add to the literature on nontraditional student engagement. Based on the study, the following are recommended for best practices to improve and increase nontraditional student engagement:

1. Institutions should look at what nontraditional students need at various stages of academic career; i.e., freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior years in college.

2. Institutions should provide tutoring labs and services identified specifically for students aged 25 and above staffed by tutors aged 25 and above.

3. Faculty should strive to understand and adopt their teaching methods and delivery systems to incorporate nontraditional student learning styles.

4. Counselors who understand nontraditional student needs and desires are instrumental in their integration into college life and successful degree completion. Therefore, it is

important to hire and train counselors and advisors who understand nontraditional student issues and needs.

5. Institutions need to develop programs and events that would appeal to nontraditional students and include their families.

6. Increase campus communication to include improved marketing strategies targeted toward nontraditional students. This includes web site improvements that foster easier access to campus information and programs, and

7. General education requirements imposed on all college students are particularly difficult for this population of students. Nontraditional students have been out of high school for a longer period of time and find math and science coursework difficult.   Institutions must look at improvements in these course offerings to include more online coursework with tutorials, streamlining general education courses in shorter blocks of time, and reducing duplication in coursework.

Recommendations for Further Research

The findings from this study provide avenues for additional research in six areas. The first area in which additional research is needed is in the size of the sample. Due to the limited study sample, further research is warranted using a larger sample of students. While the study sample was small, and the use of multiple forms of data collection methods was a factor in validity considerations, it would be advantageous if in the future the study sample was expanded.

Second, a study should be done using cohorts from grade levels to gather additional information based upon student classification. A study using cohorts of freshmen, sophomore,

junior, and senior nontraditional students is warranted in order to gather information using a larger sample of students to investigate differences among students at various grade levels.

Third, the study sample should include males and minorities, particularly African-American and Hispanic student populations, as these populations are expected to increase in enrollments at colleges and universities in the future.

Fourth, the study should be expanded to include the development and distribution of quantitative surveys to other public colleges and universities to gather additional data about nontraditional student enrollment and engagement on other college campuses that may be applicable to all institutions.

Fifth, the study should be replicated at other Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) universities in order to determine if study results are similar or new research findings emerge that may reveal additional information on nontraditional student engagement.

A comparative study should be done between traditional and nontraditional college students on student engagement. Data collected would yield a great deal of information that could be used to support increased nontraditional student engagement on college and university campuses.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Participant Selection guide

I. Demographic Information

Name_____   Student ID_____

Address_____   City, State, zip_____

Phone _____   email_____

II. Admission Status

U of M, University College, Undergraduate Program_____

Fully Admitted (please circle one)   Yes   No

III. Nontraditional Student Characteristics
        The National Center for Educational Statistics (2002a) identifies seven different
characteristics of nontraditional adult learners which include the following:

        1. Older than typical age college student (25 and above)   ☐
        2. Financially independent   ☐
        3. Delaying college entry (not attending immediately after high school) ☐
        4. Part-time enrollment status   ☐
        5. Full-time employment   ☐
        6. May have dependents or be a single parent, and   ☐

        7. May have completed high school with a GED or certificate   ☐

        Please check all that apply.

        IV. Comments and Notes

        _____

        _____

Nontraditional Student Focus Group Guide

I. Introduction

Students were asked to complete a demographic sheet with age, gender, race, and student classification. Additionally, they were asked to indicate whether they are a commuter students or live in resident housing and their work status. The students were asked to use their pseudonym name to code the demographic sheet.

My name is Linda Wyatt and I am a doctoral candidate in the College of Education. I am currently working on my dissertation and this focus group discussion is a part of my dissertation work. I would appreciate it if you would take this opportunity to freely share your thoughts and opinions about the discussion topic.

Thank you for taking the time to join us in this group discussion on nontraditional student engagement on college and university campuses. This focus group session will take approximately an hour-and-a-half, and I will ask questions that will serve to stimulate the group in a lively discussion about nontraditional student college experiences, specifically centered on how you are engaged in campus activities and the collegiate environment. Please understand that there is no right or wrong answers to any of the questions asked in the focus group discussion. I ask that you be completely honest in your answers and opinions about questions asked. Please speak one at a time and regard the tape recorder only as an instrument to aid me in accurately reporting what is said in this discussion today.

Students were asked to make a tent card with their pseudonym name. Turn on tape recorder and have students introduce themselves by their pseudonym names. Ask each student to relax, take a deep breath, and begin the discussion.

II. Discussion Questions

1. How do you define the collegiate environment?

2. How do you define engagement as it relates to the collegiate environment?

3. What does student engagement mean to you as a nontraditional student?

4. Do you consider engagement to be an integral part of the nontraditional student college experience?

5. What do nontraditional students really need from campus leaders to become successful college students?

III. Closing

Do you have any final questions? Thank you for your assistance.

APPENDIX C

Interview Guide

Nontraditional Student Personal Story

I.   Introduction

A. Statement of Intent: The intent of this research is to study and understand the responsibility and role of colleges and universities in successfully engaging nontraditional students in the preparation and completion of an academic career.

B. Research Question:

1. How does a nontraditional age student make the decision to enroll in college and pursue a college degree?

C. Informed Consent:

I assure you that your participation in this study will remain anonymous. I may quote you in my final research report. However, I will not use your name in association with these quotes, nor will I use any identifiers that might link you to your words. This session should take approximately one hour. I am tape recording this session to have an accurate record of your comments. Do you have any questions before I begin the tape recorder?

D. Turn on tape recorder: Do I have your permission to tape record this session?

II.   Main Interview Questions

1. Reflecting back to your precollege enrollment decision, perhaps when you were in high school and beyond, was there a point in time or a teacher, friend, parent, or other individual who discussed the possibility of your attending college?

2. Please tell me your personal story about when you made the decision to pursue a college degree and subsequent enrollment in a college degree program.

3. What type of college experience do you want to have?

4. What do you hope to gain from attending college?

III.   Conclusion

A. Based on the information that you have given me, I would summarize your comments in this way: Is my summary correct? Please remember that I plan to include your story in my research findings. Based on your thoughts about nontraditional student enrollment on college and university campuses, what

would you like for me to include in this research study?

B. That concludes our session. Do you have any additional comments before I stop the tape recorder?

C. Turn off the tape recorder: Do you have any additional comments off the record?

D. Again, I wish to thank you for your participation in this study.

APPENDIX D

Code Book and Theme Sheet

Chapter Four
Campus Climate Survey

STUDENTS

- Traditional College Students – Under the age of 25
- Nontraditional students – aged 25 and above

FACULTY

- Full time and part time faculty members who teach classes at the University of Memphis

CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT

- Physical surroundings
- Activities and Events on Campus
- Facilities and support services for students

ORGANIZATIONS and CLUBS

- Organizations – Service or Academic supported by campus in which students have the opportunity to join.
- Clubs – Social, Service, and Professional that are part of campus student affairs.

CAMPUS COMMUNITY

- Faculty, Staff, and Students
- Institutional support services and interactions

Chapter 5
Focus Group Sessions and Personal Interviews

STUDENTS

- Traditional College Students – Under the age of 25
- Nontraditional students – aged 25 and above

CLASSROOM

- Physical Environment and Structure
- Student and Faculty Interaction
- Involvement in classroom discussions
- Equipment
-

FACULTY

- Classroom Control and Management
- Interactions with students
- Teaching Methodology

CURRICULUM

- General Education Requirements
- Specific Program Requirements
- Program Time Completion – Start/Stop
-

TIME MANAGEMENT

- Multiple Obligations – family, work, school, children
- Organization Skills

CAMPUS OPPORTUNTIES

- Campus Sponsored Events
- Campus Resources specifically directed toward nontraditional students (tutoring, events, and organizations).

ALUMNI DEVELOPMENT

- Active Alumnae
- Invested in giving back to the institution

Chapter 6
Personal Stories and Journals

CAREER

- Current profession
- Training for a new profession

- Career advancement
- Upgrading job skills

OTHER REASONS

- Intrinsic
- Extrinsic

APPENDIX E

Campus Climate Survey

1. PURPOSE

As part of my doctoral dissertation research on nontraditional student engagement on college and university campuses, I am collecting data to assess nontraditional student interaction on the University of Memphis (U of M) campus.

This part of the research study will solicit answers about how nontraditional students are engaged in the daily activities of campus life and in interactions with other students, faculty, and staff.

As study participants, I would appreciate it if you would please take the time to complete this survey about your experiences as a nontraditional student on the U of M campus.

Linda Wyatt, Ed.D. Candidate
ETSU – Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

1. **Please select your student classification.**
    Freshman
    Sophomore
    Junior
    Senior
    Alumnae

2. STUDENTS

This section will ask a few questions about your contact and interactions with other U of M students on and off campus.

Please respond to the following using a scale of "frequently," "Occasionally," or "Never:"

I have made friends with students whose interests are different from mine.
I have made friends with students whose race is different from mine.
I have had important discussions with students whose philosophy of life or
    personal values are different from mine.
I have had important discussions with students of the opposite sex.

3. FACULTY SECTION

This section deals with your interaction and contacts with Faculty at the University of Memphis.

1. **Please respond to the following statements using a rating scale of Frequently, Occasionally, or Never. These questions relate specifically to the campus or collegiate environment.**

   I have spoken to faculty members about course-related information.

   I have discussed personal concerns or problems with a faculty member.

   I have discussed career plans with a faculty member.

   I have met informally with a faculty member on a project.

   My professors are available to answer questions outside of class.

   My advisor has assisted me in planning my academic schedule.

   My professors encourage me to interact in classroom activities.

4. CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT

These questions relate specifically to the campus or collegiate environment.

1. There are places for nontraditional students to go on campus and meet friends.
   YES
   NO

2. I take advantage of the places to go on campus where I can exercise.
   YES
   NO

3. There are places I can go on campus to study that are specifically dedicated
   to nontraditional college students?
   YES
   NO

4. I feel welcome on campus.
   YES
   NO

5. ORGANIZATIONS/CLUBS

These questions relate to your activity as a nontraditional student in organizations or Clubs on campus.

1. **I am a member of an organization or club in my related major.**
   YES
   NO

2. **I am a member of a social organization on campus.**

YES

NO

---

6. CAMPUS COMMUNITY

These questions relate to the campus community and your perceived sense of belonging and welcome on campus.

1. Are you proud to be a student at the University of Memphis?
YES
NO

2. Do you think faculty and staff are proud to be members of the University of Memphis campus community?
YES
NO

3. Do you feel the U of M campus is supportive of nontraditional college students?
YES
NO

   Please specify….

4. Do you feel that U of M has a welcoming community for nontraditional college students?
YES
NO

5. Do you feel like a valued member of the U of M campus community?
YES
NO

6. Do you plan to be an active alum when you graduate?
YES
NO

7. What do you value most about your U of M experience?

8. As a nontraditional student, what did you like least about your educational experiences at U of M?

7. UNIVERSITY COLLEGE (CONTINUED)

This section asks questions specifically about the University College and your experiences with University College.

1.Thinking about the mission of University College below:

"...to provide interdisciplinary educational opportunities primarily to nontraditional, adult students."

Do you think University College is successful in accomplishing its mission and reaching out to nontraditional college students at U of M?

YES
NO

2. Do you feel the University College is successful in creating a welcoming environment and sense of belonging for nontraditional college students?

YES
NO

3. How has the University College aided you as a nontraditional student in successfully accomplishing your educational goals?

8. GENERAL QUESTIONS

This section asks general questions about the campus and your collegiate experience. (Open- ended questions)

1. What is your overall impression of U of M?

2. What advice do you have for nontraditional students planning to attend the U of M?

Please feel free to add additional comments about your educational experiences as nontraditional student at the U of M.

APPENDIX F

Informed Consent Form

Version 2 – 10/31/07

Please carefully read the following Informed Consent information and sign the Informed Consent if you freely give your permission to participate in a study involving research. You will receive a copy of this Informed Consent for your records.

- **Researcher:** Linda G. Wood-Wyatt, Ed.D. Candidate
  1014 Borowood Court
  Jonesborough, TN 37659
  423-956-2517

- **Purpose of the Study:** To explore how the University College, University of Memphis (U of M), successfully engages nontraditional adult students into the college campus.
- **Request for Participation:** The researcher requests your voluntary participation in this study. Your participation is strictly voluntary and you do have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without impunity. In addition, you have the right to withdraw your words from this study at any time without impunity.
- **Research Procedures:** The researcher will interview four (4) undergraduate nontraditional adult students admitted and enrolled in the University of Memphis', University College, Bachelor of General Studies, or Liberal Studies program. One student each from the freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior class will be interviewed. Additionally, there will be one nontraditional alumnae that will be interviewed. The researcher will ask the interviewees questions about their attitudes and perception of nontraditional student engagement on the U of M college campus. Data collected from the Interview will be used to develop a theoretical framework for explaining nontraditional student engagement on college and university campuses.
- **Duration of Research Participation:** You will participate in personal interviews, two focus groups sessions, and field observations throughout the spring 2008 semester. This will include two, 2-hour focus group sessions; one, half-day of field observations for each participant, and 1-hour for interviews.
- **Confidentiality:** Every attempt will be made to see that your study results are kept confidential. A copy of the records from this study will be stored in the principal investigator's office, 1014 Borowood Court, Jonesborough, TN 37614 for at least 5 years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be published and presented at meetings without naming you as a subject. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services ETSU IRB, and personnel particular to this research, Linda Wyatt, have access to the study records. Your records will be kept completely confidential according to current legal requirements. They will not be revealed unless required by law or as noted above.

- **Method of Recording Interview:** The researcher will tape record your interview to ensure complete recall of the interview. The tape will be destroyed on completion of the data analysis phase.
- **Right of Refusal:** You may refuse to participate in this study without impunity.
- **Right to Withdraw:** You may withdraw from this study at any time without impunity. You may withdraw your words from this study at any time without impunity.
- **Explanation of Risks:** The researcher does not anticipate any major risks to research participants.
- **Feedback and Benefits:** Participants will be able to assist other nontraditional adult learners in the successful integration and engagement into college life and the collegiate environment. This successful integration into the college environment will result in easing the transition for nontraditional adult students into what has always been seen as a barrier to entry for this population of students. Additionally, participants will be contributing to increased understanding of the nontraditional student population on college campuses.
- **Contact for Questions:** If you have any questions, problems or research-related medical problems at any time, you may call Linda Wyatt at 423-439-6075, or Dr. Jasmine Renner at 423-439-4430. You may call Ms. Janine Richardson, Director, ETSU Institutional Review Board, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, Ada Earnest House, 807 University Parkway, Box 70565, Johnson City, TN, phone: 423-439-6054 for any questions you may have about your rights as a research subject. If you have any questions or concerns about the research and want to talk to someone independent of the research team or you can't reach the study staff, you may call an IRB Coordinator at 423-439-6055 or 423-439-6002.
- **Compensation in the Form of Payments to Research Participants:** Because the research study is small, the principal investigator, Linda Wyatt, is offering to each study participant, with the exception of the Alumnae research participant the following:
    1. $100 to be paid upon completion of the study. Participants will be paid by principal investigator, Linda Wyatt, in the form of a personal check.
    2. Two meals, one during each focus group session.
    3. Two notebooks for journaling throughout the semester, and
    4. One notebook that will be used to write their personal stories about the decision to go to college.

    The Alumnae research participant will receive:
    1. $25 gift certificate to a restaurant of her choice.
    2. One notebook to write her personal story about the decision to go to college,
    3. One lunch or dinner meal during interview at the end of data collection.
- **Copy of Consent:** You will receive a copy of this Informed Consent for your records.
- **Permission to Quote:** Your words may be used in the final research report to clarify or further explain a component of the theoretical framework. The researcher will not identify the source of the quote. In addition, the researcher will take precautions to ensure that there are no identifiers in the body of the quote.

Signature of Voluntary Participant   **Date of Participation**

Printed Name of Participant   **Date**

Signature of Investigator   **Date**

Email Requesting Study Participation

November 28, 2007

FROM: Linda G. Wood-Wyatt

SUBJECT: REQUEST FOR STUDY PARTICIPANTS

My name is Linda G. Wood-Wyatt and I am a doctoral student in the Departmental of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at East Tennessee State University. As part of my requirements for graduation, I am gathering information on nontraditional college student engagement on college and university campuses.

I will be conducting focus group sessions, personal interviews, and participant observations of nontraditional college students at the University of Memphis, University College, who are admitted to one of the two undergraduate degree programs. Specifically, I would like to discuss your perspectives on nontraditional student engagement on the college campus.

As a nontraditional college student (age 25 or older) I would appreciate your willingness to join the research study. Your expertise and experiences as a nontraditional college student will provide a firsthand account about how nontraditional college students navigate their college career. I would like to discuss your perspectives on nontraditional student engagement on the U of M campus.

This research study will involve:

- The use of focus group sessions, personal interviews, and both direct and participant observations.
- Focus group sessions will begin January, 2008.
- The focus group session will last about one a one and one-half to two-hours, and will be arranged at times convenient to your schedule. Dinner will be provided.
- Involvement in this interview is entirely voluntary and there are very little to no known anticipated risks to participation in this study.
- The questions are designed to stimulate discussion about the nontraditional student phenomenon in colleges and universities today.
- You may decline to answer any of the interview questions you do not wish to answer and may terminate the interview at any time.
- If you with your permission, the interviews will be tape recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis.
- Participants will be required to keep a journal and participate in an interview lasting approximately one-hour wherein they will tell their story about the decision to begin a

college career.

- Compensation for participating in the study includes: $100 paid to each of the four research participants; i.e., freshmen, sophomore, junior, and senior undergraduate students chosen to participate in the study, and a $25 certificate to a local restaurant for the Alumnae participant. These payments will be made at the completion of the study.
- All information you provide will be considered confidential.
- The data collected will be kept in a secure location and disposed of in 10 years time.
- If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please feel free to contact me at 423-956-2517 or email wyattlg@etsu.edu.
- I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Office of Institutional Research at East Tennessee State University and the University of Memphis. Additionally, the University College has approved this research study. However, the final decision about participation is yours.
- After all of the data have been analyzed, you will receive an executive summary of the research results.

If you agree to participate in the study, please make sure your contact information and class schedule is provided to me via email so that I can contact you for an interview and begin scheduling the first focus group session.

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study.

LINDA G. WOOD-WYATT

Personal Data: Place of Birth: Johnson City, Tennessee

Education: East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee;
    B.B.A. Management Concentration; 1994

    East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee;
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    East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee;
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Professional
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    1997 – 2005

    Project Manager, Honors College
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